

1 CONCENTRATE

When Francis Biddle stepped before the assembled crowd, he knew that his words would carry weight. This was the eve of a week commemorating the Bill of Rights, and as Franklin Roosevelt's attorney general, Biddle could be counted on as a fierce defender of civil liberties. Tall and slender, with wide-set eyes and a cleft chin, Francis Beverley Biddle was heir to an American aristocracy. The great-great-grandson of America's first attorney general, Biddle enjoyed the privileges of his class: education at Groton, the elite private boarding school for boys, followed by college at Harvard, and capped by a degree from Harvard Law. But Biddle's breeding did not leave him indifferent to the rights of average citizens. Just the opposite, in fact. He cared deeply about upholding America's most treasured values: treating all equally before the law. And the message he came to deliver on this day would resonate with the crowd. He was addressing the American Slav Congress, a group of citizens who understood the need to protect minorities from discrimination and oppression. But Biddle had come to speak about America's commitment to racial justice. He wanted to ensure that everyone knew where the administration stood. He hoped to count on the crowd's compassion for other minorities, non-Slavic peoples, entitled to the same rights as all Americans. And the timing seemed fortuitous. Some in the audience might be in a compassionate, spiritual frame of mind, having come from church that morning, for this was a Sunday afternoon. It was Sunday, December 7, 1941.

Less than thirty minutes after Biddle began his address in Detroit, thousands of miles and six time zones to the west, Japanese

aircraft began bombing ships and sailors at the US naval base at Pearl Harbor.²⁹ In a time before smartphones and instantaneous communications, neither Biddle nor his audience had any knowledge of the attack. Unburdened by the weight of this shocking news, Biddle was free to deliver his speech exactly as planned, denouncing the denial of freedom on the basis of race. He warned his audience against not just military disarmament but spiritual disarmament as well:

That disarmament threatens every time an attempt is made to build up hatred against any person or persons on the grounds of race, religion, or national origin. It is of aid and comfort to the enemy outside when a wartime national hero descends to the unheroic level of a public appeal to race prejudice. It is of aid and comfort to the enemy when a boycott is directed against a small shopkeeper whose crime has been that his parents or his ancestors were German or Italian or Japanese.³⁰

Biddle's message was simple: racism is treason, religious hatred is un-Christian, and discrimination based on national origin is un-American. And as he spoke, Japanese Zeros rained down a storm of destruction, murdering American sailors as they slept.

Biddle reminded his listeners of the wartime hysteria that gripped America in 1917, when American citizens with an accent or a German-sounding name were persecuted by their neighbors.³¹ He implored the audience to care for the constitutional rights of all citizens. The moment when anyone becomes indifferent to those rights, or if they try to override those rights, "they are striking, not at our first, but at our last line of defense."

It was a rousing speech against racism, and distressingly prescient. The Attorney General warned that even in the halls of Congress fears can often be directed against those of certain races, religions, or national origins. He pledged that the Justice Department would prosecute any aliens who posed a danger, and it would protect the vast majority of aliens who are peaceful and law-abiding. But he cautioned that no government alone could guarantee the nation's democratic ideals, just as no government alone could destroy it: "In the final analysis, when this nation's ability to survive as a democracy is put to the test, it is we ourselves who will decide. It is up to us."

Shortly after Biddle finished speaking, radios across the country carried the news. Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Several thousand

were dead, and the noble sentiments that Biddle had just proclaimed were suddenly less certain. America's spiritual defenses would now be tested, and Biddle would find his most deeply held American ideals under siege. As attorney general, it was his duty to protect civil liberties, but as he observed, it was not his task alone. To ensure that wartime hysteria would not erode the nation's values, the country's leaders, its institutions, and its sensible citizens needed to be mobilized into action. Unfortunately for the roughly 112,000 Japanese Americans living on the west coast, they were about to become the victims of one of America's worst cases of misplaced revenge. Tragically, this would be only the first of many vengeful acts America inflicted upon the innocent during and shortly after the war. And with each destructive deed, a majority of Americans insisted that this is not who we are. Why, then, did the politics of vengeance prevail?

