The American Way: The Influence of Race on the Treatment of Prisoners of War During World War Two

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THE AMERICAN WAY: THE INFLUENCE OF RACE ON THE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS OF WAR HELD IN THE UNITED STATES DURING WORLD WAR TWO

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of History in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

When examining the Second World War, it is impossible to overlook the influence race had in both creating the conflict and determining the intensity with which it was fought. While this factor existed in the European theater, it pales in comparison to how race influenced the fighting in the Pacific. John Dower produced a comprehensive study that examined the racial aspects of the Pacific theater in his book War Without Mercy. Dower concluded that Americans viewed themselves as racially superior to the Asian “other” and this influenced the ferocity of the Pacific war. While Dower’s work focused on this relationship overseas, I examine the interaction domestically.

My study examines the influence of race on the treatment of Japanese Prisoners of War (POWs) held in the United States during the Second World War. Specifically, my thesis will assess the extent to which race and racism affected several aspects of the treatment of Japanese prisoners in American camps. While in theory the American policy toward POWs made no distinctions in the treatment of racially different populations, in reality discrepancies in the treatment of racially different populations of POWs (German, and Japanese) become clear in its application.

My work addresses this question by investigating the differences in treatment between Japanese and European POWs held in the United States during and after the war. Utilizing personal letters from both American policymakers and camp administrators, U.S. War Department POW camp inspection reports, documents outlining American policy, as well as newspaper and magazine articles, I attempt to demonstrate how treatment substantially differed
depending on the race of the prisoner. The government’s treatment of the Japanese POWs should illuminate the United States Government’s racial views during and after the war.
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This thesis would have been imposable without the help of several key individuals. First, I would like to thank the history department at UCF for encouraging my studies and offering guidance every step of the way. I thank my family for their help and patience over the years, as well as several of my fellow classmates who have also shared in the incommunicable experience of graduate school and made the journey a truly memorable one. I would also like to acknowledge the great help provided by Dr. Barbara Gannon and Anne Ladyem McDivitt. Without their frequent edits and invaluable advice, this study would have surely been almost impossible to decipher or complete. Finally, I would also like to thank Rebecca for her tireless support and encouragement without which, this endeavor would have never been a possibility.
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INTRODUCTION

“The Japanese, with their reputation for trickiness and sneakiness, are apt to make a greater attempt to disturb our home front security than the Germans ever did.”¹ This statement about Japanese Prisoners of War (POWs) held in Wisconsin during World War II provides a window into Americans’ perception of these men and suggests an important question. Why would 5,000 Japanese POWs pose a greater threat to domestic security than over 400,000 German prisoners? If it clearly was not the number, as the Japanese only represented a small fraction of the prisoners of war held in the United States, then what else could it have been? The difference may have been the race of these men. When examining the Second World War, it is impossible to overlook the influence of race, which was especially important in the Pacific theater where Anglo-American forces engaged a racially different enemy, whom they viewed as inferior to themselves. John Dower argues that this led to a racial war in the Pacific theater, which he describes as a “War Without Mercy.”² Although race was influential in shaping combat overseas in the Pacific, was it also the most prominent factor when determining how the United States cared for its POWs at home? Comparing the treatment of Japanese and German prisoners held in the United States during the Second World War demonstrates the effect of race and racism on the American POW program. This study seeks to examine the influence of race on the treatment of Japanese prisoners of war held in the United States during the Second World War.

Specifically, the extent to which race and racism affected the treatment of Japanese prisoners in American camps.

While, in theory, the American regulations toward POWs made no distinctions between the treatment of racially different prisoners, in reality, racially diverse populations of POWs (German and Japanese) were treated differently when this policy was applied in the camps. While official U.S. policy in accordance with the Geneva Convention expressed no variation between the treatment of POWs based on race, the experiences of racially different prisoner populations within the United States demonstrates clear inequality. A comparison of how Japanese prisoners were treated as compared to other prisoners demonstrated that American personnel provided better treatment to German POWs, allowed them to participate in a greater variety of jobs, gave them additional access to educational opportunities, and more vigorously incorporated these men into re-education programs. While there may have been a number of reasons for these variations, including concerns for Japanese prisoners’ safety, the discrepancies identified in this study reflect the racial attitudes of American captors and show that race was indeed the most influential factor responsible for variations in American treatment of Axis POWs.

Racial prejudice between the Japanese and Americans originated with anti-Asian sentiment and xenophobia that occurred during the first major waves of Asian immigration in the nineteenth century. When war broke out in December of 1941, most Americans knew very little about Japan and lacked communalities with its people, who differed greatly in almost every aspect including language, history, politics, religion, culture, and race. What Americans did know was based on propaganda and racist caricatures portraying Japanese people as fiercely
aggressive, dull-witted, and physically weak, often with poor eyesight using thick “coke bottle”
glasses. In fact, U.S. propaganda often portrayed the Japanese as bats or primates.\textsuperscript{3} The surprise
attack on the Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941, strengthened Americans’ hatred
for men and women that they viewed as the racially inferior “other.”

The outbreak of war only intensified the existing racial hatred that dated back to the
nineteenth century. Like other Asian immigrants in the United States before the war, Japanese
Americans experienced overt racism and legal barriers, intended to exclude and control them.
Many of these laws focused on depriving Japanese immigrants of American citizenship and the
ability to own land. Several organizations throughout the Pacific Northwest including the
Japanese Exclusion League of California, Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, the
California Farm Bureau, and countless others groups that ensured Japanese Americans were
deprived of basic rights.\textsuperscript{4} Home to the largest population of Japanese immigrants, California was
also perhaps the most assertive in restricting their basic freedoms, even passing the “Alien Land
Law” in 1913 that legally prevented Japanese citizens from owning land within the state.\textsuperscript{5} With
the attack at Pearl Harbor, existing American hatred and fear of the Japanese in the United States
intensified to the point where President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, requiring the
forced relocation of over 100,000 Japanese Americans living in western states. This order gave

\textsuperscript{3} For a greater understanding of American anti-Japanese propaganda see, Anthony V. Navarro, “A Critical
Comparison Between Japanese and American Propaganda During World War II.” Michigan State University.
https://www.msu.edu/~navarro6/srop.html. (accessed March 15, 2013), and Hannah Miles, “WWII Propaganda:
The Influence of Race.” Artifacts: A Journal of Undergraduate Writing, Issue 6, University of Missouri. (accessed
March 13, 2013).

\textsuperscript{4} Brian Niiya, ed. \textit{Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to the Present}. (Japanese American

the federal government power to prohibit any person from any area of the country where national security was considered threatened. Although Executive Order 9066 did not explicitly apply to Japanese Americans or require imprisonment, over 100,000 persons of Japanese descent were forcibly relocated to War Relocation Centers away from the western seaboard, while no similar action was taken for citizens of Italian or German ancestry.  

The internment of Japanese Americans reflects the tumultuous racial history of the United States, only decades removed from the institution of slavery, where state and local governments sanctioned a program of exclusion and segregation commonly known as the “Jim Crow” laws. Segregation also extended to the U.S. military during the World War II and often resulted in white German and Italian POWs receiving greater access to facilities on and off post than African American servicemen. Given American racial attitudes, it would be surprising if American personnel provided equal care to racially different POWs despite regulations.

A public opinion poll conducted in July of 1945—after the first death camps were found in Europe demonstrates the extent to which racial prejudice against the Japanese had been engrained into the American population. When Americans were asked whether they believed the Germans or Japanese to be more “warlike and want to make themselves as powerful as possible?” 52 percent believed the Japanese were more warlike, while only 39 percent believed the Germans had these characteristics. The response to a follow-up question was even more striking. The same study also asked participants, which people were more “cruel at heart,” and

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51 percent responded that the Japanese were cruel while only 13 percent described the Germans in this way. The American people, far removed from the life and death struggle of combat, were much more likely to fear and resent an enemy who was racially different than one who had operated a vast network of work camps and extermination centers for millions of innocent civilians.

The United States did not operate death camps, but it did hold half a million prisoners during World War II. Between 1941 and 1946, the U.S. War Department detained over 400,000 enemy prisoners of war within American borders. While the United States was unprepared to deal with such a large number of prisoners, the War Department created guidelines for treatment of POWs based on procedures set forth in the Geneva Convention of 1929. Although this agreement outlined basic guidelines intended to ensure fair and humane treatment to prisoners of war, it failed to provide the details needed to care for the large numbers of POWs captured during the Second World War. The general stipulations outlined in Geneva stated that the belligerent nation should house its prisoners in equal conditions to its own troops. Some differences in camp design could exist due to camp location or climate. For example, living conditions differed slightly from POW camps located in Texas than those in New England, but the camps’ living conditions were always equal between prisoners and their guards, as stipulated in the 1929 Geneva Convention. Moreover, it also mandated that prisoners be allowed to participate in sporting events and leisure activities such as theater performances, music concerts, painting, and gardening.

10 Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, (Geneva: 1929), Article 9,10.
In addition to defining treatment for captured POWs, the Geneva Convention also stated that with the exception of officers who were excused from labor, prisoners could be forced to work while in captivity. However, these men were not to be worked more than normal civilian laborers performing the same task and also received payment for their labor. In addition to performing various jobs around the camp such as clerks, laundry attendants, and other manual labor, selected POWs were permitted to work outside of the wire under guard. Civilian contractors and the agricultural industry were particularly eager to benefit, as the availability of cheap workers had dwindled due to the war. POWs could not directly work in defense industries and were paid 80 cents a day for their efforts. Additionally, American officials attempted to indoctrinate prisoners into pro-democratic re-education programs that operated within a vague subsection of the Geneva Convention intended to ensure POWs had access to educational materials.\textsuperscript{11}

Unlike the 400,000 German and Italian POWs in America during the war, scholarly studies of the more than 5,000 soldiers and sailors from the Empire of Japan detained within the borders of the United States have been limited making understanding the effect of race on the treatment of POWs difficult.\textsuperscript{12} The first historical analysis of the Japanese POWs held in the United States published outside of Japan came in Arnold Krammer’s 1983 article “Japanese Prisoners of War in America.” Krammer, who has become perhaps the most influential historian

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

on the topic of POWs in America, produced a general study examining the experience of the Japanese prisoners held by the United States. Krammer’s work examined the capture and treatment of Japanese POWs but focused on the U.S. governments’ interrogation practices. Krammer found that the Japanese experienced a different captivity than their Italian and German allies, but he failed to examine the extent to which the Japanese POW program differed in treatment, labor, and education among the Japanese and German prisoners. Building upon Krammer’s seminal study, Ulrich Straus’ 2003 monograph, The Anguish of Surrender: Japanese POWs of World War II, examined the treatment of Japanese prisoners to a far greater extent than Krammer. Straus focused on the psychological issues related to Japanese prisoners’ transition from warrior to captive. Straus also added much to our understanding of the extended interrogation process to which Japanese POWs were more frequently subjected to than their German or Italian counterparts.

Straus was not the only scholar to examine the interrogation of Japanese prisoners. Alison Gilmore in You Can’t Fight Tanks With Bayonets examined the evolution of the psychological operations program in the Pacific, adding much to our understanding of the interrogations of Japanese POWs and their direct use in crafting American propaganda targeted at Japan. What was apparent from reading the short list of literature on Japanese POWs held by the western allies was that much work is needed to gain a complete perspective on how race might have affected the treatment of POWs.

14 Ibid., p. 87.
Considering the racial dynamics of the Pacific war, discrepancies in treatment and variations in policy between the Asian and Caucasian POWs in American hands seemed to have an easy explanation. John Dower’s seminal study of the racial influences in the Pacific theater fittingly titled *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* argued that racial fear and hatred were major factors that determined how both Japanese and Anglo-Americans perceived and dealt with an enemy they viewed as the "inferior other." While Dower’s work focused on this relationship overseas, at home, the forced relocation of over 100,000 Japanese Americans in accordance to President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066 and the fact that white Americans of Germans, and Italian descent were not interred suggests that the influence of race extended far beyond the battlefield.

Interment camps were not the only holding facilities for prisoners, the U.S. War Department would eventually hold over 425,000 prisoners from different racial backgrounds in the United States during the war. With the influx of prisoners into the United States, American officials rushed to outline regulations accommodating the large numbers of enemy prisoners that arrived in the United States during the war, as the nation lacked substantial existing policy. Chapter one examines this issue through an in-depth look at the establishment of the American POW program and basic conditions provided to enemy prisoners. Although official regulations called for equal treatment, conditions, and opportunities for prisoners regardless of race, racism played an important role in influencing various aspects in the American POW program.

Additionally, other factors such as latitude given to camp commanders by an absent command structure, personal prejudices as a result of combat experiences, and keeping prisoners occupied in order to deter disruptive behavior also influenced prisoner’s treatment.

Continuing this analysis, chapter two investigates how this relationship applied to the POW labor program. During the war, enlisted prisoners were required by international law to work while in captivity as long as the work did not directly relate to the war effort.18 American personnel, although initially unreceptive toward the idea of employing POWs, soon realized the benefits of the program, including improved order within the camp that was achieved through occupying prisoner’s idle time. This factor, combined with a growing desire of civilian contractors to capitalize on the vast untapped resources of POW labor and a dangerously low manpower shortage, led American officials to ensure the POW labor program remained a top priority during the war. Although these factors greatly influenced the utilization of POW labor, race was responsible for variations between in the participation of Japanese and German prisoners in the labor program because Japanese POWs were excluded from equal employment opportunities, despite severe manpower shortages.

Finally, after looking at inconsistencies in both general treatment of prisoners and the POW labor program, chapter three offers a comparative examination of American re-education efforts involving German and Japanese prisoners, in order to illuminate what factors had the greatest influence on American policy. Examining ways in which the War Department’s re-education program varied its content and implementation between German and Japanese prisoners, we gain a more complete understanding of these inconsistencies, as well as the

possible motivations behind them. Even though factors like public opinion, language barriers, and shortages in qualified instructors were important, race again proved to have been the most significant factor behind the variations in the re-education programs involving Japanese and German POWs.

Although minor variations between German and Italian prisoners did occur, they generally experienced the same conditions while in American POW camps. Italian prisoners were white and of similar ethnic background to many Americans, like their fellow German campmates. Furthermore, upon the capitulation of the Italian Government in September of 1943 with the Armistice of Cassibile, the official status of Italy’s POWs changed to civilian internees and no longer considered prisoners of war. In terms of this study that examines the influence of race on the American POW program, I will specifically examine the relationship between Caucasian and Asian prisoners and focus my analysis on the variations between German and Japanese POWs held within the United States during the war.

In order to illustrate the variations between Japanese and German prisoners, I examined how the U.S. War Department organized and regulated its POW program and the implementation of its POW policy based on records held at the U.S. National Archives at College Park, Maryland. Although these records provided an in-depth portrait of the organization and implementation of American policy on POWs, they only offered one side of the story. I also examined Congressional reports discussing aspects of POW program, camp newspapers, magazine articles, published memoirs of repatriated prisoners. As part of this study, I examined the type of materials available to the POWs, including literature, movies, games, recreational activities, and lectures that were used in the re-education program that hoped to promote
democratic values to these men. Ironically, the United States Government organized its POW program around the premise that through fair treatment, participating in hard work, and guided education, repatriated prisoners would gain a new understanding of ideal American life upon returning home. In actuality, however, the program was plagued with clear inequalities based on race. Although the content of the government’s program was intended to portray a idealized portrayal of American ideals, its realities may have offered a much more accurate depiction of the true American Way.
As German and Japanese POWs began settling into camps scattered throughout the American heartland, racially different groups of prisoners experienced variations in treatment almost immediately. Considering how racially segregated the United States remained in the first half of the twentieth century, it would be difficult to expect equal American personnel to give equal treatment to Japanese prisoners, who were generally considered to be racially inferior by the American public. The treatment of foreign POWs, however, was regulated by international law and enforced by Red Cross inspections, which stipulated equal care regardless of a prisoners’ race. By comparing how American policy varied in its application depending on the race of the prisoner, we can establish a clearer picture of the inconsistencies in the treatment of racially different POWs. Although official policy called for equal care regardless of race, evolving regulations and flexibility given to camp personnel when administering them, often led to unequal conditions. While race was important, further examination of the United States’ POWs program suggests that there may have been other factors besides race that affected American behavior. These elements included keeping prisoners occupied in order to deter disruptive behavior, latitude given to individual commanders by senior Army personnel as well as guards, and commanders that were influenced by personal prejudices as a result of combat. By using a comparative lens to examine the treatment of Japanese and German POWs, it will be possible to construct a more complete narrative of Japanese POWs in the United States, as well as uncovering what factors were responsible for variations in their care, despite the official regulations. While official U.S. policy expressed no variation between the treatment of POWs
based on race, the experiences of racially different prisoner populations demonstrates inequality existed.¹

The Search for Organization

Between 1941 and 1946, the U.S. War Department detained over four hundred thousand enemy prisoners of war within American borders. Initially, the United States was unprepared to deal with such a large number of prisoners. In fact, until early 1942, when the U.S. Army published "Civilian Enemy Aliens and Prisoners of War," it had no detailed regulations outlining the care and treatment of enemy prisoners of war. The first official policy to outline provisions for the treatment of enemy POWs was almost exclusively based on the 1929 Geneva Convention. This international agreement outlined general provisions to ensure that fair treatment and protection were provided for combatants taken prisoner during a time of war. ²

Originally adopted on 22nd of August 1864 in an attempt to outline basic rules in modern warfare, The Geneva Convention was substantially expanded in 1906 and again in 1929, in order to protect prisoners’ basic human rights, as well as providing detailed guidelines regulating almost every aspect involved with caring for enemy prisoners of war. Enforced by the International Red Cross through regular camp inspections, these regulations were field tested as the world’s major nations began processing hundreds of thousands of captured POWs a decade later. Unfortunately, American personnel encountered problems with the limited and often open-

² Although the Japanese government originally agreed to the conditions of the 1929 Geneva Convention, the Senjinkun mandated that no Japanese warrior become a prisoner of war, which led the Japanese to feel any compliance in caring for POWs would go unreciprocated, as other belligerents would be spared the task due to a lack of Japanese POWs. In 1942, however, the Japanese expressed through formal channels that it would abide by the laws of the 1929 Geneva Convention despite having never actually ratified the treaty.
ended provisions of the Geneva Convention almost immediately. Although general guidelines that ensured fair and humane treatment were outlined within the Geneva Convention, it failed to provide the necessary details that left large gaps in official regulations, which American legal analysts and policymakers scrambled to fill.

In search of a quick and easy solution to this issue, the War Department created general guidelines for treatment of POWs based on procedures set forth in the Geneva Convention of 1929 mandating the care of enemy prisoners of war. This policy ensured that captured enemy combatants would be housed, fed, and cared for in an almost identical fashion to American service personnel.\(^3\) Prisoners also participated in sporting events and leisure activities such as theater performances, music concerts, painting, and gardening during captivity. The stipulations set forth in Geneva and enforced by the U.S. Army, stated that the belligerent nation should house its prisoners in equal conditions to its own troops.\(^4\) American personnel ensured that each individual prisoner had his own bed, as well as storage for personal items and clothing. Some differences in camp design could exist due to the location or its climate and often did, but overall the camps’ living conditions were generally equal between prisoners and their guards, as stipulated in the Geneva accords.

Eventually, the War Department had assigned three different organizations the task of implementing and regulating its POW program. To alleviate the ensuing bureaucratic confusion, the War Department decided that the Army Service Forces (ASF) would oversee the policy set forth by the War Department’s Personnel Division (G-1), and the Office of the Provost Marshal

\(^4\)Ibid., Article 9,10.
General (PMGO) would be responsible for its implementation as well as regulating individual camp commanders.\(^5\) While this multi-departmental organization worked to coordinate its efforts, American personnel revised POW regulations and continuously changed policy, adding further confusion to an already chaotic situation. With three separate organizations creating, implementing, and overseeing POW policy, conditions fluctuated considerably considering how rapidly official policy was amended. When the last prisoners had departed the United States for home in 1946, the official Army regulations handbook had undergone countless revisions. These frequent changes combined with delays in printing and shipping new copies to the 490 POW camps within the United States often led to wide variations in policy being administered at any one time.\(^6\)

Additionally, the Army Service Forces were preoccupied with manpower shortages and matters directly related to the war-effort, leaving the Provost Marshal General relatively free to implement policy, suggest needed changes, and supervise its own personnel with little outside supervision. This overlapping command structure provided vast gray areas in which camp commanders had considerable leeway when implementing official policy, so long as they avoided major human rights violations and maintained maximum labor production within the camp. As a result of the evolving policy and the disorder that came from overlapping command


structures, variations between official government policy and what was implemented in the camps were common.⁷

Given these circumstances, the treatment of prisoners could and did fluctuate considerably based on the personal beliefs of the individual camp commanders as well as the men under their command. Each camp was given a certain amount of flexibility in its day-to-day operations, including labor assignments, availability of privileges, and enforcement of expected military protocol. This latitude in camp management inadvertently fostered varying treatment between the different races of POWs based on individual racial prejudice from commanders and guards. To illustrate this relationship, it is important to examine how treatment differed between various prisoner populations housed in America’s sprawling system of POW camps.

**Life in the Stockades**

With the exception of less than 2,000 Japanese, German, and Italian prisoners taken in the first twelve months of American entry into the war, the newly organized POW camp system operated by the Provost Marshal Generals Office (PMGO) was largely untested in 1943. As British and American forces began mopping up what was left of the famed Afrika Korps in North Africa and successful operations at the Coral Sea and Guadalcanal led Douglas MacArthur further into the Pacific, the coming year would see the meager POW populations within the continental United States increase nearly tenfold to more than 172,000 by December of 1943.⁸

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⁸ Monthly Census of Prisoners of War Interned in Continental United States: ASF WD Monthly Progress Reports, sec. 11, Administration, “Historical Monograph, Prisoner of War Operations Division, Historical File, 1941-1958,
Drawing largely on the Geneva Convention of 1929 and the newly updated official Army manual "Civilian Enemy Aliens and Prisoners of War," American policy emphasized equal treatment and made no distinction between POWs based on race or nationality.  

American personnel received the first large shipments of POWs as a result of the Anglo-American agreement to transfer all captured prisoners of war to the continental U.S. early in 1942. The transfer was thought to alleviate already stressed British forces from the problems of guarding, holding, feeding, and caring for large numbers of captured enemy combatants. In August of that year, Great Britain proposed that the United States intern 50,000 of its captured prisoners of war within the month, and an additional 100,000 in the three months following the initial shipment. The British parliament stated that any drastic influx of prisoners would overtax accommodations in the British Empire and urgently requested the help of the U.S. War Department. At first, the Joint Chiefs of Staff chose to accept 50,000 POWs and requested the additional 100,000 be sent to Canada, as the sudden infusion of 150,000 enemy prisoners into the United States appeared too large of a security threat. However, after further consideration, the Joint Chiefs decided that it was impractical to split the shipment of prisoners and accepted them all, provided American personnel were given at least one month to make preparations.  

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10 Great Britain then held 23,000 German and 250,000 Italian prisoners of war. For a more detailed account of British treatment of enemy POWs during WWII, see Churchill's Unexpected Guests: Prisoners of War in Britain in World War II by Sophie Jackson, or Prisoners of England by Miriam Kochan.

the next three years, an unprecedented number of enemy prisoners arrived on American shores, growing from less than two thousand in January of 1942 to 360,000 in December of 1944, and eventually peaking in June of 1945, at nearly 426,000 prisoners of war.\(^\text{12}\)

While the U.S. War Department detained POWs from all major Axis nations within the United States during the war, the proportions of American-held prisoners were far from an equal mix of fighting men from Germany, Italy, and Japan. The clear majority of POWs held by American personal during the war were German.\(^\text{13}\) At any one time, German POWs outnumbered their Italian and Japanese comrades at least 2:1 and often higher, reaching 6:1 in the summer of 1945.\(^\text{14}\) Several factors account for such a large variation in the representative size of POW populations within the continental United States. One was the Japanese troops\’ preference to die rather than surrender, combined with American troops\’ reluctance to offer quarter to those who may have attempted to surrender. Another was an official agreement to pay the Australian and British governments to house and care for a majority of Japanese prisoners captured by American forces in the Pacific. This arrangement partially explains the discrepancy between large numbers of German POWs held in the United States and the considerably smaller proportion of Japanese prisoners interned. Although the vast majority of Japanese POWs were held in Australia or surrounding islands in exchange for lend-lease aid, a select few who were

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\(^{13}\) Ironically the first POW captured and brought to the United States was Kazuo Sakamaki, a Japanese naval officer captured of the coast of Oahu when his midget submarine sank during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Ensign Sakamaki was apprehended on December 8, 1941 and later published his memoirs detailing his time in captive titled, I Attacked Pearl Harbor.

deemed of particular use to stateside intelligence officers were transferred to camps within the United States. Additionally, German troops had been aware of the Geneva Convention and expected quarter when surrendering to the enemy. In comparison, Japanese combatants were generally unaware of the protection ensured by the Convention.

Unlike soldiers and sailors from western nations who accepted surrender as an acceptable alternative to death at enemy hands, Japanese military culture of the early twentieth century regarded surrender as a fate worse than death and one that would bring shame upon themselves and their families. During the Second World War, every Japanese Army soldier was issued a copy of the "Code of Battlefield Conduct" or Senjinkun. This regulation was intended to improve discipline within the Japanese Army and, most importantly, prohibited soldiers from surrendering. While the document did not apply to sailors in the Japanese Navy, they too were expected to spare themselves the indignity of falling into enemy hands alive. This preference to die an honorable death rather than live in shame, combined with the merciless nature of fighting in the Pacific, resulted in few Japanese prisoners. All too often, less than 100 Japanese POW were taken after major battles in the Pacific, while ten or even twenty times that number were killed. During the Burma campaign alone, Allied forces captured a total of 142 prisoners while recording over 17,000 enemy dead. During the combined actions of the Coral Sea, Midway, Guadalcanal, and Tarawa, some of the largest battles in the Pacific, American forces netted fewer than 600 Japanese POWs.

While the Japanese notions of honor and self-sacrifice in defense of the Emperor played an influential part in limiting the numbers of POWs taken by American forces, it was only one side of the story. Unlike the ongoing fighting in Western Europe, the brutal nature of the Pacific war often led both American and Japanese combatants to offer no quarter to surrendering enemy troops. In *A War Without Mercy*, John Dower examined this key factor concluding that American soldiers, sailors, and marines generally refused to take prisoners, even if the opportunity arose. Often American commanders resorted to bribing troops with liberty-passes and even ice cream in order to bring in the first Japanese prisoners.\(^\text{17}\) The combination of Japanese culture and American hatred resulted in low numbers of prisoners captured during the majority of the Pacific War.

Although the later years of the war would see an increase in the number of Japanese taken captive by American forces, this figure never equaled the percentages of the German troops surrendering in Europe. Unlike their Japanese counterparts, European soldiers and sailors knew about the basic rights guaranteed to them by the Geneva Convention and frequently chose surrender rather than death. With the agreement to ship 150,000 prisoners from England, plus all future POWs captured for the duration of the war to the United States, large numbers of enemy prisoners began arriving on American shores in the spring of 1943. This massive influx of German POWs, combined with an increasing number of Japanese prisoners, soon had the hastily

organized system of POW camps that sprang up throughout the nation bustling with hundreds of thousands of young men from as far away as Frankfurt, Venice, and Osaka.

Unlike the huge numbers of German POWs arriving in port cities up and down the eastern seaboard of the United States, nearly every Japanese prisoner’s first steps on American soil took place at Camp Angel Island in route to Camp Tracy, California. This U.S. intelligence center operated within the gray area of the Geneva Convention by subjecting Japanese POWs to secret and prolonged interrogation practices, which at the very least violated the intentions, if not the actual provisions of the 1929 Convention.\textsuperscript{18} The length of time each prisoner spent at Camp Tracy depended on the quality and quantity of information the prisoner supplied American intelligence personnel. Once they were no longer of use to Army intelligence, nearly all Japanese POWs were transferred to one of three detention centers, Camp Clarinda in Iowa, Camp Kennedy in Texas, and Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. German POWs were rarely subjected to interrogation to any degree aside from separating members of the criminal organization known as the SS or Schutzstaffel from regular German units. This was likely due to the massive numbers of captured prisoners falling into Allied hands, but also due to the fact that German troops, unlike their Japanese allies, understood the Geneva Convention protected them from prolonged interrogation.\textsuperscript{19}

Once the transports filled with European prisoners arrived in the United States, German POWs were sent throughout the country into a system of finished and unfinished camps. Drawing almost exclusively from the standards outlined in the Geneva Convention, virtually

every article was followed to the letter when dealing with the newly arriving POWs care. This attention to detail even forced American guards to move from their own barracks in Aliceville, Alabama, and into tents while the POW barracks were finished at the camp to maintain equality. The standard prison camp accommodations were identical to the U.S. Army’s design for housing its own troops—simple rectangle one or two-story buildings; the only difference being the guard towers and double barbed-wire fence surrounding the facility. The average POW barracks consisted of large, open-bay quarters lined with bunks on either side. Each individual prisoner had his own bed, footlocker, and wall locker used to store approved personal items and clothing. In addition to his bed and storage units, each prisoner had access to an area on the wall next to their bunk used to display personal items, which were typically family photos, clippings of pin-up girls cut from magazines, as well as nationalistic or religious items. Japanese POWs, as well as their German allies, generally experienced the same basic living conditions within the camps.

Upon arrival to the camp, each prisoner was issued a set of dark blue work clothes, which were to be worn while about camp or on work detail. The prisoners were only allowed to wear their foreign uniforms during leisure hours. In addition to the work uniform, each prisoner was issued two complete sets of Government Issue military fatigues and additional personal items.

The men of supply-starved armies in North Africa and remote Pacific islands were amazed when

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20 *Nazi POWs in America*. Sharon Young director, A&E Television Network, 2002, DVD.
22 Ibid, p. 15.
they saw what was awaiting them in the mess halls their first days in camp. The Geneva Convention stated that the belligerent nation should provide equal rations to its prisoners as it provided to its own troops, or an equal portion of the prisoner’s ethnic cuisine. When prisoners first arrived at the camp they were amazed at the quantity of food available in the cafeterias. Many of the newly arrived prisoners had been subjected to shrinking rations due to increased Allied air attacks on supply shipments and prolonged fighting. Prisoners often recalled hiding the food they could not manage to eat during the first few weeks, in fear of having their rations cut.

Initially, some prisoners had difficulties adapting to the strictly American cuisine, but soon, a mixture of ethnic and American meals were being provided to POWs. Japanese prisoners were given increased portions of rice and fresh vegetables; Germans more fish soup, pork, and wurst, while Italians received a greater quantity of spices, olive oil, and spaghetti. In addition to the meals provided in the mess halls, prisoners were encouraged to supplement their own diet with any additional items they had purchased in the canteen or any produce grown within the camp and purchased from local markets when available. Although the U.S. War Department made considerable effort to ensure equal accommodations among racially different populations, several inconsistencies existed. While German, and Japanese, POWs lived in nearly identical housing and often enjoyed specially prepared cuisine, discrepancies existed in other aspects of American treatment, such as recreational activities and dispensing special privileges among inmates.

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26 Ibid., p. 48-50.
27 Nazi POWs in America. Sharon Young director, A&E Television Network, 2002, DVD.
29 Arnold Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America, p. 48.
Prisoners were encouraged to improve their camps, and they did this through planting trees and flower gardens, building recreational facilities for soccer, and baseball. POWs also build theaters for performances they took part in and outdoor gazebos for music concerts in which all prisoners were expected to attend. Japanese and German POWs were encouraged to occupy themselves through a wide variety of activities, games, and sports. American personnel believed providing prisoners with recreational activities would constructively fill large blocks of leisure-time that could otherwise be directed at causing disciplinary problems for guards or planning escapes. The first POWs set to work making their “cookie-cutter” camps more like home, or at least a place they could comfortably sit out the remainder of the war.³⁰

In addition to normal improvements, such as theaters and band shells, a wide variety of regional activities made every camp distinctive. This was the case in a camp located in Telogia, Florida, which had a zoo filled with small animals and an alligator the POWs captured while working in the nearby swampland.³¹ At Camp McCoy, Japanese POWs planted gardens and shrines to Buddha around the camp to make their imprisonment more tolerable. They also received colored crepe paper and thin wire to make artificial flowers, Mah-Jong sets, and even constructed a tennis court.³² Prisoners were able to transform many of these drab and cold structures into places that were almost enjoyable, especially compared with the conditions they experienced prior to capture.³³

³³ “This camp (Branch Camp Kendall) is located several kilometers south of South Miami, in a tropical region not far from the great bathing resort of Miami Beach. It is relatively isolated, in very beautiful pinewoods and among
Many of the prisoners took great pride in the work they did, and their actions were encouraged by the War Department because the prisoners who were preoccupied with camp improvement would be less likely to cause trouble. In an effort to reassure concerned citizens in nearby towns and avoid unwanted inspections from superiors, commanders promoted an atmosphere of quiet and orderly discipline within the camp. American officials believed prisoners could not escape or take part in riots if internal discipline was maintained through occupying prisoners’ idle time. Through required camp maintenance, educational programs, recreational activities, and paid labor, American personnel successfully avoided major incidents while detaining over 470,000 Axis POWs during the war.

As the program began to take shape, U.S. personnel organized POWs into labor details within the camp. Working POWs were to be paid as outlined by the Geneva Convention and could use their additional income to purchase items from the Post Exchange (PX). Unlike most other Allied nations, the United States allowed the prisoners to keep a majority of their personal items with the exception of money, which was held and returned upon release. The reasoning for this was to make it more difficult for enemy prisoners to successfully escape, as they would not have the money needed to buy a seat on a train out of the country or a ship home. As a result, all payment for labor was issued in the form of a script that was only valid in the camps’ Post

palm trees. The climate is mild in the winter and never too hot in the summer.... The prisoners’ barracks are exceptionally well arranged in palm and pinewoods. There are coconut and some orange trees growing in the camp. As a whole it is very well arranged; in view of its gardens and the arrangement of the barracks, this camp is the best looking I have seen. The prisoners are fully aware or their privileged situation of their camp and take good care of it. Tropical flowers (hibiscus, gardenias) grow everywhere; the prisoners tend the flower beads with zeal. International Red Cross visitor, as quoted in Robert D. Billinger Jr., Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State: German POWs in Florida, p. 33-34.

34 Arnold Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America, p. 48.
Exchange. The Post Exchange was full of extras that POWs could spend the money they earned working in and around the camp as farm laborers or in the camp’s mess hall. Most popular among the men were tobacco products, model kits, gum, candy bars, and pen sets. One German prisoner in an Alabama camp recalled that for ten cents, he could purchase a Hershey bar or a bottle of beer in his PX, despite the fact that the camp was located in a dry county. Thus, the prisoners could obtain luxuries that local civilians under strict wartime rationing could not get.

While Japanese POWs experienced the same general treatment in American camps, upon closer inspection, German prisoners frequently enjoyed greater freedoms and more access to a wider variety of leisure activities then their Japanese counterparts. The War Department restricted the sale of various items within the camp exchange for a variety of reasons, which frequently included fear of self-harm. For example, the War Department ordered that the razorblades sold in the camp PX could only be sold to German and Italian prisoners. The rationale behind this was to prevent the Japanese from taking their own lives, despite having access to more effective means, such as knives, cutlery, and blades, while working in the camp kitchen, lawn-maintenance, or even eating at the cafeteria. Although reports confirmed Japanese prisoners no longer displayed a desire to harm themselves once in captivity, American officials often overlooked or ignored these statements. One such report observing prisoners at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin described Japanese POWs as, “responding well to good treatment,” being

36 Ibid., p. 46.
37 Michael R. Waters, Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners of War at Camp Hearne (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), p. 43-44.
“quite cheerful,” and seemed to “enjoying living.” Additionally, Japanese POWs were housed together in segregated barracks with no distinction of rank and service, whereas their fellow German and Italian prisoners were separated by branch of service and only supervised by officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from within their own branch. Despite regularly documented issues of disorder that arose from inter-service rivalries, this practice of combining Japanese sailors and soldiers would continue for the duration of the war.

While at first glance, many of the safety precautions instated by the American officials seem justified, often such drastic restrictions were based on little to no substantial evidence and had adverse reactions. Considering that the majority of Americans perceived the Japanese as racially inferior, it would initially appear that race was likely the reason that different POW populations received unequal treatment. When examining variations in the treatment of racially different prisoner populations, the influence of race becomes distinguishable. What is surprising, however, was the number of additional factors that may have contributed to variations in the treatment of the racially different POW populations.

A Quiet Prisoner is a Happy Prisoner

While racial prejudice may have influenced the implementation of the American POW program, it is evident that a number of factors, including personal prejudice, keeping prisoners occupied in order to discourage disruptive behavior, and the experiences of the camp personnel might have also influenced variations in treatment. Although racial prejudice among camp

personnel may explain variations in treatment, this was not the only factor involved, as preoccupation with constructively occupying prisoner’s available free time and avoiding internal review from the War Office or Red Cross appeared to also take precedence.

By examining the differences in treatment between Japanese and German POWs held by the United States during the war, the motivations behind these variances becomes clear. Without question, race influenced all aspects of the Pacific Theater. This was a momentous struggle waged between two very different civilizations, both culturally and racially. Did the racial dynamic so dominant in combat also influence American treatment for POWs, or was it something else? The answer was yes, while race was not an issue on a policy level, it was very significant in influencing camp commanders and guards alike, who had considerable latitude in implementing that policy. Although racism influenced American military personnel, it first appeared that a concern for discouraging disruptive behavior within the camp by keeping prisoners occupied may have superseded all other factors, but this too was racially motivated. A prime example of this racial viewpoint was provided by the commanding officer of a POW camp located in Clarinda, Iowa. Similar to Camp McCoy and Camp Kennedy, Clarinda contained Japanese and German POWs, offering an opportunity for comparison. When asked by a reporter from the Des Moines Register as to which race of POW was the most disciplined, Lt. Colonel Ball responded, “[h]andling these little yellow monkeys is a lot different than handling German prisoners…. The German was far more desirable, they looked you in the eye, the Jap doesn’t.”

These individuals were allowed considerable control in the implementation of official policy. It is obvious that without frequent supervision by the senior officials, race may have played an equally influential role as any other in dictating the specifications of treatment regardless of the national POW policy.

Supporting the role of racial views in prisoner treatment, U.S. camp personnel demonstrated a clear affinity for German troops. Colonel Harold G. Storke, the officer in command of Camp Fort Devens, Massachusetts explained to a reporter that he could, “Change [German POWs] uniforms and you would hardly know them from our own men.”43 Comments like those from Colonel Ball and Colonel Harold G. Storke provide valuable insight into the racial views of senior camp officials. After considering the latitude given to camp commanders, and to what degree they were influenced by racial prejudices, it becomes clear that although absent from official policy, race affected its implementation.

An additional fact that may account for such variations in treatment was the service record or combat experience of the camp commander or its guard-staff. A good example that demonstrates how personal feelings may have been responsible for harsher treatment took place at Camp Kennedy in Texas under the command of Captain Taylor. A veteran of Pearl Harbor, Captain Taylor viewed his Japanese POWs as problematic, and he was a strict enforcer of all official regulations to make life as hard as possible for the Japanese in his care. One such minor infraction took place in the spring of 1945, when Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki, normally a model prisoner with no history of disobedience, transferred to Camp Kennedy from Camp McCoy.

While settling into his new quarters, a penknife was discovered in Sakamaki’s belongings during an initial inspection. This item was a typical addition to pen-sets of the era, and it was used to cut or sharpen the tip of a quill in order to make a pen nib. The implement was never taken from Ensign Sakamaki during his previous four years of imprisonment, and German officers were allowed to keep these implements. Despite his clean disciplinary record, Ensign Sakamaki received a week in solitary confinement, eating only bread and water. This example highlights the variation between what regulations different camp commanders enforced and how race may have influenced that decision.

Japanese POWs also experienced unequal punishment for their failure to obey orders issued by U.S. officials. In May of 1944, Colonel Rogers issued orders for all able-bodied enlisted POWs detained at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, to participate in a forty-hour workweek. Because of the fear of violence between civilians and Japanese prisoners, Rogers mandated that the Japanese POWs perform labor within the camp and not outside the installation. This restriction sparked unrest among the Japanese prisoners, who were unhappy at the lack of outside labor opportunities, which resulted in a work slow down. In response, Rogers placed the Japanese on a diet of bread and water, but it did not have the desired effect. In order to maintain labor output numbers and avoid an unscheduled visit from his superiors, Rogers ordered that the Japanese forced back to work. Following the separation of Japanese non-commissioned officers (NCOs) involved in the incident form the rest of the prisoners and several men being treated for

minor bayonet wounds, the Japanese POWs reluctantly went back to work.\textsuperscript{45} The report fails to mention exactly what “minor bayonet wounds” entailed; however, no formal complaints from prisoners ever reached the International Red Cross. It should also be noted that German POWs were never subject to similar violence when refusing to work.\textsuperscript{46}

Despite no racial distinction in the official policy for treatment of enemy POWs, the organization of the camp system allowed for considerable interpretation of vague regulations. However, based on these incidents, it is evident that American personnel viewed the Japanese POWs as inferior to their German campmates and the only logical explanation for this preference was race. While race mattered, other factors such as latitude given to camp commanders by an absent command structure and personal prejudices as a result of combat, also influenced prisoner’s treatment. While we have only examined one component of American treatment for enemy POWs, further investigation of other key aspects such as the clear variation between racially different prisoner populations in the utilization of POW labor and availability of educational programs to Japanese prisoners will provide alternative avenues to explore the causes behind unequal treatment.


\textsuperscript{46}No documentation was found within the records to suggest that German or Italian POWs were subjected to violence in order to get them back to work.
THE LABOR PROGRAM

As the growing numbers of German and Japanese prisoners begin adjusting to life in the camps during the winter of 1942, the U.S. War Department began drafting a POW labor program intended to occupy prisoners’ idle time. Initially, POWs were employed on tasks within the camp such as clerks, laundry attendants, and as laborers, but the growing number of workers quickly exceeded the amount of available jobs. To complicate this issue, civilian contractors throughout the United States clamored for an opportunity to access the growing numbers of able-bodied POWs for outsourced labor in the agriculture and manufacturing industries. While the Geneva Convention allowed POWs to be used in any labor that was not considered hazardous, degrading, or directly related to the war effort, it failed to provide detailed explanations as to what types of jobs prisoners could and could not perform. Although the Articles of the Convention called for different employment standards between commissioned officers, non-commissioned officers (NCO), and enlisted men, it made no distinction between POWs based on race or nationality.

By comparing the treatment of Japanese and German POWs while working within the United States, it is possible to construct a more complete narrative of Japanese POWs in America, as well as uncovering what factors were responsible for variations in their care despite the official regulations. Examination of the labor program suggests that while there may have been other factors besides race that affected American behavior, including occupying prisoner’s idle time, capitalizing on the vast, untapped resources of POW labor and manpower shortages within the United States due to the war, it is likely that race ultimately influenced all decisions regarding the treatment of Japanese POWs in the United States.
Idleness and Industry

In addition to defining general outlines for the treatment of captured POWs, the 1929 Geneva Convention also regulated POW labor. Article 27 of the Convention stated, “Belligerents may employ as workmen prisoners of war who are physically fit, other than officers and persons of equivalent statute, according to their rank and their ability.”1 Additionally, the Article excused officers from mandatory labor, but non-commissioned officers (NCO) could be forced to work in supervisory roles. In addition, Article 30 mandated that POWs could not be worked more than civilian laborers performing the same task; while Article 31 explicitly restricted POW labor from any jobs that directly related to the war effort. While the specifics of this provision lacked clarification, it prohibited employing prisoners in, “the manufacture or transport of arms or munitions of any kind, or on the transport of material destined for combatant units.”2 Additionally, Articles 32 and 33 clarified what type of work POWs were able to perform and provided general conditions for laborers. Finally, Article 34 of the Convention dealt with paying POWs for their labor. As stipulated by the Geneva Convention, POWs were to be paid a rate later agreed upon by the belligerent nations, but only for work not “in connection with the administration, internal arrangement, and maintenance of camps.”3 This key issue, left for further clarification at a later date, highlighted additional weaknesses in the Geneva Convention. Despite the international agreement outlining rudimentary guidelines for the care of prisoners of war, it failed to set necessary standards for implementing these articles, and it left the United States War

1 Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Article 27. Geneva, 27 July 1929.
2 Ibid., Article 31.
3 Ibid., Article 34.
Department with several issues it would need to address before the POW labor program went into effect on January 10, 1943.⁴

As the Office of the Provost Marshal General (PMGO) began drafting its official regulations outlining treatment for the growing number of Axis POWs arriving from Europe and the Pacific in the beginning of 1943, the topic of POW labor was a paramount concern. American commanders in charge of growing numbers of enemy POWs sought ways to constructively occupy prisoners’ idle time. Similarly to provisions outlining the general guidelines for the treatment of POWs, the War Department simply expanded upon the provisions of the 1929 Geneva Convention. The Articles of the Convention laid out the basic provisions regarding POW labor however, it still needed clarification in several key aspects including specifically what jobs constituted labor related to “war operations” and what wage-scale would be used to compensate prisoners for working while in captivity.⁵

The 1942 Army manual, "Civilian Enemy Aliens and Prisoners of War" which supplemented the provisions of the Geneva Convention, addressed these issues, among many others. According to Article 34 of the 1929 convention, POWs were to be compensated for their labor, and the belligerent nations also agreed to meet later in order to agree upon wages. However, this meeting never took place, and by January of 1943, questions relating to POW pay rates remained unanswered. In order to solve this problem and get POWs to work, the War Department decided that the minimum pay rate for POW labor would be set at 80 cents per day, per prisoner. This general pay rate was roughly based on the twenty-one dollars a month paid to

a U.S. Army private in 1941. POWs were paid in vouchers redeemable at the Post Exchange (PX), or they could chose save their wages for repatriation when former prisoners would receive a payout in hard currency. After addressing issues over paying POWs, the Office of the Provost Marshal General next sought to establish what types of jobs constituted “dangerous” or “demeaning work,” specifically prohibited by Articles 31 and 32 of the 1929 Geneva Convention.

American policymakers examined the vague bylaws of the Geneva Convention and concluded that the definition of jobs considered hazardous, demeaning, or directly related to the war effort was left to the discretion of the captors. In order to streamline labor production and ensure the United States did not violate the Articles of the Geneva Convention, a new agency was created to oversee nearly every aspect of the POW labor program. The Prisoner of War Employment Reviewing Board worked in conjunction with the Office of the Provost Marshal General, and the Judge Advocate General quickly set out to clarify Articles 31 and 32 of the Geneva Convention.

Any work outside the combat zones not having a direct relation with war operations and not involving the manufacture or transportation of arms or munitions or the transportation of any material clearly intended for combatant units, and not unhealthful, dangerous, degrading, or beyond the particular prisoner’s physical capacity, is allowable and desirable.

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7 Arnold Krammer, Nazi POWs in America, p. 81.
With these issues out of the way, local camp commanders were now able to require all able-bodied enlisted POWs to work up to ten hours a day on approved jobs in addition to any required administration, beautification projects, and maintenance duties within the camp. Initially, prisoners performed various jobs, such as clerks, laundry attendants, and laborers around the POW camps. In addition to camp maintenance, small numbers of selected POWs were permitted to work outside of the wire under guard, performing minor tasks and prohibited from interacting curious civilians. As the influx of prisoners grew from just over 5,000 in April 1943 to over 130,000 by the end of August, all available labor opportunities within the camps were exhausted and officials needed to identify more jobs for POWs.9

With large numbers of able-bodied American men in the military, many small towns throughout the nation sought POW labor.10 Civilian contractors and agriculture were particularly eager to employ prisoners, as the War Department announced outsourced POW labor would cost fifty to seventy percent less than the going rate for civilian workers to account for “nuisance factors.”11 Over the course of the war, the United States Government profited greatly from POW labor, bringing in over a $100,000 dollars in 1944 alone.12 During the period between 1943 and December of 1945, POWs performed over 90,629,233 paid man-days of labor on military

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instillations throughout the United States. Realizing the potential for profit early on, the Office of the Provost Marshal General and the Prisoner of War Employment Reviewing Board set out to further refine POW labor regulations in order to better incorporate civilian contract work.

In May 1943, the chairman of the newly established War Manpower Commission suggested to the Secretary of War that POWs should be used within the food processing, lumber, and railroad industries, to help alleviate critical manpower shortages. In order to address this new directive, the Provost Marshal General and the Manpower Commission met to formulate the official policy for POW contracted labor to civilian authorities. The August Directives, as they would come to be known, organized POW labor into three distinct categories. Priority I work consisted of “essential work” conducted within the prison camp or military instillation itself. These jobs often included working in the laundry, cooking, and kitchen; however, this did not include the mandatory improvement and maintenance of the POW complex. Priority II work related to outsourced contract labor employed in various civilian industries, primarily agriculture. Finally, Priority III labor included “useful but nonessential work” on U.S. military instillations not directly related to the Allied war effort. In addition to organizing the three classes of labor and clarifying official regulations, the Manpower Commission also recommended future sites that could provide POWs for necessary work. Prisoners’ labor

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benefited the American government and showed variations in the treatment of prisoners based on race, both in official policy and its local implementation at the camp level.

**Working Behind and Beyond the Wire**

While the POW labor program was being developed and revised by the Provost Marshal General and Prisoner of War Employment Reviewing Board in the winter of 1942 and spring of 1943, the number of enemy POWs detained within the United States was relatively small. As a result, finding work for the roughly five thousand prisoners around the camps was not a difficult task. Moreover, because the majority of jobs available could be easily classified as maintenance or improvement, they were specifically allowed under Article 31 of the Geneva Convention. As a result, small numbers of prisoners were soon put to work within the camps or military installations, making up to 80 cents a day on jobs classified as “essential work” by the Office of the Provost Marshal and the Judge Advocate General. The Prisoner of War Employment Reviewing Board explicitly defined essential work as any work that must be completed whether or not there were any POWs to do it.\(^\text{17}\) Initially these jobs remained within the POW camp or surrounding military installations and were officially designated as Priority I work.

The most common Priority I jobs dealt with employment as hospital orderlies, camp administration and personnel clerks in War Department owned and operated laundries. They also did brush clearance, construction of firebreaks, mosquito control, soil conservation, and agricultural projects. Additionally, POWs were often involved in construction and repair of highways and drainage ditches, strip mining, quarrying, and other similar “essential” jobs; all

\(^{17}\) AG Ltr, 10 Jan 43, subject: “War Department Policy with Respect to Labor of Prisoners of War.” (10-30-42) (1). RG 389, Entry 467, Box 1516, “Prisoner of War Operations Division, Legal Branch” (PMGO) National Archives II, Modern Military Branch.
work that might violate the convention was to be referred to the Provost Marshal General for a final decision on their legality. With the numbers of incoming prisoners rapidly outgrowing available jobs, American commanders sought ways to maximize labor production and expand the POW labor program.

With the new policy outlined in the August 1943 Directives, major changes occurred within the POW labor program. These changes ensured that all prisoners received the maximum of 80 cents a day working in addition to 10 cents for basic toiletries. As specified by Article 27 of the Geneva Convention, commissioned officers were not required to work but could should they choose to do so. Whether German or Japanese officers chose to perform advisory roles in work assignments or not, they received an annual salary based on rank. Lieutenants received twenty dollars per month, Captains received thirty dollars per month, and Majors through Generals were paid forty dollars. Prisoners were directly supervised by their own officers and NCOs while working. In addition, these men were closely watched by armed guards with orders to fire on any prisoner attempting to escape. Initially, POWs failed to notice anything had changed, as many camp commanders had been putting prisoners to work on similar jobs without payment under the classification of “maintenance” and “improvement” that were specifically permitted by the Geneva Convention.

Despite American commanders reservations about thousands of enemy soldiers recently removed from combat causing havoc on U.S. military installations, very few incidents involving POW labor were ever reported. American commanders were quick to notice the added benefits

19 Arnold Kramer, Nazi POWs in America, p. 84.
of POWs performing various essential jobs on military bases; it kept prisoners busy and freed thousands of American personnel for the Allied war effort who would otherwise be forced to perform these duties.20

Whatever initial concerns American commanders had with employing POWs quickly diminished as the first few thousand prisoners worked without any major incidents. Even at the height of the U.S. POW program, when the United States held 420,000 prisoners, only three escapes per month for every 10,000 POWs occurred.21 German prisoners accounted for 1,036 attempted escapes while in American POW camps during the war or less than 1% of the total POW population. The United States War Department even boasted a lower ratio of escapes than the federal penitentiary system with its permanent walls and state-of-the-art security devices.22

In comparison, Japanese POWs, who were generally restricted in work assignments and more closely supervised, eluded camp guards fourteen times over the course of the war; however, prisoners never got too far and usually returned to the camp on their own after exploring the surrounding countryside.23 With widespread prisoner escapes and sabotage failing to materialize and growing numbers of American service personnel freed to perform more vital jobs related to the war effort, any remaining serious resistance to POW labor on behalf of the United States War Department disappeared.

Around the same time, U.S. officials and military personnel experienced a changed their views of POW labor, particularly as the numbers of prisoners arriving from Europe and the Pacific grew exponentially. Camp commanders were eager to allocate all available jobs to the growing number of prisoners under their control. Despite the creation of several new job classifications falling under the “Priority I labor” umbrella, the Prisoner of War Employment Reviewing Board found the task of locating enough work to satisfy the growing numbers of POWs an increasingly difficult task.\(^2^4\) One possible solution, expedite the transition into Priority II work by outsourcing POW labor to civilian contractors. This solution appeared to be the most feasible one, as growing wartime production and extensive labor shortages led representatives from the food-processing, agriculture, and manufacturing industries to lobby Washington for access to POW labor. The U.S. War Department considered allowing large numbers prisoners to work as contract labor for civilian authorities, but the specifics of the program would take time to work out. In order to temporarily find work for the newly arriving POWs, the Office of the Provost Marshal General and the Judge Advocate General expanded POW labor to include Priority III work and expanded the list of approved jobs available to prisoners.

When the War Department realized the benefits of POW labor, American officials encouraged all local service commands to employ any available prisoners on tasks where POWs had not been already used. As a result of this push, camp commanders only calculated how many workers they would be able to assign and need not consider if the job was approved for POWs. General Wilhelm D. Styer, commander of the U.S. Army Forces in the Western Pacific

\(^{24}\) Between April of 1943 to December that same year, the total number of enemy POWs detained within the United States grew from 5,007 to 172,879 and by December of the following year (1944) the number had grown to 360,281. POW numbers within the continental United States eventually peaked in May of 1945 at 425,806.
(AFWESPAC), seemed envious of the labor production achieved in stateside camps. According to Styer,

> We must overcome the psychology that you cannot do this or that … I want to see these prisoners work like piss ants! … Get rid of the idea that this place was built by heavy equipment. The pyramids and the Appian Way were built by hand. I can't understand why we cannot get some of these people to work. In the States, POWs were considered best in work habits followed by civilians and then soldiers. If they do not work, put them on bread and water!  

With this attitude toward POWs labor, camp commanders began to employ prisoners in an ever expanding role, which included working as locksmiths, brick masons, janitors, interpreters, and draftsmen, as well as jobs in clothing and equipment repair shops, forestry, watch repairing, furniture making, and upholstery. General Styer’s comments explain why the War Department and American commanders valued POW labor; prisoners seemingly outperformed civilians and U.S. troops in terms of production. While American personnel admired prisoner’s work habits, it remains to be seen if this bridged the racial divide that influenced POWs’ treatment.

Just as regulations outlined the general care for prisoners, American policy toward the POW labor program made no official distinction between prisoners based on race or nationality; however, gaps always existed between official policy and its unofficial implementation on a camp or individual level. While Japanese and German prisoners all received the same basic pay and had access to generally equal job opportunities on military installations, racism and inequalities were prevalent throughout the POW labor program. American officials and commanders alike expressed a greater concern for escape and sabotage from the 340 Japanese

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26 “Projects on which Prisoners of War can be Employed.” PMGO Policy Book III, RG 389, Entry 467, Box 1516, “Prisoner of War Operations Division, Legal Branch” (PMGO) National Archives II, Modern Military Branch.
prisoners working at the height of Priority I and Priority III labor utilization in March of 1944 than they did from nearly 200,000 German POWs who also held the same jobs. Commanders whose camps held Japanese POWs frequently warned personnel and local townspeople about Japanese prisoners, “The Japanese, with their reputation for trickiness and sneakiness, are apt to make a greater attempt to disturb our home front security than the Germans ever did.” In reality, however, Japanese POWs accounted for a smaller percentage of escapes than their Germans counterparts. This was not only due to commanders’ restrictive attitude toward Japanese in terms of available labor assignments, but also a more substantial language barrier and greater difficulties blending into the largely Caucasian or African American civilian population.

Additionally, American commanders and guards alike displayed a clear affinity to German POWs and publicly admired their work ethic. Unlike soldiers supervising Japanese prisoners, American guards frequently broke regulations when handling German POWs on work assignments, as they grew more comfortable with them. Alfred Klein, a German prisoner of war held at Camp Rucker, Alabama, recalled, “I remember a number of times I was sent to work at Fort Rucker, and the guard would ask me to hold his rifle until he had climbed in or out of the truck. Almost as an after-thought, he would ask me to hand it up to him a few minutes later.”

Civilians, too, who worked in close contact with German POWs, experienced the same

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29 Letter from John Schroer, May 20,1976. As cited by Arnold Krammer in, Nazi POWs in America, p. 84.
surprising transformation as east Texas farmer Lloyd Yelverton stated, “They were just the best bunch of boys you ever saw in your life. You enjoyed being around them.”

Not surprisingly, this cordial relationship did not extend to the more than five thousand Japanese POWs who were entitled to equal working conditions. Civilians who lived or worked near camps that held Japanese prisoners were warned that POWs would try to steal from local farmers and to be extra vigilant as, “these men, with their strange philosophy of ‘dying for the Emperor,’ could cause a great deal of damage.” All of these warnings were unfounded, as no major incidents of violence or suicides among the Japanese POW population held on American soil were reported during the war. Many Americans believed the Japanese were racially inferior as a result of stereotypes combined with the ongoing propaganda campaign and the results of these attitudes were seen at the local level. While camp guards and commanders often treated Japanese POWs differently, the POW labor program was generally equal in terms of Priority I and Priority III work. In contrast, race-based discrimination was evident in the implementation of the contracted labor program—Priority II work. Even with the growth of Priority I and Priority III labor, only 59.7 percent of POWs were employed by February 1944. The need for new jobs in order to employ the ever-increasing numbers of prisoners led the War Department and the Prisoner of War Employment Reviewing Board, to consider widespread use of POWs in civilian contracting work classified under Priority II labor. By the winter of 1943, the Provost Marshal General and the War Manpower Commission had established the specifics of Priority II civilian contract labor and pushed the program through channels. Although civilian contractors had been

requesting access to what they viewed as “idle” POWs for needed jobs, it was the War Food Administration who would be the most influential in lobbying for Priority II work assignments. Initially, heavily guarded groups of twenty or more prisoners would be assigned to contractors registered with the War Manpower Commission.

For the most part, POWs working Priority II jobs labored in agriculture, food processing, and the lumber industries. However, outsourced POW work did not come without strong opposition from organized labor who feared competition. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, as well as the U.S. military, was concerned with possible escapes. Among these groups, the most adamantly against contracting POWs was organized labor, as unions feared competition from what they considered “slave labor.” In order to reassure organized labor, the War Manpower Commission mandated that civilians would be given preference for employment when available and that POW labor would not underbid civilian contractors when accepting labor contracts. Much of this opposition was muted, as fears of mass escape and destruction failed to materialize during the widespread utilization of prisoners for Priority I and III assignments. Additionally, profits from POWs working essential jobs on military installations were quickly eroding any security concerns still remaining by the end of 1944.33

Initially, commanders were primarily concerned with security, but as time passed, this apprehension lessened. During the opening stages of Priority II labor in the late fall of 1943, the prisoner-to-guard ratio was often as high as one guard for every one and a half POWs. Realizing the profit being lost to excessive security, the Inspector General (G-1) launched an official

33 In 1944 alone, the U.S. War Department reported POW labor from Priority I and III jobs on military installations as being worth $70 million. Additionally, conservative estimates place the total figure at over $130 million from 1943 to 1946. See, 79th U.S. Congress, “Investigation of the National War Effort,” June 12, 1945. p. 8.
inquiry in order to find ways of increasing the utilization of POWs.\textsuperscript{34} The Inspector General’s report called for a reduction in security measures that were seen as limiting labor output, and the establishment of more mobile, sub-camps in order to move POWs to areas experiencing the greatest manpower shortages. In February of 1944, the commanding generals of all Army service commands met in Dallas to re-evaluate official procedures in order to better comply with the Inspector General’s report for increased utilization of POW labor. At the Dallas Conference, Brigadier General B. M. Bryan, the Assistant Provost Marshal General, stressed the necessity for maximizing POW labor and urged Army Service Command to implement the recommendations of the Inspector General in both reducing security and relocating prisoners to smaller branch camps. With the conclusion of the Dallas Conference, the commanding general of Army Service Forces, Brehon B. Somerville ordered all service commands to take a "calculated risk," and balance the risk of prisoner escape against the value of the work to be done. Effectively with this order, security was no longer the paramount factor; the new policy would look to a better balance security with productivity.\textsuperscript{35}

With fewer guards to slow down work and more effectively located branch camps, profits from POW contract labor grew. Priority II employment even surpassed the numbers of prisoners in Priority I and III jobs by the end of 1944.\textsuperscript{36} In order to maximize POW employment following

\textsuperscript{34} Memo, U.S. War Department to the Chief of Staff, 15 Jan 44, G-1 383.6 Labor (1 Apr 43) "General Policies, Procedures and Regulations," National Archives II, Modern Military Branch.


\textsuperscript{36} The new suggested ratio was, one guard for every ten prisoners. By late 1944, the recommended ratio was 1:8 POWs in non-cooperative camps; 1:10 in cooperative working camps; and 1:15, in cooperative nonworking camps. Additionally, the employment of cooperative POWs without guards on military installations was advocated and authorized in situations where they worked under American supervisors or in the presence of American troops. See: Minutes, Sixth Conference of Service Commanders, ASF, Edgewater Park, Mississippi., 1-3 Feb 45. ASP Control Div File. "History of the PMGO, WWII," p. 418., RG 389 (PMGO) National Archives II, Modern Military Branch.
the implementation of the Priority II work program, the Works Project Branch was created to serve as a liaison between Army Service Command’s labor, engineer, quartermaster officer, and others connected with POW labor. One of the first directives to come from this new organization was incentive-based pay for jobs in agriculture, pulpwood cutting, and food processing. On April 26th 1944, the Secretary of War approved the incentive-based pay scale with a maximum daily rate of one dollar and twenty cents, roughly one and a half times the pay available to workers limited to Priority I and III jobs.37

The incentive pay program, relaxed security measures, and the relocation of prisoners to smaller branch camps closer to worksites had an almost immediate impact on overall POW employment; it rose nearly 13% by May of 1944 and by the following April 91.3% of prisoners were working on approved jobs.38 From June 1944 to August 1945, POWs working on Priority II contract labor accounted for 851,994 man-months and helped to alleviate the manpower shortage in the United States.39 The overwhelming majority of POWs with contract jobs worked in various forms of agriculture and produced almost 440,000 of the 800,000 man-months in Priority II labor. Prisoners harvested potatoes and wheat in Missouri, shucked corn in Kansas and Nebraska, picked citrus in California and Florida, harvested peanuts in Georgia, performed orchard and general farm work in Pennsylvania and Arkansas, picked sugar beets in Texas, and

even picked six-million pounds of cotton seed in Mississippi during one 90 day period in late 1943 alone.\textsuperscript{40}

In addition to agriculture work, POWs helped alleviate labor shortages in the food processing industry and worked over 110,000 man-months canning food in New York and meatpacking plants in Chicago, Illinois. While almost half of all POW contract labor involved growing and processing food, prisoners also accounted for 165,000 man-months cutting pulpwood. Early in the planning stages, it was decided that working in heavy logging posed too great a danger to POWs, but the War Manpower Commission approved harvesting considerably smaller trees needed for paper or chemical production. In upper Michigan, prisoners attended short instructional classes, and were then sent to work identifying and cutting trees used in producing the acetic acid, wood alcohol, and acetone. In addition to chemical trees, prisoners cut pulpwood, essential for the production of paper materials and other goods; POWs working in Minnesota and southern woodcutting states throughout the Appalachians, harvested one-third of the region’s total pulpwood between 1944 and 1945.\textsuperscript{41}

Several other industries benefited from POW labor aside from agriculture, food processing, and woodcutting. Priority II jobs also included mining and quarrying stone, foundry and railroad work, as well as working in fertilizer plants and civil construction. While these industries utilized large numbers of eligible prisoners, they pale in comparison to the number of POW man-hours invested into agriculture, food processing, and cutting specialty lumber. By the

\textsuperscript{40} George G. Lewis, John Mewha. \textit{History of Prisoners of War Utilization by the United States Army 1776-1945}.Department of the Army Pamphlet No 20-213. p. 127.
middle of 1945, 965 of every 1,000 POWs held within the United States, were employed in some form of paid labor. What made Priority II labor so appealing to the War Department was the fact that outside contractors would essentially cover at least two-thirds of the wages paid to prisoners, further expanding the profit margin from POW labor. The prisoners themselves seemed to favor this type of work over jobs on military installations or around camp, as they had the ability to make extra money through incentive pay and enjoyed working around the neighboring countryside among the civilian population.

Unlike German prisoners, Japanese POWs did not receive this incentive pay because they were excluded from civilian contract labor opportunities.\(^{42}\) The official regulations from the Office of the Provost Marshal General directed all service commands to use only German and Italian POWs for civilian contract work, suggesting that race affected labor policies. The War Department justified excluding Japanese POWs because of their concern for prisoners safety due to anti-Japanese sentiment among civilians. Supporting evidence used to justify these fears failed to account for the armed detachment of guards accompanying the POWs who could provide security for the prisoners while working. Additionally, the decision was never revisited by stateside service commands, despite continuous revisions in official regulations, and was not even discussed when the commanding General of the Army Service Forces outlined a reduction in security measures to increase production numbers.

With the decision by Army Service Command that only German and Italian prisoners were permitted to participate in Priority II work, Japanese POWs were only allowed to work

within the confines of the camp or instillation in which they were housed. American personnel justified this unwritten policy by explaining that it was intended to save Japanese prisoners from civilian violence, despite lacking any substantial reasoning for this claim. The War Departments’ decision was supported when citizens of Marengo, Illinois, marched three Japanese workers back to the train station and forced them to leave, despite having been assigned to work in the town by the War Relocation Board. The situation in Marengo was a poor example to base such an important decision; in this incident there were only three civilian workers who sought individual employment from townspeople. In contrast, POWs worked in groups of twenty or more on larger-scale jobs while guarded by armed soldiers, who would be more than able to physically protect prisoners, though their presence alone would have deterred any violence from civilians.

While the war department had no real idea how American citizens would react to Japanese POWs working outside the camp among civilian populations, they had previously been used in a similar way in the Philippines without issue. It would seem more likely that Filipinos, who had experienced harsh Japanese occupation, would harbor more animosity and thus pose a more viable threat. Additionally, considering the relative location of the Philippines to Japanese forces, the risk of escape would also have been greater. Ignoring examples of Japanese working outside POW camps without serious incident, commanders within the United States were instructed to withhold their Japanese POWs from Priority II labor opportunities during the war.

44 Arnold Krammer, “Japanese Prisoners of War in America.” p. 82.
This exclusion may have been particularly unwise because of the potential benefits of Japanese labor. Following the V-J day, groups of Japanese POWs were relocated to camps near the Pacific coast in preparation for repatriation. In response to the shortage in agricultural labor in the area, Japanese POWs were used in cotton harvesting outside the camp and in close proximity to civilian workers. Despite California Governor Earl Warren making a considerable effort to keep Japanese POWs out of his state, three sub-camps in the San Joaquin Valley were filled with the former Japanese prisoners from McCoy in October of 1945. During several months of outside labor, no reports of hostility or violence toward Japanese prisoners were ever documented. It should also be noted that in this instance, Japanese laborers outperformed German POWs in pounds of cotton picked per day at a rate of nearly 2:1.47

Whatever reservations American personnel may have had about employing the vast numbers of enemy POWs when the program was first implemented quickly subsided as fears of escape and sabotage failed to materialize. Accordingly, as these concerns were tempered by reality, regulations on POW labor was routinely revised in order to maximize prisoner employment. After the commander of Army Service Forces, General Somervill, ordered all service commands to take a “calculated risk” with guarding prisoners, it was clear that security was no longer the paramount factor when deciding POW labor policy.48 With this in mind, relying on the original justifications for withholding Japanese prisoners from Priority II work out

of concern for the safety of the POWs appeared less creditable. Unlike German prisoners, who were increasingly employed in contract work under an ever-shrinking detachment of guards, regulations limiting what types of jobs Japanese POWs could take part in, were never revisited or relaxed during the war.

In addition, to the failing to allow Japanese POW to participate in Priority II work assignments, the overwhelming majority of guards, commanders, and policy makers alike failed to make an equal attempt to accommodate and motivate Japanese POWs in terms of labor production. American personnel learned relaxing the number of guards and assigning more rigorous work-schedules, in addition to pitting small groups of prisoners against each other in competition while performing tasks, produced greater work output among German POWs. On the other hand, American personnel failed to make similar efforts to better understand ways of motivating Japanese prisoners and simply classified them as poor and ineffective workers. These commanders failed to recognize how factors such as language barriers and ineffective leadership that stemmed from rivalries due to the inter-service grouping of Japanese POWs were influential in leading to lower motivation and discrepancies in production. This combined with an ever-present fear for security, the availability of Priority I and III labor, and a paramount desire to maximize profits from POW employment led to clear inequalities between Japanese and German prisoners while working in the United States during the war.

With this in mind, the question of motivation behind the unequal utilization of POW labor becomes apparent. What was most important to the U.S. War Department was maximizing

production numbers, ensuring stateside labor-shortages were filled, and ensuring that no unnecessary risks were taken that might jeopardize the profits from POW labor. Despite this, examples have shown that Japanese prisoners were excluded from the most profitable form of POW labor—Priority II work assignments. This decision conflicted with the U.S. priority for maximizing production and showed that race was the most influential factor responsible for variations in POW labor. Ironically, examples have shown the War Department may have missed out on even greater financial windfalls through the exclusion of Japanese POWs from Priority II labor. Although camp maintenance and paid labor occupied the majority of prisoners’ free time, individuals in the War Department continued to search for other avenues that could keep POWs busy after returning from work and on the weekends. The answer to the Army’s problems seemed to lie in Article 17 of the 1929 Geneva Convention that required captors to provide and encourage prisoners with intellectual pursuits. This would evolve into a formal effort to re-educate select numbers of POWs housed in the United States during the Second World War.
RE-EDUCATION

By the fall of 1944, most of the basic problems regarding the treatment and employment of nearly 340,000 enemy prisoners of war held within the United States had largely been solved. The majority of American personnel in the War Department, as well as the Office of the Provost Marshal General, were content with POW operations as long as order was maintained within the camps and labor production was maximized. A few of these official feared releasing nearly half a million pro-fascist foot soldiers back to war-torn areas without some form of political re-education once the war ended. The Geneva Convention of 1929 specifically forbade attempts to indoctrinate prisoners of war, but also required captors to provide and encourage enemy POWs with intellectual pursuits.¹ Much in the same manner as provisions outlining general treatment and POW labor, Article 17, which regulated intellectual pursuits and leisure, was vaguely written and lacked specificity. The failure to provide detailed guidance provided U.S. officials with a way of dealing with their concern about prisoners’ post war attitudes.

American personnel would eventually use this stipulation as a cover to introduce a clandestine program aimed at indoctrinating German and Japanese POWs held in the United States during the war. Examining the American re-education program and how it varied in content and implementation between German and Japanese prisoners highlights the role of race in the treatment of POWs. Although race was likely the most significant factor behind the variations in the re-education program, other factors like public opinion, language barriers, and instructor shortages also seem to have been important, but these too were influenced by race.

¹ Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Geneva: 1929), Article 17.
Overall the Japanese program drastically lagged behind its German counterpart in both available educational materials and qualified personnel. Although several other potential factors may have led to these inconsistencies, race was the most significant factor behind the variations in the War Department’s re-education program.

**Eleanor and the Holy Ghost**

In addition to outlining housing, diet, recreational activities, and labor requirements for prisoners of war, the Geneva Convention also required signatory nations to provide POWs with educational materials that encouraged their intellectual pursuits. This provision, outlined in Part II, Chapter IV, Article 17, of the Convention stated, “Belligerents shall encourage as much as possible the organization of intellectual and sporting pursuits by the prisoners of war.”\(^2\) While this article was intended to provide prisoners access to newspapers, books, newsreels, classroom instruction, and other forms of educational diversion, was vaguely written and gave captors the power to decide what material was appropriate and how it would be disseminated.

Under the pretenses of providing intellectual opportunities required by Article 17, the U.S. War Department developed its clandestine re-education program. The program was first given serious consideration by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General George C. Marshall, in March of 1943 as the first large groups of POWs began arriving in the United States.\(^3\) General Marshall was interested in the possibilities that a program, which, “prisoners of war might be exposed to the facts of American history, the workings of democracy and the contributions made to America by peoples of all national origins,” might have on repatriated

\(^2\) *Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War* (Geneva: 1929), Article 17.
POWs after the war.\textsuperscript{4} Despite personal endorsement from General Marshall himself, the Provost Marshal General initially considered the idea “inadvisable” and filed it away pending further investigation. \textsuperscript{5}

The War Department had ample reason to be concerned with any attempt made to re-educate enemy prisoners in the United States, as such a program could be considered indoctrination—a direct violation of the Geneva Convention. Additionally, if the War Department attempted to re-educate enemy POWs held in the continental United States, the Americans held by Germany or Japan could be exposed to similar forms of indoctrination or worse. Around the same time, General Marshall suggested that the United States should think of taking an active role in re-educating prisoners, American personnel realized the benefits of the POW labor program, further diminishing the need to occupy prisoners’ time elsewhere. While the Provost Marshal General had no interest in revaluating General Marshall’s plan, an unlikely series of events would take place over the following year led Army leadership to reassess its position on the importance of creating a re-education program\textsuperscript{6} With over 150,000 Axis POWs arriving in 1943 alone, the U.S. War Department rapidly adjusted its new policy through a process of trial and error.

One of the first serious issues dealt with limiting Nazi authority within POW camps. With the most able and qualified American soldiers serving in North Africa, the South Pacific, or preparing for the invasion of Europe, the Provost Marshal General was often forced to staff its ranks with sub-par recruits when it came to POW camp guards and administration. Supervised


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.,p. 59.

\textsuperscript{6} Arnold Krammer, \textit{Nazi Prisoners of War in America.}, p. 195.
by young and inexperienced guards who had often been rejected from frontline service, camp leadership increasingly relied on the prisoner’s own officers and non-commissioned officers to help keep order within the POW population.\(^7\) American guards admired the way German prisoners handled themselves and frequently looked the other way when hard-line Nazi disciplinarians used force or intimidation to police themselves. Sergeant Richard Staff, a former guard at Camp Robinson, Arkansas recalled, “Damn! They were a well-disciplined bunch of guys—physically healthy, well trained, and excellent soldiers. They still maintained the dignity and discipline they had learned in the German Army, and I-we all-respected them.”\(^8\) Newly trained guards were not the only group who took notice of the added benefits German non-commissioned officers had on camp order and productivity as Deputy Commander of Camp Operations for the Provost Marshal General, Major Maxwell McKnight, wrote, “And believe me, I could see as I visited the camps. Who could best get a work detail cracking? The Nazi noncoms.”\(^9\) Because things were running smoothly within the camps and Army leadership focused on maximizing labor production, no initial attempt was made to deter the use German non-commissioned officers in supervisory roles.

As a result, U.S officials unofficially sanctioned pro-Nazi POW leadership to use whatever means necessary to maintain order and productivity among the prisoners. During the first months of the program, camps appeared to run smoothly, but the balance of power shifted during an eight-month period from September 1943 to April 1944. With hard-line fascist non-commissioned officers in charge, POWs were frequently attacked and even murdered by

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\(^7\) Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, p. 39,40.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 150.
midnight tribunals. These “kangaroo courts” actively censured and punished any prisoners who made statements against Nazi ideology or the German war effort.10

These condemned men often received a visit from the “holy ghost,” a euphemism given to prisoners beaten by retribution squads often known as the “Lagargestapo,” or Camp Gestapo, who violently punished POWs found guilty of such an offense.11 As American personnel looked the other way, the situation worsened until the number of prisoner suicides reached an alarming amount. In actuality, however, the large majority of these suicides were murders committed by German kangaroo courts. While the exact numbers of clandestine executions will never be known, estimates place the total number as high as 160.12 Several notable POW murders occurred during the eight-month reign of terror, sparking outside parties to begin asking just what type of operation the War Department was running when it allowed Nazis elements to operate and kill on American soil.13

Although the re-education program had been thought inadvisable only a year earlier, several key individuals in Washington gathered support for this effort. As a result, the War Department to reconsidered the program. After hearing stories of brutality and murder committed by pro-Nazi elements within American run POW camps, Eleanor Roosevelt met with

13 While the PMGO and the U.S. War Department made efforts to conceal the POW program from the general public, several periodicals and local newspapers had published stories of questionable suicides and murder including several rather “violent” killings where POWs were, “liquidated by comrades” that took place at Camp Concordia in Kansas and a particular event at Camp Grant, Illinois where a group of fanatical Nazis tried to kill 42 suspected anti-Nazi prisoners by setting fire to their locked barracks during the middle of the night., see: Robert Devore, "Our 'Pampered' War Prisoners," Collier's, Oct. 14, 1944, and: “Suspect Nazis Tried to Burn Camp Building,” Rockford Morning Star (Illinois), December 1, 1944; U.S. Congress, “Investigations of the National War Effort,” November 30, 1944., p. 9.
officials of the Administrative Section of POW Camp Operations at the White House to ask about the accuracy of these reports and why there was not more of an effort to rid German prisons of Nazis. The First Lady convinced the President to persuade the Secretaries of War and State to implement the plan outlined by General Marshal in 1943.  

In order to start preparations for a formal re-education program, the Provost Marshal General ordered sectional commanders to begin segregating pro-Nazi POWs from their less ardent comrades. While this policy was already in place, it was rarely enforced; when camp personnel made attempts to screen prisoners, they had no official regulations to help isolate pro-Nazis from those on the fringe. It was not until May of 1944 that the Army standardized the requirements for political segregation. Army personnel removed the last serious obstacle delaying the re-education program when officials picked out ardent Nazi prisoners and relocated them to different camps. Although the First Lady and senior Army leadership were in favor of re-educating POWs held within the United States, the decision was far from unanimous in the spring of 1944.

The American public held vastly different views when the topic of re-educating enemy POWs. Some were supportive and hoped it rehabilitated German and Japanese prisoners; others rejected the idea on grounds that it was impossible. A Texas man-on-the-street opinion poll optimistically recalled, “You can't civilize or educate Germans or Japs in a short length of time. We've got to give them a new form of government so we might as well start making Democrats

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15 Memo, “Segregation and Re-education of German Prisoners of War,” from Colonel Francis E. Howard, Director of Prisoner of War Division, to the Commanding General, United States Army Forces, May 20, 1944. RG 389 (PMGO) National Archives II, Modern Military Branch.
out of them right now.”\textsuperscript{16} This sentiment showed both a desire to educate POWs on the workings of American democracy and a belief that doing so was a very real possibility. However, another commentator in the same poll argued that “for my money you could flood the whole damn country for twenty-four hours, and then start from scratch,” rejecting any notion that reeducation was worthwhile.\textsuperscript{17}

Academics, journalists, politicians, and military officials weighed in on this issue, and were divided on the idea of indoctrination. Harvard anthropologist Dr. Ernest A. Hooten wrote, “to convert or re-educate a Nazi is impossible, the only alternative is to dilute the German stock, adulterate the Nazi strain and destroy the national framework by a process of out-breeding.”\textsuperscript{18} On the other hand, author Paul Winkler of the \textit{Washington Post} insisted that the War Department should take immediate action to, “win as many Germans as possible…from Nazi ideals and converted to those of democracy.”\textsuperscript{19} While members of the military including General Marshall and members of the War Department were in favor of the re-education program, some American personnel were clearly less optimistic. While some American personnel admired the German troops, this admiration was not unanimous amongst the military. Captain Joseph Lane stationed at Camp Cascade in Iowa captured some of the military’s sentiment concerning the re-education of POWs best, when he told a reporter from \textit{The New York Times}:

\begin{quote}
I’ve seen more than 100,000 Germans pass through my cage, and I know these bastards. They’re no good. They’re treacherous; no morals, no scruples, no religion, no nothing. I’ve seen how they try to insinuate themselves into our big hearts by trying to be sugary sweet and pathetic. And I’ve seen them come in acting like we were scum under their feet. I hate them and all my men hate them. We want a peace that will knock them down on their knees and keep them there until they
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Huntsville Item}, Aug. 16, 1945, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{17} “What Kind of Peace?” \textit{New York Times Magazine}, March 11, 1945, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{18} “What Shall Be Done With Germany?” \textit{SEE}, April 1945, p. 36,37.
learn better. I don’t know what in the hell you’re going to do about re-educating their officers. My private suggestion is that you just kill them all and save the world a lot of headaches for the next couple of generations. Most of them are just hopeless.20

In contrast, the many in the War Department believed that POWs educated in American democratic values, could be persuaded to help establish a democratic, pro-American post-war Germany.21 Whatever reservations American personnel had about the effectiveness of indoctrinating German prisoners, by the fall of 1944 the War Department’s top-secret re-education program began throughout POW camps across the United States.

Most American officials were less than optimistic about the possibility of including the several thousand Japanese prisoners in the re-education program. Several factors contributed to the American perception that Japanese prisoners could not be re-educated. These included pre-war racial stereotypes, the brutal nature of the Pacific war, and the fanatical sense of nationalism and devotion to the Emperor. While the general consensus was to exclude Japanese POWs from the formal re-education program, the feelings were not unanimous. Although officials initially excluded Japanese prisoners from indoctrination efforts within the United States, efforts had already been underway in Burma and China that yielded surprising results. John Emmerson was a State Department officer assigned to the China-Burma-India Theater (CBI) during the war; he was impressed with the large amount of valuable information provided by the Japanese captured in Burma.22 Emmerson wrote, “There seems to be no feeling that he is a traitor to his country, but rather that he no longer belongs to a country.” The reasoning behind this had much to do with the

21 Michael R. Waters, Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners of War at Camp Hearne (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), p. 143.
Psychological make-up of Japanese troops who believed they could never return home after suffering the immense shame of surrender.\textsuperscript{23} Japanese POWs in captivity seemed to embrace the principals of spiritual rebirth contained within their Buddhist religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{24}

Despite being in the clear minority who saw the potential for including Japanese into the re-education program American officers like John Emmerson were not alone. Although official regulations did not sanction indoctrination efforts prior to the fall of 1944, several camp commanders experimented with unofficial efforts including Otis Cary, an assistant POW camp commander located near Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Through Cary’s encouragement, a small group of Japanese POWs worked in conjunction with civilian educators and utilized Japanese language texts from the local Nisei community and the University of Hawaii at Honolulu to begin an unofficial democratization program later known as the “Hawaii College.”\textsuperscript{25}

Despite promising results from efforts made without official approval, the Army’s official re-education program did not expand to include Japanese prisoners until July of 1945—over a year after the creation of the original German indoctrination effort.

Although the War Department believed its actions did not violate the 1929 Geneva Convention, they worked to keep their efforts secret during the war. The newly created Prisoner of War Special Projects Division (SPD), tasked with creating and administering the re-education program worked independently of camp officials and answered directly to the Provost Marshal General. Operating outside traditional command structures, the SPD remained small, self-contained, and out of the public eye. American officials did not want to release any information

\textsuperscript{24} Ulrich Straus. \textit{The Anguish of Surrender: Japanese POW’s of World War II}. p. 119- 121.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 211, 212.
that could potentially risk the safety of Americans held in Germany. This program also might have led to a negative reaction by the over 400,000 German prisoners who could still cause considerable damage to the American home front. The program was kept top-secret until twenty days following the Nazi surrender in Germany. On May 28, 1945, a seven-page statement was released that gave a vague description regarding the mission of the re-education program, but left out any mention of the program existing prior to the end of combat in Europe.

Primarily, the U.S. War Department saw the education program as a way to constructively occupy prisoners while not working and at the same time, satisfying its obligation to provide intellectual pursuits for POWs. Although Article 17 required the belligerent nation to supply and encourage intellectual diversion programs, it was left up to the captors to select the educational materials provided, subjects offered, and the methods of instruction. Through interpretation of this vaguely written article in the Geneva Convention, the War Department asserted control over the program’s curriculum. By selectively screening the educational material provided to prisoners, as well as influencing available classroom topics, films, and newspapers, American personnel could promote democratic values and highlight key American ideals under the facade of intellectual diversion required under Article 17.

**Intellectual Diversion**

Initially, the U.S. War Department saw the education program as a way to constructively occupy prisoners when they were not working, but it evolved into a formal program of re-education soon after. While indoctrinating prisoners of war first appeared advisable, the

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27 Ibid., p. 217.
potential rewards for re-educating enemy POWs eventually outweighed the risks associated with it. Prisoners who did not support the re-education program were singled-out through further and more detailed screening, then segregated to other camps so not to inhibit the progress of compliant prisoners.28

American sponsored education programs started off with entry-level courses taught by American civilian and military instructors, as well as German prisoners themselves.29 Courses taught differed widely from camp to camp. Some camps offered a wide variety of classes in both basic and advanced subjects ranging from American history, handcrafts, and civics, to chemistry and jurisprudence.30 Prisoners took great pride in their education, and any programs were always filled with eager pupils who took advantage of the opportunity to better themselves through on-the-job training and classroom instruction in the hopes that it would help them find work when they returned home.31 Two Texas schools, Texas A&M and Baylor, offered programs that met full university standards for college credit that transferred back home after the war.32

To implement this plan, the Provost Marshal General commissioned an organization to oversee the project. This group of educators and sociologists became known as the Prisoner of War Special Projects Division.33 The mission statement issued by the Prisoner of War Special Projects Division made it very clear that the program set up by the War Department not only

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32 Michael R. Waters, Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners of War at Camp Hearne (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), p. 40.
33 Arnold Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America., p. 194.
encouraged the intellectual pursuits of the prisoners—it was the deliberate indoctrination of German prisoners of war.  

The Special Projects Division immediately went to work looking for qualified American personnel who were fluent in German, held a college degree preferably in the liberal arts, and displayed imagination as well as good judgment. Colonel Edward Davidson of the Morale Services Division, who had been a Guggenheim Fellow in the thirties and served on the faculties of the Universities of Miami and Colorado before the war, commanded the Special Projects Division.

The initial search produced 150 qualified Assistant Executive Officers (AEO), who conducted training conferences in order to fully staff the program. By December of 1944, the Special Projects Division’s re-education program included a total of 262 officers and 111 enlisted personnel who became and assisted AEOs with teaching German prisoners democratic values. These men highlighted key American ideals like successes from diversity, and “understanding historical and ethical truth as conceived by Western civilization” all under the facade of intellectual diversion required by international agreements. By selecting books, films, and educational materials, that stressed Christian ethics and revealed the “true” history of

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34 “The prisoners would be given facts, objectively presented but so selected and assembled as to correct misinformation and prejudices surviving Nazi conditioning. The facts, rather than forced upon them, would be made available through such media as literature, motion pictures, newspapers, music, art, and educational courses. Two types of facts were needed; those which would convince them of the impracticality and viciousness of the Nazi position. If a large variety of facts could be presented convincingly, perhaps the German prisoners of war might understand and believe historical and ethical truth as generally conceived by Western civilization, might come to respect the American people and their ideological values, and upon repatriation to Germany might form the nucleus of a new German ideology which will reject militarism and totalitarian controls and will advocate a democratic system of government.” The Office of the Provost Marshal General, “A Brief History,” p. 545, also cited in Arnold Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America., p. 197.


Germany and America, the Special Projects Division hoped to dispel the Nazi charge that the United States was inefficient, decadent, and corrupt.\textsuperscript{37}

The first camp used to test the experimental re-education program was located in Van Etten, New York; however, three months later it relocated to Fort Philip Kearney, Rhode Island. A former Coastal Artillery Post in the middle of Narragansett Bay, this new facility at Fort Kearney would later be known as “The Factory.”\textsuperscript{38} The Provost Marshal General would provide security for the top-secret program, in addition to notifying Governor J. Howard McGrath of the situation. He required Fort Kearney to have its mail diverted to another POW camp located at Fort Niagara in upstate New York. The staff at the Factory comprised of Prisoner of War Special Projects Division officials, as well as eighty-five German prisoners considered ardent anti-Nazis. These original prisoners who participated in the development of the program consisted exclusively of German officers who volunteered for the assignment.\textsuperscript{39} The re-education program then broke down into six independent sections, each responsible for selecting the most effective pro-democratic material available in field. The diverse team assembled at Fort Kearney eventually produced the template that all other prisoner of war camps within the United States would follow.

The Special Projects Division selected opinionated and democratically biased film and reading materials. These included books banned in Germany and pamphlets promoting democratic values over those of National Socialism. The men of Fort Philip Kearney also

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{37} Arnold Krammer, \textit{Nazi Prisoners of War in America.}, p. 197, 198.
\textsuperscript{38} “Fact Sheet,” “Press Tour, Fort Kearney, Fort Getty, Fort Wetherill, Rhode Island, 18\textsuperscript{th} September 1945, “POW Special Operations Division, Administrative Branch Decimal File 1943-46.” RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1629, (PMGO) National Archives II, Modern Military Branch.
\textsuperscript{39} Arnold Krammer, \textit{Nazi Prisoners of War in America.}, p. 201.
published a nationally distributed anti-Nazi newspaper named *Der Ruf* (The Call) in addition to nationally published periodicals sold in all camps across the country. Additionally, the program worked to influence all forms of prisoner life—the movies they watched, the books they read, and even the topics of classroom instruction.

Initially, camp administration relied on books and other German-language publications donated by local universities and libraries, the German military, or supplied by the YMCA and international Red Cross. Later, the War Department replaced these materials as the majority of publications available to POWs contained some form of Nazi propaganda. The Special Projects Division ensured that all undesirable reading material was replaced by large quantities of anti-fascist literature and works by authors banned in Germany such as Thomas Mann, Joseph Conrad, and Ernest Hemingway. The men of the Factory also called for a similar re-tooling of the movies and newsreels being shown to German POWs that had been selected by pro-Nazi prisoners and used to mock the Allies or encourage German pride. To combat this Nazi propaganda, officials from the Special Projects Division replaced these films with ones showing advances in American industry, construction, and infrastructure.

Movies highlighting the vast and untapped resources of the American landscape and films showing the diverse population working together portrayed the United States in a more positive view, while also entertaining German prisoners. Films showing war crimes committed by Nazi officials were also shown to German POWs, including footage captured by American

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forces that liberated Nazi concentration camps throughout greater Germany.\textsuperscript{42} To ensure that movies and books had the desired effect, the Special Projects Division integrated formal discussions and classroom lecture into the re-education program.

To guarantee prisoners absorbed the pro-democratic message, the Special Projects Division incorporated formal lectures and discussions into the re-education program. These ranged from classes on the English language and mathematics to soil-conservation, American literature to agricultural engineering.\textsuperscript{43} Prisoners were encouraged to participate in discussions that followed lectures given by college faculty that frequently included local history. Academics and military personnel alike emphasized the ‘melting pot’ nature of American life with its peaceful cooperation of different ethnical elements,’’ when constructing their lectures.\textsuperscript{44} Overall, classroom instruction was very popular among German POWs, largely due to the non-academic nature of the lectures to ensure they would be interesting to the average prisoner.

In the end, results of the re-education effort were rather surprising, considering the lack of preparation and limited time POWs were actually exposed to the program. In the eyes of the Prisoner of War Special Projects Division and the U.S. War Department, the re-education program was considered a success. The results of questionnaires given to over 25,000 prisoners, concluded that 74\% of recapitulated German prisoners left with “an appreciation of the value of democracy and a friendly attitude toward their captors.” 33\% were considered, “anti-Nazi and

\textsuperscript{42} “Germans Are Unmoved by Atrocity Film: Prisoners Lay War Crimes to ‘Higher-Ups,’ ” \textit{New York Times}, June 27, 1945, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{44} Memo, “Visit of Professor Carl Arndt,” from Captain Michael Ginsburg, to Colonel Davidson (Att. Major McKnight and Captain Kunzig), December 27, 1944, Folder, “Lectures,” RG 389, Entry 459A, Box 1635, (PMGO) National Archives II, Modern Military Branch
pro-democratic,” while only 10% were still “militantly Nazi,” and a further 15% “while not strictly Nazi, still…not favorably disposed toward America or democracy.” 45 These figures show that the re-education program conducted by the Prisoner of War Special Projects Division was quite successful in accomplishing the War Departments’ original expectations. Unfortunately, further follow-ups with former POWs were never conducted to gauge the longevity of repatriated prisoners’ newfound feelings of democracy as they returned to war-torn Europe.

While the War Department may have had reservations about the willingness of German prisoners to actively participate in organized re-education, they generally believed any similar effort to indoctrinate Japanese POWs was unrealistic due to their fanatical loyalty to the Emperor. Although reports coming from American commanders in the Pacific may have supported this initial conclusion, however, several examples occurring within the prison camps themselves show otherwise. 46 Surprisingly, Japanese POWs may have begun informal re-education prior to their German counterparts. Before the Army began working on curriculum for German POWs at Fort Kearney, a group of about ten Japanese POWs held near Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, had become convinced of Japan’s inevitable defeat and created an almost identical program of classroom instruction and pro-democratic lectures intended to re-educate their more reluctant comrades. 47

45 The reason for the discrepancy with these percentages is unknown. Robert D. Billinger Jr., Hitler’s Soldiers in the Sunshine State: German POWs in Florida (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), p. 164.
47 Although the idea of Re-educating Axis POWs was first introduced by General George Marshal in 1943, it had been largely forgotten until the War Department created the Special Projects Division tasked with creating and implementing the top-secret re-education program began work at Fort Kearney, also known as “the Idea Factory” or “the Factory,” in October of 1944.
During the summer of 1944 and without orders, this group of Japanese prisoners began reading and translating material that may help democratize post-war Japan. Under the guidance of assistant camp commander Otis Cary, Japanese POWs taught their fellow prisoners classes in the English language, history, and politics at the “the Hawaii College.” At Pearl Harbor, each lecture identified the ways Japan would need to change in the postwar world. After the lecture, prisoners engaged in a wide-ranging discussion on the idea presented in the lecture. In addition to classroom instruction, lecture, and assigned readings, Japanese POWs in Hawaii published a pro-democratic Japanese language newspaper that was largely seen as unbiased, as it came from the prisoners themselves. The willingness of American personnel to allow Japanese POWs to play an active role in creating the curriculum, translating material, and administering the lectures greatly added to the initial success of the program in Hawaii—over a year before similar efforts for Japanese POWs were in place stateside.

Despite the initial successes re-educating Japanese POWs in Hawaii and reports showing the Japanese at Camp McCoy were just as responsive to indoctrination as German prisoners, the Provost Marshal General and Army Service Forces remained convinced that the formal indoctrination program should only include German POWs. Over the next year, and despite repeated requests from a variety of civilian and military personnel, the U.S. War Department made no effort to expand the program to include Japanese prisoners.

The unauthorized Navy re-education program underway at Pearl Harbor should have given American officials more than enough evidence to demonstrate the feasibility of re-educating Japanese POWs, especially as prisoners themselves constructed and implemented it. In addition to the Hawai‘i-based program, the Provost Marshal had other examples attesting to the Japanese prisoners’ receptiveness toward re-education efforts. One such report came in June of 1944, when Captain Shepard Traube conducted a preliminary visit to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin to observe German prisoners in preparation for the Special Projects Division’s re-education program. In addition to reporting on German POWs, Traube noted that reports claiming Japanese prisoners displayed intense hatred toward American personnel, made any attempt to avoid work, and faked wounds and illnesses were inaccurate. In his report, Captain Traube showed Japanese POWs responded to fair treatment by American personnel at McCoy positively and even appeared to enjoy themselves. He went on to explain how, “The Japanese played baseball during recreation, practiced gymnastics, and even put on a theatrical show, to which only the camp C.O. was invited from the American officers.” By March of 1944, examples like the prisoner-led program at Pearl Harbor, reports from officers like Shepard Traube documented, and continuous lobbying from civilian academics, eventually led the War Department and the Provost Marshal General to reconsider their decision to exclude Japanese prisoners from the re-education program.

When the Special Projects Division finally decided to include Japanese prisoners in the official re-education program in the summer of 1945, they selected 5,000 cooperative Japanese

POWs. From this ambiguous screening process, 200 prisoners were earmarked for the Japanese re-education program and sent to one of three POW camps in Texas. By mid-June, these Japanese prisoners that had been approved for the Army’s indoctrination program had been reassigned to Camps Huntsville, Kennedy, or Hearne, and awaited further instruction. Although the War Department had been conducting its re-education program on Germans for over nine months by the time Japanese POWs began classes in Texas, American officials failed to incorporate the most successful aspects of the German program, when creating a similar Japanese program.

While the Special Projects Division utilized cooperative German officers to help construct the program’s curriculum and even give lectures to fellow POWs, the content and specifics of the Japanese program was left strictly to American service personnel and select academics at Sam Huston State Teachers College. The senior America officer selected to supervise the Japanese re-education program was Lt. Colonel Boude C. Moore, an American born to missionary parents in Japan who had been educated in the United States but returned to live in Japan from 1924 to 1941. To assist Colonel Boude in outlining the Japanese re-education program, the Provost Marshal assigned Dr. Charles W. Hepner, a well-known veteran of the Far Eastern Branch of the Office of War Information and thirty-year resident of Japan.

These two men would construct a series of lectures on various topics ranging from studying the English language and American history to discussions comparing Japanese and American literature, books, and magazines. Unlike the instructors who had been carefully selected by the Special Projects Division and were fluent in German, instructors used in the Japanese program relied on prisoners to translate lectures to the class because they could not speak the language. This language barrier also extended to other aspects of the Japanese re-education program such as shortages in textbooks, magazines and other published material, as well as what films could be made available to prisoners.

Under the watchful eye of camp officials, Japanese POWs in Texas worked to translate written material that could be distributed to the remaining prisoners not selected for re-education. Like the German program, the Special Projects Division worked with Japanese POWs to create a pro-democratic Japanese-language newspaper comparable to Der Ruf (The Call) that could be distributed to Japanese POWs nationwide.54 American officials also encouraged Japanese POWs to attend American-style religious services in an effort to break them from “traditional emperor-worship.”55 While camp personnel encouraged the religious transformation of Japanese POWs, this was not about conversion; instead, these officials intended to lead prisoners away from their feelings of group mentality and intense nationalism.

In addition to written material and religious services, the Special Projects Division made a detailed effort to utilize movies and newsreels in the indoctrination of Japanese prisoners

during the war. Concerns over the availability of approved native-language titles, combined with cultural differences between Japanese and American entertainment, led to a greatly reduced pool of available films for Japanese POWs.\(^56\) Camp officials worked to increase the initial list that included only five films. The Special Projects Division intended to utilize these and other movies in conjunction with a synopsis read aloud beforehand by a POW leader to ensure prisoners had received the intended message.

American personnel believed the use of movies in the Japanese re-education program would help to, “disassociate the individual from the state and establish the right of an individual to follow his desires within the scope of American accepted social customs,” as well as, “Impress the Japanese with the solidarity of their opposition; a solidarity that exists not only in military strength but also in fundamental laws of living and decency.”\(^57\) In addition to classroom lectures, reading material, and movies, Japanese prisoners filled their time with recreational activities including table tennis, baseball, American music, and even popular cartoons. Before the Japanese program had a real chance to test itself, the War Department decided that after the surrender, unlike the majority of German POWs who would remain in the United States for continued re-education and labor, Japanese prisoners were to be repatriated home as soon as possible. Despite the results of the Japanese re-education program, it appeared American officials remained convinced that only German POWs were worth indoctrinating. While Japanese prisoners had been rapidly deployed home upon V-J day eliminating further opportunities for re-education, the


\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 2.
German effort was expanded in order to attempt to expose more prisoners prior to repatriation. Comparing the numbers of POWs residing within the United States by February of 1946 illustrated this discrepancy, as the total number of German POWs remained over 208,403 compared to only 561 Italians and one Japanese prisoner.\textsuperscript{58}

Unfortunately, whatever good the two hundred former students of the Army’s re-education program could have done upon repatriation will likely never be known, as they arrived home after the military occupation under General Douglas MacArthur had been established and were excluded by the conservative post-war government.\textsuperscript{59} By January 1946, the remaining Japanese POWs in the United States boarded ships in San Francisco Bay headed for Japan and nervously anticipated what type of welcome awaited them. Overall, American officials believed a significant percentage of Japanese prisoners had embraced the principles of American democracy, individualism, and multiculturalism taught to them during their time in Texas. Unfortunately, the detailed system of questionnaires given to German POWs prior to and following repatriation home did not extend to re-educated Japanese prisoners, making further comparison difficult.\textsuperscript{60}

**Race vs. Reward**

While American officials initially expended little effort to reeducate prisoners; they seemed willing to violate the Geneva Convention and use prisoners to help improve propaganda


\textsuperscript{60} Arnold Krammer, “Japanese Prisoners of War in America,” p. 89.
efforts. Despite disregarding the results of Otis Cary’s unofficial, prisoner-led indoctrination program at Pearl Harbor, orders were given to transfer a select few of its instructors to help improve American propaganda directly linked to the war-effort. Unlike other aspects of POW treatment, using Japanese prisoners on projects directly related to the American war effort was a clear violation of Article 31 in the Geneva Convention. At Iroquois Point, an island adjacent to Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, a group of thirty Japanese prisoners, monitored by Cary, set to work improving American propaganda being used in the Pacific. One of the first operations that POWs at Iroquois Point worked on was to improve the effectiveness of the *Mariana Jiho* (Mariana Bulletin), a propaganda newspaper used to undermine the morale of Japanese forces on the front lines. Initially, this leaflet was largely ineffective, as it suffered from translation errors and lacked a sense of connection to Japanese combatants. Prisoners worked to create content originating in Japanese, bypassing the need for articles translated from English that had made it less affective. Additionally, prisoners added creditability to *Mariana Jiho* by fabricating advertisements from prominent Tokyo department stores.

Japanese POWs working with the psychological operations program also worked to improve various other aspects of American propaganda, including translating the Potsdam Declaration for leaflets dropped by B-29s over Japan. The document laid out Allied plans for the post-war world and provided terms for Japanese surrender, but was not published in its


63 Ibid., p. 217.
entirety to the Japanese people. American leaflets informed citizens of the relatively lenient Allied terms that may have contributed to the Japanese government’s final decision to capitulate on September 2, 1945. The use of Cary’s POWs at Iroquois Point attests to the receptiveness of Japanese to American re-education and the American willingness to violate the Geneva Convention. Both factors suggest that the motivating factor behind the different educational opportunities and re-education policies came down to race, since American officials were willing to blatantly violate the Geneva convention when it came to Japanese prisoners but not German POWs.

When the German re-education program was first suggested by General Marshal in March of 1943, the plan was shelved largely do to fears over legality and the fact that a majority of American personnel believed any such effort would be useless. Through a combination of lobbying by academics and influential individuals like the First Lady of the United States herself, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, American military officials eventually reconsidered their initial decision on re-education. Despite this reversal in policy, it would take an additional six months.64 During this period, American officials not only failed to consider the results of Otis Cary’s POW school in Hawaii, but overlooked reports confirming that similar attitudes existed among the thousands held on the U.S. mainland.65 Ironically, many reports predated the German indoctrination program and portrayed groups of Japanese prisoners as more receptive to the idea of

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indoctrination than German POWs. Despite this evidence, it appears the majority of American officials relied on racial stereotypes and preconceived notions of Japanese behavior electing to exclude them from the initial re-education program. Even when the decision was made in July of 1945 to include Japanese prisoners, the effort suffered greatly from poor planning and resources. Although attempts were made to expand the collection of films, books, magazines, and other activities available to the 200 Japanese undergoing re-educated in Texas during the summer of 1945, the gap between the two racially different groups remained considerable throughout the program.

The American POW re-education program varied in both content and application depending on a prisoners’ race. Despite having additional time to prepare and over nine months previous experience with re-educating German prisoners, the Japanese program drastically lagged behind in both available educational materials and qualified personnel. American commanders also ignored reports countering their preconceived notions that Japanese POWs were incorrigible and impossible to re-educate. Although several other potential factors may have led to these inconsistencies, race was in fact the most significant factor behind the variations in the War Department’s re-education program.
CONCLUSION

When examining the experiences of Japanese and German POWs held in the United States during the war, it is impossible to overlook variations in treatment, available labor assignments, and inclusion in the re-education program. Without question, race influenced all aspects of the Pacific War, including treatment of Japanese POWs in the United States. This was a momentous struggle waged between two very different civilizations, both culturally and racially. When defining this conflict, John Dower writes of a “war without mercy,” but in the infrequent event that Americans were merciful, did racism influence POWs treatment or was it something else? The answer to the question is yes, while race was not an issue on a policy level, it was very significant in influencing camp commanders and guards alike, who had considerable latitude when implementing that policy.

Although racism influenced a majority of American military personnel’s treatment of Japanese prisoners, it appears that a priority for maintaining order within the camp may have also been a factor; however, this too was racially motivated. In terms of POW labor, official policy was affected by American racial views. When it came to re-education, racial prejudice seemed to have been the only factor responsible for inconsistencies in both available educational materials and the delay in including Japanese prisoners. The variations between Japanese and German POWs held within the United States demonstrate that although the U.S. War Department made an effort to fulfill its obligations to provide equal care without the influence of racial prejudice, in reality, the prisoners experienced unequal treatment based on their race.
Although the United States scrambled to accommodate and provide regulations for large numbers of Axis POWs that arrived in 1943, the overall results of the program were relatively successful as far as the War Department was concerned. During next three years, enemy prisoners arrived on American shores in unprecedented numbers, growing from less than 2,000 in January of 1942 to 360,000 in December of 1944, and eventually peaking in June of 1945 at nearly 426,000 POWs.\(^1\) Americans provided enemy prisoners with higher standards of housing, food, and overall treatment than any other nation involved with the war; however, examination of American policy demonstrated that prisoners were treated differently because of their race. Although perceptions did slightly fluctuate from camp to camp, it was clear American personnel viewed the Japanese POWs as inferior to their German campmates, and the only logical explanation for this preference was race. Despite no racial distinction in the official policy for treatment of enemy POWs, the organization of the camp system allowed for considerable interpretation of vague regulations. While race was important, further examination of the United States’ POWs program suggests that there may have been other factors besides race that affected American behavior. These elements included keeping prisoners occupied in order to prevent disruptive behavior, latitude given to individual commanders by senior Army personnel as well as guards, and commanders that were subjective to personal prejudices as a result of combat. Although these issues did affect the POW program considerably, racial prejudice among American personnel appears to have had the greatest influence. Additional examination of how these factors influenced the POW labor program proved that race again took precedence.

During the winter of 1942, the U.S. War Department began drafting a POW labor program intended to occupy prisoners’ idle time in order to discourage the risk of escape and rioting. While the Geneva Convention eventually allowed POWs to be used in any labor which was not considered hazardous, degrading, or directly related to the war effort, it failed to provide detailed explanations as to what types of jobs prisoners could and could not perform. Initially, the War Department approved the employed of POWs on tasks within the camp, but the growing number of incoming workers quickly exceeded the amount of available jobs. Additional outside factors influenced the prisoner of war labor program, such as the growing desire of civilian contractors to utilize POW labor at discounted costs and key-manpower shortages throughout the United states due to the war effort. These factors led to the expansion of POW labor outside of the camps, but only German and Italian prisoners could participate in these jobs. Priority II or off-post labor came with added benefits including less direct supervision by guards, higher pay, and opportunities to leave camp for several hours while working in the American countryside. Examining the variations in labor between German and Japanese prisoners continued to demonstrate the influence of racial views in the American POW program; however, the desire to maximize profit from prisoners work combined with a need to constructively occupy prisoners also influenced commanders and policymakers. Despite this, examples have shown that Japanese prisoners were excluded from the most profitable form of POW labor—Priority II work assignments. This decision conflicted with the U.S. priority for maximizing production and showed that race was the most influential factor responsible for variations in POW labor.

Although the influence of race is apparent when examining the general treatment of prisoners and American utilization of POW labor, the War Department’s re-education program
provided what was perhaps the most obvious example. Most of the basic problems regarding the
treatment and employment of nearly 340,000 enemy prisoners of war held within the United
States had largely been worked out by the fall of 1944. The War Department, as well as the
Office of the Provost Marshal General, seemed to be content with POW operations as long as
escapes and disciplinary issues were limited, Geneva Convention violations did not occur, and
labor production was at a maximum. American officials also quietly made efforts to politically
re-educate thousands of POWs while in captivity during and after the war. Although the Geneva
Convention of 1929 specifically forbade attempts to indoctrinate prisoners of war, Article 17 also
required captors to provide and encourage enemy POWs with intellectual pursuits. ² Like
provisions outlining general treatment and POW labor, this Article was vaguely written and
lacked specificity. American personnel would eventually use this stipulation as a cover to
introduce a clandestine program aimed at indoctrinating German and Japanese POWs held in the
United States during the war. The American POW re-education program varied in both content
and application depending on a prisoners’ race. Despite having additional time to prepare and
over nine months previous experience with re-educating German prisoners, the Japanese
program lagged behind in both available educational materials and qualified personnel.
American policymakers also ignored numerous reports that Japanese POWs responded well to
these programs. ³ Although several other potential factors may have led to these inconsistencies
including public opinion, language barriers, and shortages in qualified instructors, race was the

² *Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War* (Geneva: 1929), Article 17.
³ Memo, Army Service Forces, from Captain Separd Traube to Major Paul Horgan, Morale Services, War
Department, June 8,1944, “POW Special Projects Division, Administrative Branch, Decimal File 1943-46,” folder:
most significant factor behind the variations between the German and Japanese re-education programs.

Throughout the POW program’s evolution, American officials continually justified their actions when applying different standards to Japanese prisoners. Camp personnel often based important decisions on racial stereotypes and personal bias that led to inconsistencies in treatment, available work, and access to educational materials between German and Japanese prisoners. Although American officials implemented several precautionary measures that seemed justified in order to prevent suicides among Japanese prisoners and protect them from being harmed by mobs of angry citizens, closer examination has shown considerable evidence existed that invalidated these claims and was ignored or overlooked by American policymakers.

Acknowledging that race was perhaps the most influential factor of the Pacific War, we have seen American treatment of Japanese POWs was no exception. While Japanese prisoners experienced treatment that often varied compared to German POWs also held within the United States, it was much better than American prisoners experienced in Japanese captivity. American POWs were frequently starved, beaten without provocation, and executed working on slave labor projects or during their time in Japanese prisoner camps. Over the course of the war 27,465 American service personnel and civilians had been detained by the Japanese, of which, 11,107 died in captivity.4

Although prisoners experienced better treatment in the United States than Americans held in Japanese camps, the POW program was not flawless. The U.S. War Department outwardly

complied with the Geneva Convention; however, a closer examination suggests that they did not fully obey these articles. Comparing the treatment, labor, and re-education of German and Japanese prisoners held within the United States revealed that race mattered most, even far removed from the influence of combat. American personnel provided better treatment to German POWs, allowed them to participate in a greater variety of jobs, gave additional access to educational opportunities, and more vigorously incorporated into re-education programs than Japanese prisoners. While outwardly projecting total compliance with regulations and equality among prisoners, the American POW program suffered from racial inequality at all levels. Although the War Department intended on using this opportunity to project the ideal American way of life onto foreign prisoners, the operations and conduct of the program itself may offer a more accurate depiction of the American war circa 1945, a nation in which race based discrimination shaped both the actions of individual and official government policy.
APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS
AEO - Assistant Executive Officer

AFWESPAC – U.S. Army Forces in the Western Pacific

ASF – U.S. Army Service Forces

CBI – Chinese India Burma Theater of Operations

CO – Commanding Officer

ETO – European Theater of Operations

G-1 - The Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, U.S. Army

NCO – Non-Commissioned Officer

PMGO – Provost Marshal General’s Office

POW – