ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR

March 17, 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF WAR:

Here are two memoranda if you plan to discuss the return of persons of Japanese ancestry at Cabinet today.

The first is a statement which could be read by you at Cabinet, and the second is a more elaborate statement for your background and information.

I think you should point out to the Cabinet that this matter should be kept in absolute confidence until some decision is made, otherwise the anti-Japanese agitation on the West Coast will begin all over again.

J. J. McC.
MEMORANDUM ON THE RETURN OF PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY TO THE WEST COAST TO BE READ BY THE SECRETARY OF WAR TO THE CABINET.

I think it is advisable to raise before the Cabinet a question with which we may soon be faced — the question of the return of persons of Japanese ancestry to the West Coast. In the Spring of 1942, 112,000 persons of Japanese descent, both aliens and citizens, were evacuated from California, western Oregon, western Washington, and southern Arizona. This was made necessary by the difficulty of handling the problem of potential disloyalty among persons of Japanese descent on an individual basis with the expedition which was required by the unfavorable military situation after Pearl Harbor. In view of the improved military situation in the Pacific and the time which has been available since the evacuation to discover and take appropriate measures against persons of Japanese descent who are disloyal, we will soon be faced with a situation where it can no longer be said that the wholesale exclusion of persons of Japanese extraction from the West Coast is required by military necessity.

Once this situation exists, the problem of the return of the Japanese to the West Coast is not primarily a military problem but one involving questions of national policy. The War Department will still have certain specific interests: to see that there is adequate screening of those who return so there is protection against sabotage and espionage, and also to see that the return is not accompanied by riot or disorder which will give the Japanese Government an excuse to inflict reprisals on our prisoners of war.
The main problem will be caused by the violent objections which a very articulate group of people on the West Coast, particularly the Californians, and a large portion of the press, have to any return of persons of Japanese descent to the West Coast. The issue of the return of the Japanese to the West Coast will become a political football. Local administrative and law enforcement agencies are unlikely to assist the evacuees in their return, but are very likely to oppose them. It is also likely that local sentiment will be stirred up to a point where it is actually unsafe for the evacuees to return. Returning evacuees will also have economic difficulties. At the time of the evacuation, under Government control, a large number of their businesses were liquidated, their cars were sold, and their arrangements as tenants or lessees of farms were terminated. Unless some agency undertakes to get them the facilities which they need, they will have difficulty in supporting themselves.

I do not mention these difficulties as a reason for keeping persons of Japanese descent from the West Coast after military necessity which required their evacuation has ceased to exist. This would not only be illegal but would probably result in institutionalizing a large number of the evacuees who have been unable to make a start anywhere else and present the Government with another American Indian problem. I do mention them because they show that if resettlement on the West Coast is to be permitted, the Government must take affirmative steps to make the resettlement
Effective. When the return is put into effect the War Department is prepared to assist it to the extent of announcing that it is consistent with military necessity. But this alone is not enough. Other Government agencies will have to be prepared to take firm steps, in the face of bitter political opposition, to assure that these people are not denied their civil rights and are given a square deal economically.

The last question which remains is the basis on which the Japanese-Americans returning to the West Coast shall be screened. Citizenship is not an acceptable criterion, since the family situation of the Japanese is such that unless both aliens and citizens are permitted to return, the return will not be feasible. I believe it is advisable for the civilian agencies, such as the War Relocation Authority and the Justice Department, to exercise the primary responsibility for this screening. It is assumed that the War Department, since it has the responsibility for the military aspects of the return, will have to have some say in the method of screening.
MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF WAR:

Subject: Military Considerations Relating to the Problem of Return of Persons of Japanese Descent to the West Coast.

The evacuation of persons of Japanese ancestry from the Pacific Coast was impelled by military necessity. At that time, the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor had crippled a major portion of the Pacific Fleet and exposed the West Coast to an attack which could not have been substantially impeded by defensive fleet operation. There were over 115,000 persons of Japanese ancestry on the Pacific Coast. Because of the ties of race, the intense feeling of filial piety, and the strong bonds of tradition, culture and customs, this population presented a tightly knit racial group. Some of them had been subjected to an intensive campaign of indoctrination by the Japanese Government, either by education in Japan or by Japanese societies in this country. Whether by design or accident, virtually always their communities were adjacent to very vital shore installations, war plants or other important facilities.

While it was believed that many of the Japanese were loyal, it was known that some were not. No ready means existed for separating the loyal from the disloyal. Furthermore, it was apparent that some of the disloyal were engaging in activities hostile to the safety
of this country. There were instances of illicit use of signal lights and the illicit transmission of radio messages on the West Coast. The activities of Japanese submarines at that time indicated a knowledge of the departure time of our convoys and the positions of our shore installations. The group of potentially disloyal Japanese who might be engaged in these activities was too large for normal law enforcement procedures to be effective. Furthermore, over two-thirds of the Japanese population were citizens of this country and hence were not subject to alien enemy regulations. Evacuation of the entire group from the West Coast was the only answer. As a result, in the spring of 1942 all persons of Japanese descent (with certain exceptions in mixed marriage cases) were evacuated from California, western Washington, western Oregon, and southern Arizona.

It is necessary to analyze the situation at the present time, in light of the present military situation, and the measures which have been taken to screen the loyal from the disloyal, to determine whether the military situation still requires this group to be kept from the West Coast.

The measures which were taken cannot be understood without a statement as to the composition of the evacuated population. The average Japanese family consists of alien parents with American-born children. Roughly 112,000 persons of Japanese descent were evacuated. Of these, approximately 41,000 were aliens, average
age 56 for the males, 47 for the females. Of the approximately 71,000 citizens, roughly 36,000 were age 17 or over; 35,000 were under 17.

The work which the War Department has done in screening this group has been limited to the citizens age 17 or over. In February and March 1943, this group was supplied with a questionnaire, DSS Form 304-A. This questionnaire required these persons to supply information as to any relatives in Japan, any visits to Japan, education in Japan, membership in Japanese societies, ability to speak Japanese. The people being screened are also required to state whether they are willing to serve in the armed forces and whether they will swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and forewear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor. On the basis of these questionnaires, and information supplied by the FBI, ONI, and the Western Defense Command, a Joint Board, composed of representatives of the Provost Marshal General's Office, MIS, ONI, the Army Air Forces, and the War Relocation Authority, has screened for loyalty about 36,000 American citizens of Japanese ancestry 17 or over. This screening has been for the purpose of making recommendations to the War Relocation Authority concerning the release of the persons involved from the relocation centers on indefinite leave. This Joint Board has recommended in favor of 24,000 persons and against 12,000 persons.
The question of the availability of persons of Japanese ancestry
for military service has required another job of screening to be done.
In March 1942 all American citizens of Japanese descent were put, for
Selective Service purposes, into Class IV-C as persons not acceptable
for military service because of their ancestry. In February 1943,
the 442nd Combat Team, composed of Japanese-American volunteers, was
formed. The excellent showing which the combat team made in training
at Camp Shelby and the outstanding record achieved by the 100th
Battalion, a former Hawaiian National Guard unit composed almost
entirely of persons of Japanese descent, which is now fighting in Italy,
led to a re-examination of the problem. As a result, on January 21,
1944, it was announced that plans had been completed for the reinstitu-
tion of general Selective Service procedures for American citizens of
Japanese descent. Under this plan, Japanese-Americans considered
acceptable for military service after appropriate screening by G-2
are to be reclassified by their Selective Service boards on the same
basis as other citizens and called for induction if physically qualified
and not deferred.

A total of approximately 17,000 male American citizens of Japanese
descent who are of military age have been examined by MIS for the
purpose of determining their acceptability for service in the Army.
Approximately 10,000 of these have been declared acceptable, and
Selective Service has been notified that they are available for in-
duction in the Army if physically qualified and not deferred. Estimates
vary as to how many of these will actually be inducted, but it is safe
to say that at least 5,000 will ultimately be put in the Army. Approximately 1,000 persons of Japanese descent are in the 100th Battalion; approximately 4,000 persons of Japanese descent are in the 442nd Combat Team. This will bring the total to approximately 10,000 persons of Japanese descent who will be serving in the Army.

Since the date of the evacuation, the military situation has changed considerably. The West Coast is no longer in imminent danger of invasion, and on the first of November, 1943, it ceased to be classified as a theater of operations. General Emmons has expressed the view that the presence of persons of Japanese descent on the West Coast would not cause a serious sabotage problem due to the existence of facilities for plant protection, and the constant surveillance under which such persons would be kept by other races. He has, however, expressed the view that the danger of espionage is still serious, because fleet and ship movements would be of real interest to the Japanese forces and this information might get to Japan across the Mexican border. It must be remembered also that the appropriate authorities have had two years to gather information about the loyalty of persons of Japanese ancestry and a program has been instituted by the War Relocation Authority involving the segregation of disloyal persons of Japanese descent at Tule Lake. As a result, if segregation were pushed to its conclusion, the return of the remaining persons of Japanese descent might not present any security problem which the regular law enforcement could not handle. As a result, it seems to me to be very probable that sometime before
the end of hostilities with Japan the War Department may be faced
with a situation in which it can be said that military necessity no longer
requires the wholesale exclusion of persons of Japanese descent from
the West Coast.

There are two principal factors which will have to be considered
when that situation arises. The first is the attitude of a large
number of persons on the West Coast who are violently opposed to any
return of the Japanese. It is often said that the War Department has
no interest in this sentiment and that it is up to the civilian agencies
to arrange for the return of persons of Japanese ancestry. The War
Department is interested in American prisoners of war of the Japanese
and in not giving the Japanese Government any excuse for maltreating
our prisoners. As a result the War Department is interested in having
any plan for the return of persons of Japanese descent to the West
Coast conducted in a way so that it does not incite riot or disorder.
The sentiment among some groups against the return is so strong that
the resettlement could not be undertaken in an orderly manner without
Army support, at least to the extent of a public statement that the
return is consistent with military requirements.

The fact that the War Department will have to take a certain
amount of public responsibility for the return of any persons of
Japanese ancestry to the West Coast intensifies the problem of the
basis on which it shall be determined who is permitted to return and
who is not. The War Department screening so far has been limited to
the citizens age 17 or over, a relatively small group, 36000, of which
only 24,000 have been approved. Return of this 24,000 alone would not be feasible in view of the economic and family situation of the persons involved, including the fact that a good proportion of the men in this 24,000 are now, or soon will be, in the Army. I assume that the War Department would not have much difficulty permitting the return of the group of American citizens under 17, but it is likely that there might be some reluctance as to the 41,000 aliens and the 12,000 citizens as to whose approval has been withheld. As to this latter group, it must be considered also that the 12,000 who have been disapproved have not had a hearing, but this disapproval has been based on the dossier which has been gathered on them, and the War Relocation Authority has considered only approximately a fifth of them bad enough to be segregated in Tule Lake. When the time arises to permit the return of persons of Japanese descent to the West Coast I believe that the solution will lie in indicating to the Secretary of the Interior the willingness of the War Department to rely on their screening provided the segregation program is carried forward to the War Department’s satisfaction.

John J. McCloy