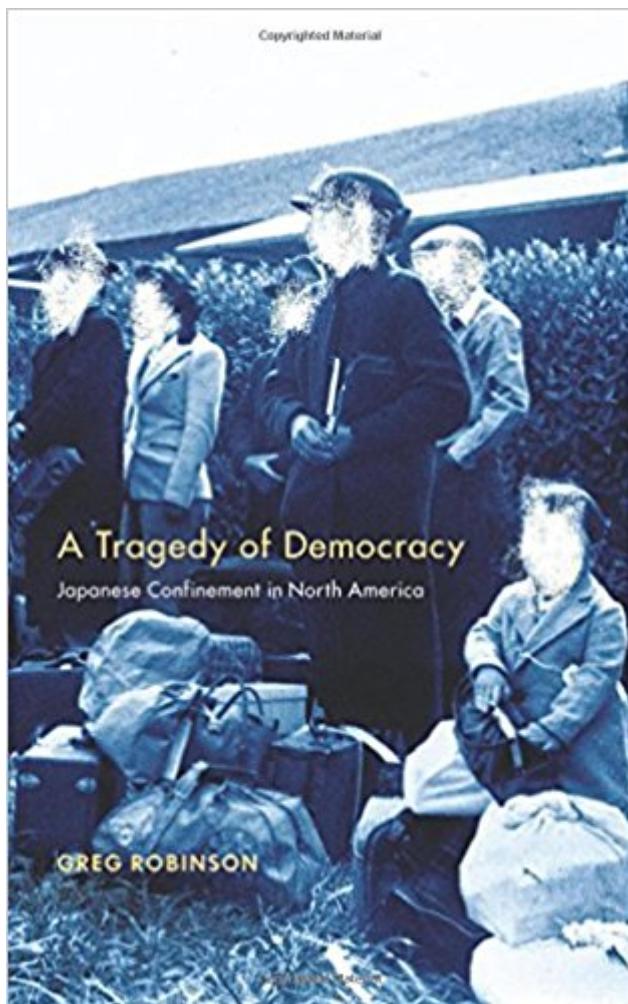


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A Tragedy Of Democracy: Japanese Confinement In North America



Synopsis

The confinement of some 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II, often called the Japanese American internment, has been described as the worst official civil rights violation of modern U. S. history. Greg Robinson not only offers a bold new understanding of these events but also studies them within a larger time frame and from a transnational perspective. Drawing on newly discovered material, Robinson provides a backstory of confinement that reveals for the first time the extent of the American government's surveillance of Japanese communities in the years leading up to war and the construction of what officials termed "concentration camps" for enemy aliens. He also considers the aftermath of confinement, including the place of Japanese Americans in postwar civil rights struggles, the long movement by former camp inmates for redress, and the continuing role of the camps as touchstones for nationwide commemoration and debate. Most remarkably, *A Tragedy of Democracy* is the first book to analyze official policy toward West Coast Japanese Americans within a North American context. Robinson studies confinement on the mainland alongside events in wartime Hawaii, where fears of Japanese Americans justified Army dictatorship, suspension of the Constitution, and the imposition of military tribunals. He similarly reads the treatment of Japanese Americans against Canada's confinement of 22,000 citizens and residents of Japanese ancestry from British Columbia. *A Tragedy of Democracy* recounts the expulsion of almost 5,000 Japanese from Mexico's Pacific Coast and the poignant story of the Japanese Latin Americans who were kidnapped from their homes and interned in the United States. Approaching Japanese confinement as a continental and international phenomenon, Robinson offers a truly kaleidoscopic understanding of its genesis and outcomes. The confinement of some 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II, often called the Japanese American internment, has been described as the worst official civil rights violation of modern U. S. history. Greg Robinson not only offers a bold new understanding of these events but also studies them within a larger time frame and from a transnational perspective. Drawing on newly discovered material, Robinson provides a backstory of confinement that reveals for the first time the extent of the American government's surveillance of Japanese communities in the years leading up to war and the construction of what officials termed "concentration camps" for enemy aliens. He also considers the aftermath of confinement, including the place of Japanese Americans in postwar civil rights struggles, the long movement by former camp inmates for redress, and the continuing role of the camps as touchstones for nationwide commemoration and debate. Most remarkably, *A Tragedy of Democracy* is the first book to analyze official policy toward West Coast Japanese Americans within a North American context. Robinson studies confinement on the mainland alongside events in wartime

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tour de force (Nichi Bei Times)Robinson deftly merges the Pacific Rim experience into one coherent magnum opus. (Wayne Maeda Nichi Bei Times)A superb history about one of the more shameful chapters in U.S. history. (Jeff Kingston The Japan Times)[A] memorable... revealing book.

(Jonathan Mirsky Times Literary Supplement)Robinson has clearly mastered his subject, and this book provides a clear, comprehensive account, including facts both well known and obscure....

Highly recommended. (Choice Magazine)A Tragedy of Democracy serves as a timely reminder of how badly things can get out of control in times of war. (Rachel Pistol Reviews in History)In examining the mistreatment of ethnic Japanese Americans and Canadians as a tragedy of democracy, Greg Robinson has produced a triumph of narrative synthesis, one that will stand as the definitive work of its generation. (Daryl J. Maeda Journal of American Ethnic History)A Tragedy of

Democracy is a remarkably well-written, extensively researched, and innovatively reasoned history of internment… One wishes that this important book would appear on the shelves of every Justice Department and military lawyer. (Canadian Journal of History)

The confinement of some 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II, often called the Japanese American internment, has been described as the worst official civil rights violation of modern U. S. history. Drawing on newly discovered material, Greg Robinson reveals for the first time the extent of the American government's surveillance of Japanese communities in the years leading up to war and the construction of what officials termed "concentration camps" for enemy aliens. He also considers the aftermath of confinement, including the place of Japanese Americans in postwar civil rights and redress struggles. Most remarkably, *A Tragedy of Democracy* is the first book to analyze official policy toward West Coast Japanese Americans within a North American context. Robinson studies confinement on the mainland alongside martial law and the imposition of military tribunals in wartime Hawaii, as well as Canada's confinement of 22,000 ethnic Japanese from British Columbia. Approaching Japanese confinement as a transnational phenomenon, *A Tragedy of Democracy* offers a kaleidoscopic understanding of its genesis and outcomes. The confinement of some 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II, often called the Japanese American internment, has been described as the worst official civil rights violation of modern U. S. history. Drawing on newly discovered material, Greg Robinson reveals for the first time the extent of the American government's surveillance of Japanese communities in the years leading up to war and the construction of what officials termed "concentration camps" for enemy aliens. He also considers the aftermath of confinement, including the place of Japanese Americans in postwar civil rights and redress struggles. Most remarkably, *A Tragedy of Democracy* is the first book to analyze official policy toward West Coast Japanese Americans within a North American context. Robinson studies confinement on the mainland alongside martial law and the imposition of military tribunals in wartime Hawaii, as well as Canada's confinement of 22,000 ethnic Japanese from British Columbia. Approaching Japanese confinement as a transnational phenomenon, *A Tragedy of Democracy* offers a kaleidoscopic understanding of its genesis and outcomes.

Excellent book. Such a sorry time in our history that never should have happened.

Great book. Arrived as advertiased.

A number of academically-oriented books on the internment have emerged recently, opening up the subject as far more complex than the view presented in earlier memoirs. I would put this book as among the very best, along with Alice Yang Murry's "Historical Memories of the Japanese American Internment and the Struggle for Redress," for their detailed and sober examinations of the various dynamics of the civil rights and human saga of Japanese Americans in the twentieth century. These are issues that not only continue to reverberate for an ethnic community, but for the American purpose. For the serious reader, this is an important book. For the academic reader it is indispensable.

This book gives a very detailed account of the history of the Japanese American internment. It is a dialogue that should inspire us all to ensure the civil liberties of all the many multi-ethnic groups of America.

Greg Robinson's latest book, *A Tragedy of Democracy*, is worthy of being the definitive work on Japanese American/Canadian wartime experience. As a Japanese American who spent World War II in an internment camp, I have over the past fifty years read nearly every book that has been written on the subject and I wondered what could be added to the mountain of information already available. Robinson's work on the Japanese Canadian experience was almost totally new to me. I had read Joy Kogawa's novel, *Obasan*, and summary accounts of what Canadian Japanese endured during the war, but I was stunned to learn in detail the depth of the animosity and vindictiveness of the Canadian government and the harsh treatment it meted out to the hapless Japanese. It made me think that compared to our Canadian kin, we Japanese Americans had it easy. Much of what he wrote of the Latin American situation was also new for me. But I call it a definitive work not simply because it deals with all of North America and much of the Latin American experience. This is the first book that gives coherence to a widely diversified, multi-faceted story. Until now, if someone was seriously interested in the Japanese American wartime experience, I would have recommended several books, some focusing on history, others on politics, law, sociology, psychology and so on. I think I can now say, "Read Greg Robinson's book." Beyond finding an impressive amount of original material, he took full advantage of all that has been written on the subject; he looked down from the mountaintop, so to speak, and provided a broad perspective that has been lacking. Although I already knew a great deal of the Japanese American experience, I found it deeply satisfying to come across even familiar material in a broad and coherent narrative that told the story more completely than anything that I have previously read. In

his first book, *By Order of the President*, Professor Robinson gave us a revealing and disturbing psychological profile of FDR, his biases and predisposition for putting all Japanese -- he made little distinction between citizens and non-citizens -- in "concentration camps" even before the outbreak of war. In this new work, Robinson demonstrates his psychological acumen regarding Japanese Americans struggling with their dual cultural identity. Describing the Japanese American dilemma of having to choose between the country of their parents' origin and of their own is not easy even for Nisei, or perhaps especially for Nisei, but Robinson, aided to some degree by the perspective of time, shows rare and keen insight into the Japanese American mentality.

Greg Robinson takes great pains to justify his decision to add his own entry to the long list of books and documentaries that have addressed the removal and confinement of West Coast Japanese Americans during World War II. He does this out of academic modesty, and the reasons he gives for revisiting a well-trodden path are perfectly valid. But he didn't need to justify himself. *A Tragedy of Democracy* stands out by itself as an exceptional piece of scholarship. It is a book attuned to our times and circumstances, and it will likely remain the reference on the issue for at least the decade to come. This being said, I don't want to imply that this is the last possible book on the issue and that it closes the topic from any future enquiry. Another book is possible, always. Just as the author felt compelled to revisit the narrative of Japanese Americans' wartime confinement, other scholars may offer different perspectives on the same issue, or they may use Greg Robinson's research results as a material for their own constructions. To begin with, the historiography of *A Tragedy of Democracy* is very American, with its insistence on legal cases and its final plea for constitutional guarantees of democracy. A similar endeavor by a French historian, to take a hypothetical example, would have focussed more on the subjectivity of camp inmates, and would have been more experimental in its writing. The comparison between the United States and Canada's treatment of their West Coast Japanese communities, which forms the hallmark of the book and defines its original contribution, could be extended to the harassment of other minority communities during World War II and to other periods. These would make different books, with different histories to tell. Moving beyond historiography, I am interested by the contribution this narrative could offer on contemporary philosophical debates. Pressed by ethical and political concerns, some authors have elaborated on the concept of the state of exception, first theorized by Carl Schmitt as the power of the sovereign to transcend the rule of law in the name of the public good, or they have underscored the importance of sites of liminality, which include airports and refugee camps but also spaces opened at the margin of law to detain and contain illegal immigrants. State of exception, sites of

liminality: although Greg Robinson doesn't use these expressions, he brings the arbitrariness and social suffering associated with emergency state power into full view. The author's reasons for offering a new look at a familiar subject are manyfold. The book uses new archival materials, including newspaper articles, interview transcripts, legal briefs, census records, and finding aids, which were consulted over a period of more than one decade in numerous libraries and archives, some of which are now available online. It is based on the latest scholarship, including the author's own research on the signing of Executive Order 9066 by President Franklin Roosevelt. More importantly, it takes a wider angle by looking beyond the mainland United States in order to include wartime Hawaii and to draw meaningful comparisons with Canada. It puts the history of Japanese Americans' wartime confinement into a broader story of prewar discrimination and postwar claims for redress. And it looks at the past with the pressing concerns of the present, so as to remind his readers from North America and other continents that democracies are not immune from self-inflicted tragedies. The book reveals hitherto little known episodes that have not attracted enough scholarly interest, although they help put the story of West Coast Japanese Americans into perspective. It sheds new light on the histories of the Japanese Latin Americans who, following agreements between the U.S. Department and the government of Peru and other nations, were kidnapped from their home countries and interned in the United States, plus the 5,000 Japanese expelled from Mexico's Pacific Coast. It presents an in-depth study of the case of Hawaii where, in the wake of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, army commanders pushed through a declaration of martial law and set up military tribunals that dispensed arbitrary justice, until the territory was restored into full civilian control in late 1944. It documents the prewar history of bigotry and racial discrimination directed against the Japanese communities in the Pacific coastal states of the United States and Canada. Even such a liberal internationalist as Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote that the exclusion of Japanese immigrants after 1908 and the laws that prevented them from owning property or becoming citizens were justified as a means of preventing intermarriage and protecting white racial purity. The book uncovers the assiduous efforts of the Japanese government, acting through consular officials and other agents, to recruit spies in the late 1930s, but also their lack of success in turning any Japanese American into an agent or informant of Japan during wartime. The U.S. government considered Japanese Americans inherently dangerous, and did not relax control efforts even in the face of evidence regarding their lack of involvement in subversion. Contrary to the general attitude of passive acceptance that is said to have characterized Japanese Americans' reaction to evacuation and confinement, Greg Robinson documents many cases of resistance, most of them tragic in their consequences. The injustice of being dispossessed and confined unjustly,

and the boredom and futility of camp existence, preyed on the inmates. Anti-administration sentiments predominated, and community leaders and others who worked with camp administration or showed themselves too openly pro-government found themselves accused of being traitors and collaborators. Beatings occurred, and on two occasions camps rioted against their warden, provoking them with Japanese marching songs and militarist slogans. In turn, Issei nationalists and Nisei "troublemakers" were isolated from the others and incarcerated in special detention camps, where conditions were much harsher. In the case of the U.S., these isolated detainees were rejoined at Tule Lake by a group of Nisei who had reacted negatively to an ill-conceived questionnaire intended to test their loyalty before resettlement and drafting. Within the camp, pro-Japanese thugs marched to the sound of martial songs and displayed rising sun flags, coercing other Nisei to renounce their American citizenship and turn into "real Japanese". By focusing on acts of resistance and legal challenges to confinement, the book distances itself from the popular view of the topic as a typically American "tragedy with a happy ending". Wartime confinement led to a lot of suffering, and Japanese Americans in the U.S. and in Canada remained marked for decades, in their careers, material circumstances, and social relationships, by the bitter heritage of camp life and the suspicion cast during wartime on their loyalty. Public apologies were long overdue, and redress was finally settled only in 1988 by the Civil Rights Restoration Act H.R. 442 (numbered in honor of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team of Nisei volunteers, who fought bravely in the campaigns of Italy and France). The conclusion given by the author is without appeal: "Governments and their leaders simply cannot be given arbitrary powers and trusted on faith to assure fundamental freedom. (...) If such great men as [Franklin Roosevelt, who signed Executive Order 9066, and Hugo Black, the justice who wrote the decision justifying mass removal on racial grounds] cannot be trusted, it seems to me that no lesser figure should. Rather, we owe it to ourselves to be jealous of our liberties."

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