

THE "ROUNDUP"
UNDERSTANDING INTERNMENT THROUGH THE WESTERN

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THE GREAT WESTERN ROUNDUP



Thomas in The Detroit News

Fear is a powerful force in human existence. Some are driven to avoid their fears while others try to confront them at every opportunity. Some are motivated to action by their fears while others are frightened into inaction. Selma Hirsh argued in The Fears Men Live By that overwhelming fear has two effects on a frightened community. Fearful people will mistrust those around them and they will instead look for a hero to restore order. The advent of United States participation in World War II was an extremely stressful and fearful time in the United States. The fear of the time led people to stereotype and dehumanize people of Japanese descent in the United States and also to create a hero out of the military.

The August 18, 1942, New York Times presented two views of Japanese

living in the United States that, at face value, seem quite contradictory. A "news" article titled, "50,000 Japanese Relocated in West" reported on the completion of the removal phase of internment—Japanese and Japanese Americans living in the areas designated as "sensitive" by the military had been removed from their homes and placed in "relocation centers." The article emphasized the relative ease of the process and the passivity of the internees. The article was paired with an editorial cartoon showing a faceless cowboy roping a "jap alien." The "jap alien" is struggling against the rope and had been carrying the tools of a spy: a radio, a camera, and a flashlight.

That a newspaper would present two views is not surprising. Indeed, it is almost a cliché that news sources attempt to provide "both" sides of a story in order to lay claim to "objectivity."¹ That this particular pairing occurs in two different sources does not seem particularly relevant. Newspapers have often printed opposing columns as well as single articles that attempt to discuss "both sides" of a story. What is significant in the August 18, 1942, New York Times is the duality of the Japanese American in the mind of the United States. The "news" article and the editorial cartoon reflect two views of Japanese in America that demonstrate the old maxim: "out of sight, out of mind." They also, in part, explain why the Japanese Americans were deemed dangerous enough to intern, but not so dangerous as to require constant attention (or perhaps execution).

It is interesting to note, for example, that there was little opposition to internment even from sections of society one might normally expect to oppose it. Gordon H. Chang noted, for example, that

other than the Japanese victims themselves, few Americans publicly opposed relocation. While the socialist leader Norman Thomas and the Quakers were notable dissenters to the federal policy, even the Communist Party, USA and others of the identifiable left openly endorsed relocation (46).

In order to examine these two items and perhaps understand the period of time they represent, they need to be placed in some context. Although the specific event that led to the production of the texts was the start of United

¹ Consider the application of the Fairness Doctrine in the United States, e.g.

States participation in World War II, the mistrust of Japanese in the United States existed well before that time. Joe R. Feagin noted that "attitude surveys in the 1920s and 1930s suggested that anti-Japanese prejudice and accompanying social distance attitudes were widely accepted by European Americans, although anti-Japanese feeling was most intense on the West Coast until World War II" (335).

The picture entitled "The Great Western Roundup" contains a number of interesting details. In its overall effect, the cartoon suggests an attempted "herding" of Japanese Americans. The title, itself, connotes "herding."

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defined "roundup" as

1. *Western U.S.* Act of gathering together cattle on the range by riding around them and driving them in, as for branding. . . .
2. *Colloq., U.S.* Hence, a gathering in of scattered persons or things; as, a *roundup* of criminals. (p.738) [emphasis in original]

As such, the cartoon is the visual playing out of an analogy. Because the rounding up of people and the rounding up of animals have the same name, the title alone may have been sufficient to communicate the connection, but the image reinforces that interpretation. Both meanings suggested by Webster's found expression here. The "jap alien" is both an animal being "driven" into the internment centers and a hunted criminal because of his ethnicity. The addition of the cowboy wielding a lasso only heightens the audience's awareness of and participation in the multiple meanings of roundup. It can be assumed that the audience had some familiarity with "roundups" because of the popularity of "Western" movies before the start of the war. The years immediately preceding the war were inundated with Westerns. Shoot-em-ups: The complete reference guide to Westerns of the sound era by Adams and Rainey noted that

The years 1938-1941 were peak years for the Western genre, whether one's taste ran to major Westerns, minor Westerns, serials, semi-major Westerns, pseudo Westerns, musical Westerns, comedy Westerns, or unusual Westerns. There was something for all in the 700 Western flicks released during these

years, an average of 3.4 per week. Somebody had to be seeing a lot of cactus capers! (p.169)

Indeed, it is interesting to note that although the roping of animals was not a common tactic in the actual herding of cattle, it was a somewhat common scene in "Westerns."

How, then, does the Western motif serve to explain and illuminate key elements of the cartoon? Initially, the Western provides a rationale for the setting. The cowboy and the "jap alien" are located out in the desert. At first glance, this may have seemed an odd setting for the picture. The "jap alien," if he was to be a spy should have been located in a city or near a military base--somewhere where he could have done damage or found vital information. However, the city setting would have violated part of the cowboy myth. John Lenihan argued in Showdown: Confronting Modern America in the Western Film that the mythic cowboy ceased to belong once the society had been tamed.

The Western also posited the sadder truth that the establishment of democratic order required the cowboy or gunman to subordinate his freedom to the greater good. The cowboy could ride the open ranges and heroically battle the outlaw with his six-gun, but only until the order was made secure. (p.15)

The modern city, certainly, was no place for roaming cowboys to enforce Western justice. The city and United States society relied on police and courts to uphold the law. By placing the characters in the desert, time could be suspended--the "jap alien" and the cowboy could be transported back to a time when the cowboy was the law of the land.

Despite the prevalence of Western movies, few people probably believed that cowboys were still roaming the California "badlands." Why, then, this anachronism? The answer may lie in the fear aroused by the attack on Pearl Harbor. The "sneak attack" showed some of the cracks in the "secure" order. The society was reeling with fear and needed to find some hero. Cowboys were the most obvious choice given the widespread myth of the Western. Because disorder abounded after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the mental space

for cowboys reopened in the United States.

The "hero" of the cartoon is a somewhat featureless cowboy. He seemed to be presented as an idealized and unspecified view of the hero of the West. That the cowboy bears no identifying label like the "jap alien" label for the villain may indicate that the cowboy was not intended to represent any particular agent (like the Army), but rather to stand for the whole "posse" of the roundup. More likely, the cowboy did not need to refer to any agent. He did not need to be invested with any particular referent that could tarnish the myth of the Western. A real soldier could have made mistakes the mythic cowboy would not have made, and the cowboy of the roundup certainly resembles the mythic cowboy. His wide brimmed hat, the kerchief, the chaps, and the horse may well have called to mind the heroes of the "Westerns." Edward Buscombe quoted Granville Stewart describing the typical attire of the cowboy.

Their [cowboys'] trappings consisted of a fine saddle, silver mounted bridle, pearl-handled six-shooter, latest model cartridge belt with silver buckle, silver spurs, a fancy quirt [riding whip] with silver mountings, a fine riata [lariat] sometimes made of rawhide, a pair of leather chaps and a fancy hatband often made from the dressed skin of a diamond rattlesnake. They wore expensive stiff-brimmed light felt hats with brilliantly colored handkerchiefs knotted about their necks, light colored shirts and exquisitely fitted high-heeled riding boots (p.101-102.)

In the minds of the audience, then, the cowboy could have been any one of the heroes of the Western movies. He could have been all of them. As Everson noted in the description of a promotional photograph for the movie "Black Market Hustlers," that featured the three heroes and one other actor throwing their guns into a barrel marked "blast a jap with scrap," "Wartime Westerns had a lot of anti-Axis propaganda" (p.229).

The cowboy was located positionally prior to the "jap alien" by being both at the top and left of the cartoon. As such, the viewer (if reading from left to right and top to bottom) encountered the "heroic" and "victorious" cowboy before scanning the "straying steer" that was labeled for the audience as a "jap

alien." The cowboy was in a position of power. The clouds in the upper left hand corner and the rocks in the lower left hand corner sloped down and to the left to emphasize the relative position of the characters. In addition, the cowboy had already roped the "jap alien" and was just stopping his horse as was indicated by the dust clouds forming around its hooves.

Beyond the obvious control demonstrated by the roping of the "jap alien," the power of the cowboy over the "jap alien" was also demonstrated by their modes of transport. The horse was one of the most important indicators of power in the Western genre. The person who rode a horse had both power and ability. To ride a donkey symbolized less power and less standing in the society. To ride in a carriage meant that one was enfeebled or female. To walk indicated the least possible power and standing. Buscombe noted that "the loss of a horse is the biggest threat to the hero's chances of survival in hostile country; but worse than that, it is an affront to his dignity" (p.151).

The clothing also indicated the relationship between the two characters. The cowboy was dressed as a cowboy should have been. He was able to partake of the myth of the cowboy. The "jap alien," on the other hand, was wearing a suit coat and a tie along with a short brimmed hat. Such clothing identifies him as the villain. William Everson argued that "the *chief* villain's clothes were usually well tailored, often to the point of ostentation, implying an affluence which could only be supported by illicit activity" (p.11) [emphasis in original]. Further, the clothing of the "jap alien" highlighted his incongruence with the scene. He was not dressed for the desert. He was not at home in the surroundings of the Western. He did not belong.

Finally, the mustache on the "jap alien" may serve two functions. Initially, the mustache was a common device for distinguishing the hero from the villain in Westerns. Everson contended, for example, that "perhaps as a subliminal echo of the mustache-twirling villains of the old stage melodrama, the mustache remained the property of the villain" (p.11). Second, the mustache was a common feature on World War II posters depicting Japanese soldiers in general and the "Tokyo Kid" in particular.² The inclusion of a mustache on the

² See the reproduction of a U.S. wartime poster in Faces of the Enemy (p. 17), e.g.

"jap alien," then, further tied the character into the prevailing stereotype of people of Japanese ancestry in the United States.

In contrast to the powerful "Western" cowboy, the "jap alien" was positioned as an animal. Not only was he placed opposite a cowboy on the Western range enthymatically asking the audience to think of him as an animal being rounded up, but he was also on his knees, indicating that he was on all fours before being roped: crawling not standing up. He also seemed to be struggling against the lasso. The physical image presented by the cartoon, then, was of a steer or bull straining against the rope. Because he is struggling, the "jap alien" also lost the respectability offered the "good badman" in some Westerns. He was not facing the cowboy, he was running away. He did not accept his defeat gracefully. He was not the "worthy" enemy who understood and played by the rules--however minimal they may have been.

The roundup was, of course, only used for animals that had gotten out of control (or to control range animals). In this case, it certainly seemed as though the "jap alien" had gotten out of control. He had some of the makings of a spy. He had a short-wave radio, a flashlight, and a camera. On their own, these artifacts would probably have not been counted as sufficient evidence to convict a person of espionage in court, but in a cartoon they were enough to convey the intent and character of the "jap alien." It was clear that he was not simply a tourist who had lost his way.

The audience's ability to distinguish the artifacts of a spy may again be established through their exposure to motion pictures. One of the forms that Westerns took was the serial, and in their serial form, movies in 1942 presented several Japanese in roles as spies. "King of the Mounties," for example, featured an Axis Fifth Column in Canada. "Junior G-men of the Air" also had Axis agents who were working for a character named "Baron," the Japanese leader of the "Order of the Black Dragonfly." In these serials, the idea that the Axis powers were spying on the United States was expressed, and the artifacts of the spy (like the radio and the camera) were established.

While the characters and setting are easily understandable, the scene may be slightly more complicated. The scene depicted was the moment just

after the "roping" of the "jap alien." This stoppage of action was convenient for a number of reasons. Initially, there was no expectation to convey the future placement of the Japanese captive. The audience could envision the roping as it pleased. The cowboy did not have to be seen after dismounting or before capture. Thus, the audience did not have to envision the possibility of the escape of the "jap alien" or continue with the scene to envision the branding or "hog tying" of the "jap alien." Equally important, the audience did not have to consider the other possible scenes in the Western genre. They were not asked to envision a horse chase, a shoot-out, an ambush, or a duel. In any other scene, the "jap alien" would have been more humanized and powerful. In addition, because of the frame of the scene displayed in the stoppage of action, the cowboy and the "jap alien" were allowed to represent the whole enterprise of interning Japanese. This "jap alien," then, stood for all Japanese in the United States.

The total picture of the "jap alien" presented in the cartoon was a very one dimensional and misleading one. He was a male adult despite the presence of large numbers of women and children in the internment camps. He was an "alien," a non-citizen despite the high percentage of United States citizens in the camps. Some 70% of internees were citizens of the United States and many of those who were not citizens were Issei, first generation Japanese in the United States who were prohibited from citizenship. He seemed to be spying although there were no confirmed acts of spying or sabotage by Japanese in the United States. In the "jap alien," the society could find an enemy within which its fears could reside. Here was the threat, the cause for the fear. In addition, the cowboy provided a means for containing the threat.

In contrast to the cartoon, the portrayal of Japanese Americans in the column positioned next to it was strikingly passive. It sought to report the aftermath of the "roundup" and marked, ostensibly, the removal of all Japanese and Japanese Americans from the militarily prohibited areas of the West. What is striking about the article is the treatment of Japanese Americans in an almost diametrically opposed fashion to the editorial cartoon. Where the "jap

alien" was active and attempting to spy, the interned Japanese American was passive and wanted only to work. The image presented in the cartoon was a solitary, non-citizen, adult male. The people presented in the article were grouped by the thousands and included citizens of the United States and families with the implied females and children.

What then does the format of the Western reveal about the article? It may seem odd to use a visual genre to interpret a written work and even odder to use an imaginary genre to interpret a news article, but the position of the reporter as an omniscient narrator allows the reporter to create a scene and populate it with actors. Walker Gibson noted, for example, that the omniscient news narrator has the power to provide more information than can actually be known—such as what people are thinking. "Such a speaker [the omniscient narrator] can, for example, know what is going on in the minds of other people—a privilege open to the fictitious narrator alone" (p.204).

In addition, the narrator has the power of insight: "he can *know* the true significance of the events he describes" (p.204) [emphasis in original]. These dual powers of the newswriter make a potent combination. The reporter has the ability through knowledge and insight to reveal and/or conceal many elements of a given situation. Given the inherent difficulties of any person perceiving all aspects of any story, these drawbacks may seem unavoidable. They probably are. By framing the situation as an omniscient narrator, however, the reporter can seem as though he or she has all of the details—can crop the picture or stop the action because she or he has the insight to know what is relevant and what is not. In analyzing the article, therefore, it is important to look at how the reporter framed the report. What was said and what was left unsaid?

Despite the apparent differences, the role of animal remained as a primary descriptor for the Japanese portrayed in the article. In the article, the Japanese in the United States could be described simply as "cattle" back in their proper pasture.

Indeed, the Japanese Americans were described in almost entirely passive voice. They "did not know their fate" and only recently had begun "to

realize some of the things in store." Indeed, the Army, the War Relocation Authority, and even "doubt, inactivity, and impatience for work" all were depicted as acting on the interned Japanese. The Japanese, in contrast, were never quoted, never given voice. They move, but without personality. These distinctions display part of the power of the omniscient narrator in news reporting.

In the first paragraph, for example, we are told that an anniversary was marked for the Japanese, not that they marked the anniversary for themselves. The paragraph ends with the odd comment that any person may be excluded from the Western United States on the grounds of "military necessity." This ending was unusual because there was no further discussion of the potential threats to the military security of the United States. Such an absence was important because it may have represented an enthymeme--an incomplete argument intended to be completed by the audience. The article stated that: (1) any person may be excluded on the basis of "military necessity." (major premise) (2) the Japanese have been excluded. (minor premise) These two statements compelled the audience to complete the thought--that Japanese in the United States presented a threat to "military necessity." That such an understanding existed in the audience at some level was undeniable. Peter Irons, commenting on the appeal of Gordon Hirabayashi, noted that

Government lawyer Victor Stone called a parade of former FBI and intelligence officials to support claims that General DeWitt's wartime orders were "rational" responses to threats of espionage and sabotage. One official labeled Japanese Americans as "the most likely friends of the enemy" and another recalled "espionage nets" along the Pacific coast. (p.48)

Irons continued by noting that all of these statements were made despite the admission that "under examination by Gordon's lawyers, none of the government witnesses could point to a single documented instance of wartime espionage by Japanese Americans" (p.48).

In the second paragraph of the article, the Japanese were removed "for the duration." There was no discussion of what will happen after "the

duration"—how they will return to their former lives. The article made no attempt to engage the reader in speculation about the potential fate of the Japanese. Unlike the previous paragraph's enthymeme, this omission more closely resembled the stop action of the political cartoon. The removal for the duration seemed more like a vacation from which the Japanese would simply be allowed, after the "duration," to return. The choice of "removal" does not, for example, imply that "the Japanese-Americans lost not only their liberty but also most of their worldly goods" (Divine et al. p.799).

The next three paragraphs discuss the history of the evacuation of Japanese from the Western United States. In paragraph three, the Japanese did not know their fate until it was decided by a "freezing" order. In paragraph five, some of the Japanese willingly left the "sensitive" Western areas. What was curious about these comments was that the Japanese never complained. Indeed, the Japanese were typically portrayed as complaisantly accepting their fate. Joe Feagin, for example, noted that "some have raised the question why Japanese Americans did not protest their imprisonment more than they did" (p.340).

The issue that Feagin raised was one of the "American-ness" of the Japanese in the United States. The Japanese seemed to be adjusting rather easily to a world of confinement and order. Would the hero of the Western movie, for example, passively accept being herded into detainment camp?

The relocation centers were not described at all. The lack of description allowed the focus to be on the detainment without concern for the conditions of detainment. The readers were told that the centers were "permanent as the war," but were not told that the "supplies were often inadequate. Barracks were bareboard buildings with few furnishings; small sections of barracks housed large families" (Feagin p.339). By describing the camps as permanent and locating them in remote areas in paragraph six, the article could relieve some of the concerns about espionage and sabotage. Concerns about the temporary relocation centers were quickly dealt with by the author in paragraph seven. He explained that the Army was moving with "relative speed" and that the temporary centers would be "abandoned" within two or three months.

The only people allowed to speak in the article were the omniscient narrator and the United States Army. In this case, these two voices, the all knowing reporter and the Army represented two different parts of the Western roundup. The Army may have stood for the cowboy, out rounding up the "jap alien," while the reporter was the movie camera that captured the scene for the movies. Like every decent cowboy/lawman, the Army took steps (discussed in paragraph eight) to allow families to be together. Curiously, the Japanese did not appear (according to the author) to have asked to be reunited with their families. Indeed, they did not complain about being "rounded up," or about the posted notice that required that the Japanese internees could not discuss "international affairs, national, State, or local police." In fact, the only thing that the Japanese did complain about is the lack of work. Why this detail was important relies on the existing stereotype of Japanese in the United States. One image of Asians in general and Japanese in particular was their willingness to work long hours for little or no pay. Thus, as Peter Rose contended, Japanese "came to feel the brunt of racism used as 'a mask for privilege,' to use Corey McWilliam's phrase. The Japanese and Korean Exclusion League was formed to protest against 'unfair competition" (p.44-45).

The overall picture of the Japanese in the relocation center, then, was a very non-threatening one. They are waiting and hoping and accepting. In essence, they were out of sight and, as a result, they may have been able to slip out of mind. These two pieces taken together, then, reveal the potential dangers of being a visible minority. Before the war, the negative attitudes about Japanese in the United States were confined largely to the West. After the outbreak of war, those negative attitudes took the shape of relocation centers.

In the retelling of one of the prototypical Western plots the cowboy proves his worth by taming a beast. He restores faith in himself by breaking a wild horse, for example. Outside, "in the wild," the "jap alien" represents a threat. Once captured, however, the threat diminishes. Fear is reduced. Order is restored. The cowboy can give way to society. Thus, within the context of the relocation centers, the "jap alien" is given back United States

citizenship by the Army. This return to "respectability" was highlighted by the absence of the epithet "jap" in the article. At a time when movie stars, Superman, and General DeWitt were all publicly using the label, it is strange that the article did not. Such absence begins to illustrate the power of being out of sight and under control. The "jap alien" was a threat to society—a cunning, dastardly, and deadly "Tokyo Joe." Once fenced in by the barbed wire, the wild animal was tamed and could once again be called "Japanese" and even be referred to as "American citizens."

On a cautionary note, however, the status of "citizenship" is still somewhat suspended for the "out of sight" Japanese in the article. It is worth noting that it was not the omniscient narrator who declared them "citizens." Indeed, the last sentence seems incongruous when compared to the rest of the article because of the treatment of sources. Everywhere else, the Army acted. In this one sentence alone they were simply talking. The narrator reported that "this, Army men say, is America and these are American citizens." Here, readers we were not allowed the unique insight of the omniscient narrator. That knowledge was withdrawn and the statement became opaque. The information was not presented as true, it was asserted. What, then, was being asserted? Certainly, this was America (or rather the United States.) Thus, the opacity, the uncertainty, shrouded the citizenship of the Japanese. The audience was not told that the Japanese were citizens, but rather they were told that they had been told that Japanese are citizens. What the narrator giveth, the narrator taketh away.

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