

Questions 27 & 28: Loyalty and Japanese American Incarceration

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Abstract:

At the outset of World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, signed on February 19, 1942, Executive Order 9066, which authorized the removal and incarceration of all Japanese Americans on the West Coast. 120,000 Japanese Americans were removed from designated military areas to inland internment camps. In the next year, the War Relocation Authority had the task of determining the loyalty of their inmates in order to release them for productive normalized lives outside camp: those who had offers for jobs and education outside and those who would enlist or enter the draft for military service. A loyalty questionnaire was distributed to assess "loyalty." While many of the questions seemed innocuous or about contact with Japan and its traditions, two questions in particular, 27 and 28, about willingness to serve in the US military and forswearing any allegiance to the Japanese Emperor, were confusing and divisive within the incarcerated communities. The answering of these two questions, yes-yes or no-no, created rifts within families and friends, with hostile and traumatic divisions that resonate to this day.