Soon after Francis Biddle concluded his speech in Detroit, he learned of the Pearl Harbor attacks and quickly returned to Washington. The test of his pledge to defend the rights of racial minorities was about to begin. In the weeks and months that followed Pearl Harbor, some Americans called for banning, arresting, and removing those of Japanese descent from the coast and the country.³² Even some prominent public figures demanded the removal of this perceived enemy, including the California attorney general, Earl Warren. Warren was running for governor, and he shrewdly recognized that he could ride this issue to higher office. A vocal segment of white Americans now felt completely free to voice their deepest racial views. The newspaper columnist Harry McLemore wrote: "Personally, I hate the Japanese, and that goes for all of them." McLemore demanded immediate evacuation and relocation to the worst part of the American Badlands.³³

Although the government's actions in the initial weeks after Pearl Harbor were limited to FBI roundups of those deemed suspicious, one segment of the public soon pressed for more robust measures, as fears of a second attack swelled. Rumors and false reports circulated in the press and by word of mouth that Japanese people on the west coast had sent radio signals to Japanese submarines to assist the Pearl Harbor strikes. The fear of sabotage led officials to confiscate the cameras and radios of Japanese Americans and to shutter their businesses. FBI officials arrested Japanese-American community leaders. Innocent Japanese Americans hid, burned, or destroyed any possessions from

Japan, including prized family heirlooms, and especially traditional swords. Fear that a fifth column of saboteurs was living on American shores spread through the population of white citizens in California, Oregon, and Washington State. Their calls for action sprang not solely from fear but also from greed.

Japanese Americans owned land, homes, cars, and possessions, all of which were coveted by some white people, who felt that Asians did not belong in America. White farmers had seen Japanese Americans prosper in the produce trade. White fishermen vied with Japanese Americans for the best catches. There were many white west coast residents who saw Asians as competitors and threats to their livelihoods. If forced to relocate, the Japanese Americans would have no choice but to sell nearly everything they owned at a fraction of its true value. The unanticipated attack at Pearl Harbor presented a golden opportunity not merely to remove these perceived outsiders from their land but also to create a windfall for white people who could profit from the fire sale of Japanese-American property. Pearl Harbor created a perfect mix of incentives to scapegoat Japanese Americans while stoking the flames of white rage.

Clearly, the federal government had to answer the voluble outcry from politicians and media figures. If the administration was going to bow to pressure from a segment of angry voices, it needed to base its response on an actual threat. And to assess the extent of that threat, it needed reliable intelligence – not just on Japanese Americans but also on the actual views of most west coast residents.

The Intel

Franklin Roosevelt faced two existential crises as president. He entered office in the midst of the Great Depression, when the nation hovered on the brink of revolution. His expansive use of government to create jobs rescued the nation from that fate. The second crisis involved the rise of militaristic, authoritarian regimes, which made war a looming danger. Fearing sabotage as early as 1936, Roosevelt began ordering investigations into the safety of American installations. His first instinct was to defend Hawaii. On August 10, 1936, FDR told the Chief of Naval Operations that every Japanese person, citizen or not, who makes contact with Japanese ships in Oahu should be surveilled. They should be the first to be “placed in a concentration camp in the

event of trouble.”³⁴ His remark, though chilling, was made in a time before the Nazis’ death camps became synonymous with concentration camps. By 1941, as the likelihood of war with Japan intensified, Roosevelt requested official reports on the state of Japanese Americans along the west coast.

FDR asked J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, to assess the threat. The President wanted to know whether the country needed to worry about their loyalty. The FBI chief investigated and returned with a definitive answer. He informed the President that there was no reason for concern. The Japanese Americans appeared eager to prove their loyalty.³⁵

Around the same time as Hoover’s investigations, the Office of Naval Intelligence launched its own study of the situation, spearheaded by Lieutenant Commander Kenneth Ringle. Ringle had good reason to be alert to the risk of sabotage. In June 1941, he had led a nighttime raid on the Japanese Consulate in Los Angeles, exposing a spy ring. If anyone would have been sensitive to the threat from Japanese Americans, Ringle would have been it. But Ringle was not the average naval intelligence officer. He spoke fluent Japanese, having lived for several years in Tokyo as the naval attaché to the US Embassy. While in Japan, he studied Japanese culture as well as the language. Subsequently assigned to the west coast to keep a close eye on Japanese Americans, Ringle developed extensive ties to the community. After evaluating the community as a whole, Ringle concluded that it represented no threat at all.

But Roosevelt was never content to rely solely on the traditional instruments of government to obtain information. He frequently created back channels, bypassing the officials charged with overseeing an area or issue. FDR preferred his own men to the ones he had not appointed and could not entirely trust.

In order to gather his own information on Japanese Americans, Roosevelt commissioned a friend and journalist, John Franklin Carter, to conduct a secret intelligence mission. Carter in turn tasked Curtis Munson, a businessman who had produced reporting for FDR previously, to travel to the west coast and take the pulse of the Japanese-American community. This time the President would get the truth about the threat. What Munson found was striking. He not only confirmed that the thousands of Japanese Americans were overwhelmingly loyal to the United States but also reported that the Japanese Americans had more to fear from west coast white residents than the other way around.

His follow-up reports only reinforced this view, and Carter forwarded Munson's reports to the President.

These three separate intelligence reports should have sufficed to quash any notion of concentration camps, but just to ensure that the President would not act unwisely, Attorney General Biddle also voiced his opposition to any unconstitutional actions against American citizens. Biddle had read the FBI and Office of Naval Intelligence reports, as well as the Munson reports. He understood that any danger of sabotage was slight and already being monitored appropriately. Biddle, however, had a problem. Some Army commanders, in particular General John DeWitt, the head of the Army's west coast command, were insisting that the Japanese-American community be rounded up and removed from the coast. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, DeWitt began forwarding a series of unfounded rumors that Japanese Americans were signaling to ships off the coast and preparing a large-scale uprising. The Federal Communications Commission and the FBI discredited these reports, but DeWitt remained insistent that the Army take preventive action. It was DeWitt's subordinate, Colonel Karl Bendetsen, who pressed for the total evacuation of all Japanese and Japanese Americans from the coast. Throughout the months leading up to and after the President's executive order, Bendetsen acted as a crucial driving force for internment from within the military.³⁶ Bendetsen frequently drafted letters and memoranda on DeWitt's and Secretary of War Stimson's behalf, crafting documents that reflected Bendetsen's own views. Bendetsen met with congressmen to influence them in support of internment, and he tried to strangle any opposition to his plans. Because Biddle resisted the Army's demands, the Army implored Assistant War Secretary John McCloy to intervene on their behalf.

From Biddle's perspective, the solution was obvious. On Sunday, February 4, 1942, he met with McCloy to propose a joint statement by the Justice and War Departments. They needed to act collectively to calm the citizens' fears. They should explain to the public that the government had thoroughly investigated the Japanese-American community and determined that it posed no threat. The few individuals who did would be dealt with properly, but evacuation of citizens was neither necessary nor appropriate. This was exactly the approach he had outlined in his speech to the American Slav Congress on December 7, barely two months earlier. Round up the few who genuinely presented a danger and protect the rest from attacks by fearful

mobs. A joint War and Justice Department statement could have eased tensions and set policy on a sensible course. But McCloy would not agree to Biddle's plan. He wanted to leave open the option of evacuation. Biddle found himself completely unable to persuade McCloy and quickly realized he was losing control of what should be a Justice Department matter. The War Department was exerting influence beyond its purview, and Biddle lacked the know-how to combat it.

With his top intelligence officials and his own secret investigators agreeing that Japanese Americans posed no threat, how did FDR come to issue the directive to uproot and intern them? It did not stem from a malicious racism. Roosevelt's own racial views of the Japanese were mixed. He did not share the anti-Japanese sentiments of the fearful white Americans who were demanding internment. The Roosevelt family had a long history of engagement with Asia. The President's grandfather had lived in Canton, China, for a decade, where he profited in the budding China trade. Roosevelt's family acquired Japanese porcelains and other artifacts to adorn their estate. And Franklin, himself, had befriended at least one Japanese person, a classmate at Harvard. Despite his openness to friendships with Japanese individuals, Roosevelt nonetheless absorbed the commonly held beliefs of his era regarding racial purity. He did not wish to see any mixing of the races that would produce offspring. He believed that the Japanese shared this view as well, wanting to keep their own race pure. But FDR's racism alone would not have produced the internment. He did not initiate the plan, and he seemed largely indifferent to it. His decision required a strong push in that direction. But who exactly was doing the pushing?

The idea that the general public demanded internment is false, and the government knew it. Ever sensitive to public opinion, Roosevelt grasped that some white Americans felt angry over Pearl Harbor, fearful of further attacks, and hateful toward Japanese Americans living among them. The calls for evacuation, however, did not represent all Americans. They may not even have represented the majority. The government had good reason to think that internment was unpopular, because it was conducting its own surveys on the subject.

By executive order, President Roosevelt had recently created the innocuously named Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) in October 1941, an agency officially charged with coordinating information about America's defense efforts, but which actually functioned partly as a propaganda ministry. FDR chose the noted poet Archibald

MacLeish to head the new organization. From February 7 to 13, 1942, two months after Pearl Harbor, OFF conducted polling of citizens in the three west coast states. In these early months following the Japanese attacks, anti-Japanese sentiments might have been expected to run extremely high. But the survey found that outside of southern California, fewer than half those surveyed supported the internment of Japanese aliens, and only a meager fourteen percent favored interning Japanese Americans.³⁷ In southern California, where anti-Japanese attitudes were more intense, only a third of respondents supported the removal of Japanese Americans. If even west coast citizens, the people supposedly most fearful of sabotage from an enemy within their midst, opposed internment, then the push for this policy could not have come from the general public. As real as racism was, the idea of forcing Americans from their homes and into camps was a step too far for most people.³⁸ Their consent would need to be manufactured.³⁹

Even if a majority of the public had demanded the internment of Japanese Americans, political pressure alone could not explain the President's actions. FDR was an exceptionally artful politician. He knew how to deflect attention and defeat an argument. He had options available to him for addressing public fears without resorting to the evacuation order. He could have described in a fireside chat to the nation the findings of his intelligence chiefs, unequivocally asserting Japanese-American loyalty and stressed the need to avoid retribution against innocent Americans. He could have defended the civil liberties of all citizens, reminding Americans that if one minority is stripped of its constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, then no other group, such as German Americans, Italian Americans, or Catholic or Jewish Americans, could be safe from a similar fate. This is, of course, what his own Justice Department chief, Biddle, was arguing in his opposition to the proposed internment. But with the outbreak of war and the consuming pressures it exerted, Roosevelt had little time to concentrate on the fate of one relatively small ethnic minority, and even less concern at this moment for their rights. FDR had the fate of the world to consider.

The Stakes

America's victory in the war, and indeed the future of democracy worldwide, hinged, counterintuitively, on Soviet Russia's ability to

survive. This was just one insight that made Franklin Roosevelt such an exceptional strategist. He possessed the ability to view foreign and military affairs in a genuinely global context. He did not see the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in isolation. He did not mount a military response that was solely directed against Japan or even solely against Japan's aggression in the Pacific. Instead, he had the wisdom to step back from the intensity of the moment and survey the political, not just the military, implications of current events.

Since at least as early as the 1920s while composing *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had dreamed of acquiring living space in Eastern Europe. In 1937, Hitler outlined to his generals and foreign minister his intention to invade Russia and instructed them to prepare. In 1941, he amassed the largest invasion force in history. Some three million troops gathered along Russia's western front and managed to catch only Stalin by surprise. Despite overwhelming intelligence reports that the Germans were poised to invade, Stalin refused to believe his own officials, convinced that these reports were part of a Western plot to embroil him in a war with Germany. The Soviet leader assumed that the massing troops were merely training to the east of Germany as a means of avoiding British bombs as they prepared for an attack on the British Isles.

Once the invasion of Russia began on June 22, 1941, the cost of Stalin's paranoia quickly became apparent. Having spent the preceding years purging his military of suspected enemies, Stalin had succeeded in depleting his officer corps of its most competent commanders. Initially the German advance moved swiftly and steadily eastward as poorly led and ill-equipped Soviet troops fell back. Meanwhile, Japanese forces easily routed inadequately defended targets across the Pacific. As Roosevelt looked on in dismay, he had to fret over a nightmare scenario: that Japan might attack Russia in the east, thrusting the Soviets into a two-front war, one which they were likely to lose. Just two years earlier Japanese troops had attacked Russia in the border region of Mongolia, but Soviet Red Army forces decisively defeated them. Following the Nazi invasion in 1941, the Red Army was desperately combating German troops in the west, and this time the Soviets seemed barely able to prevent a total collapse. If forced to divert some of their troops east to battle the Japanese, Russia and its vast resources, including its crucial oil fields, seemed certain to fall to the Axis. If that occurred, the Allies' odds of winning the war would be slim.

Everything had to be done to prevent a Russian collapse from occurring. Japan had to be drawn away from attacking Russia. Roosevelt's strategy throughout the second half of 1941 appears directed toward that end. By imposing an oil embargo on Japan coupled with impossible demands, FDR probably hoped to draw the Japanese into a conflict with the United States in the Pacific and away from an attack on Russia's rear.⁴⁰

This was one of FDR's greatest gifts – the ability to perceive the interlocking puzzle pieces of world affairs with a clarity that others lacked. He recognized that decisions in Japan could cripple Russia's ability to survive, which would strengthen Germany's hand immensely, which would severely imperil America. Roosevelt likely divined a daring solution to that puzzle, one which gave the United States a fighting chance for victory. Unwilling to withdraw from China as America was demanding, and feeling the tightening noose of the US oil embargo, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese launched their fateful strike. Roosevelt at last found himself enmeshed in the war he had long expected, but for which America nonetheless remained ill prepared. Four days after Pearl Harbor, Hitler gave Roosevelt a surprising gift by declaring war on the United States.⁴¹ Roosevelt wanted to pursue a Europe-first strategy for the war. By declaring war on America, Hitler made Roosevelt's position vastly easier. The President could more readily justify sending troops to fight in Europe as well as the Pacific.

The stakes in this conflict were incalculable. From Roosevelt's perspective, nothing mattered more than defeating the Axis completely. Any other concerns had to be secondary to this one objective. If the civil liberties of Japanese Americans had to be sacrificed in the larger aim of winning the war, then so be it. John McCloy, General DeWitt, and Colonel Bendetsen believed evacuation was necessary to safeguard military installations. A vocal minority of white Americans, particularly west coast politicians, was demanding it be done. Despite these pressures, the internment could still have been prevented. In early February, Secretary of War Henry Stimson tried to meet with FDR to discuss it, but Roosevelt told him that he was too busy, indicating it was far from the President's top priority. The following week, Stimson managed to get the President on the phone. Judging by FDR's response, he apparently had no strong feelings regarding internment. FDR was preoccupied with developing strategies to win the war. He could scarcely

concentrate on the Japanese-American matter. The President told his War Secretary to handle the issue however he thought best.⁴²

And that should have settled the matter against internment, because Stimson was deeply ambivalent. He had no wish to see more than 100,000 innocent individuals evacuated to the country's interior. As a Harvard-trained former US attorney, he knew that mass internment would probably not be constitutional. As a devout Christian, he felt disturbed by the thought of uprooting people on the basis of race. Although he did perceive some threat from a minority of second-generation Japanese Americans, whom he believed were not all as loyal as their parents, he immediately recognized the ugly underlying motivation behind the calls for removal. "We cannot discriminate among our citizens on the ground of racial origin," Stimson recorded in his diary on February 3, 1942.⁴³ But Stimson also felt that something had to be done to protect military installations along the west coast, and certain elements within the military were pushing for the evacuation. On February 10, he told his diary that "their racial characteristics are such that we cannot understand or trust even the citizen Japanese." At the same time, he acknowledged that attempting to evacuate all Japanese Americans would "make a tremendous hole in our constitutional system."⁴⁴

These back-and-forth arguments with himself were typical of how Stimson wrestled with difficult matters. In short, on his own, Stimson would probably never have insisted on relocation and internment. His mixed emotions meant that he needed a push. If Stimson had joined with Biddle and taken a strong stand against internment, the evacuation would most likely never have happened, especially given Stimson's imposing stature inside the government.

Gentleman Statesman

Henry Stimson enjoyed one of the most remarkable careers in modern American public service thanks to his intellectual gifts and impeccable pedigree. The son of a noted surgeon, Stimson was educated at Phillips Academy, an elite boarding school comparable to Groton. From Skull and Bones at Yale, followed by a Harvard law degree, he glid effortlessly into one of the most influential law firms on Wall Street. There he was mentored by the firm's prominent partner, a former

secretary of state and war. Stimson would follow precisely in his mentor's path.

A chronic insomniac prone to occasional bursts of anger, Stimson nonetheless had a reputation as a man who got things done. Perhaps it was the bags beneath his eyes that gave the impression of a workhorse. His sagging jowls, drooping face, and stooped shoulders contrasted with his belief in hearty outdoorsmanship. His appearance notwithstanding, Stimson was seen as a sober-minded attorney, a man to whom people turned when they needed sound advice or problems solved. He was widely respected as a man of great moral rectitude. Those who had divorced were not welcome in the Stimson home. Hunting, fishing, and vigorous exercise built a man's character. Charity, kindness, and Christian virtues made America great. Above all, deference to authority maintained social order. These were Stimson's values: clear-cut and straightforward. He was a nineteenth-century man caught in a morally muddled modern era.

Beneath his stern demeanor lay a progressive Republican in the Teddy Roosevelt mold. His first public service came in the early 1900s, when then President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him as a United States attorney in New York, where he prosecuted corrupt tycoons and crooked corporations. This was the time of Roosevelt's trust-busting campaign, and Stimson devoted himself to the charge. He belonged to the progressive wing of Republicans, those who believed that government should be harnessed to uplift its citizens and give average white Americans a fair shot at success – what TR dubbed “a square deal.” He admired Roosevelt's genuine commitment to the common good, and he never lost his respect for him, even when Roosevelt broke ranks with the Republican Party to challenge his own hand-picked successor, the incumbent President William Howard Taft.

Recognizing Stimson's many gifts, President Taft asked Stimson to lead the War Department. From 1911 to 1913, he reorganized the military to reform and prepare it for modern combat. As testament to his deeply held values of duty, once America entered the war in 1917, the nearly fifty-year-old former war secretary volunteered for the Army. He served as an artillery officer in France and was promoted to colonel. It is difficult to imagine today a middle-aged former secretary of defense enlisting to fight in a war, but Stimson's nineteenth-century values made such a sacrifice seem unremarkable.

In 1927, Stimson was again drawn out of private legal practice to act as governor-general of the Philippines, and two years later President Herbert Hoover named him secretary of state. When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, he declared the Stimson Doctrine, which refused recognition of territory annexed by force. It was a purely rhetorical stand to take against Japanese expansion, but there was little more that America could do, given its own economic turmoil. The Stimson Doctrine also conveniently overlooked the fact that America's own acquisition of the Philippines had resulted from its war with Spain. This was, in a nutshell, the Teddy Roosevelt tradition: expansion abroad, compassion at home. And Stimson followed that line, always in moderation, sensitive to the limits of American power, but moving ever closer toward American dominance in world affairs. Unfortunately for Stimson, he could not continue his policies for much longer as Hoover was fated to be a one-term president.

The problem that hung over Hoover's presidency, of course, was the Depression. Hoover was blamed for the massive unemployment and suffering of millions of Americans. The failure of Hoover's predecessors to regulate the financial sector had encouraged wild speculation and a stock market bubble that was destined to burst. And it burst just nine months into Hoover's presidency. As unemployment widened and hunger spread, Hoover endured the brunt of bitter humor. The newspapers that homeless men and women used to cover themselves for warmth were dubbed Hoover blankets. Empty pocket linings turned inside out were Hoover flags. Shantytowns were known as Hoovervilles.⁴⁵ The President's name had become synonymous with depression, poverty, and loss.

When the Democratic governor of New York, Franklin Roosevelt, Teddy's younger cousin, trounced Hoover in the presidential election in 1932, both Hoover and Stimson left their respective offices and settled into private life. Had Stimson's long career in public service ended there, his achievements would have been exceptional by any measure. Instead, in 1940, President Roosevelt called on Stimson to once more lead the War Department. It was a selection that would have profound repercussions for decades to come. At nearly seventy-three years of age and in declining health, Stimson began one final stint of high-level service to his country, in a role that would place him at the center of several of America's harshest wartime acts.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, while his assistant John McCloy was at work in the War Department, Stimson sensed an ominous tension. For months he had been tracking the movement of Japanese vessels in the Pacific and assumed that the Imperial Navy would soon strike somewhere in Asia. Secretary of State Cordell Hull was expecting a reply from Ambassador Nomura on this day, and Stimson felt certain that the message would not bode well for peace. In his diary Stimson wrote: "Hull is very certain that the Japs are planning some devilry and we are all wondering where the blow will strike."⁴⁶ Within hours they would have their answer.

The pressures on Stimson in those first few months were enormous. Of the many immediate matters he confronted on December 7, defending the west coast military installations from sabotage ranked high. General John DeWitt, commander of the Army's western defenses, pushed hard for removal of all Japanese Americans from the coast, but Stimson's misgivings led him to seek the President's clear instructions. When Stimson finally extracted a clear direction from the President regarding internment, he was told to handle the problem however he thought best. A war was on, and there were more pressing matters at hand.

But Stimson, too, was overtaxed by the need to manage the military once fighting had broken out. He was not a man to override his generals, and General DeWitt was insisting on internment. In order to avoid confronting DeWitt directly and free himself to focus on gearing up the military for war, Stimson tasked his able assistant John McCloy with taking the lead on the relocation issue. It was a fateful choice. McCloy, like Stimson, would also be tightly enmeshed in some of America's harshest decisions. The internment order was merely the first.

McCloy, more than any other person in government, enabled the internment order. In doing so, he needlessly sent thousands of innocent people to concentration camps. Through extensive machinations, he personally ensured that they remained there for the duration of the war, even when the Supreme Court might have released them much sooner. Oddly, McCloy never intended to be dealing with questions of Japanese sabotage when Stimson hired him. On the contrary, Stimson only charged McCloy with responsibility for internment because of his knowledge of an entirely different enemy.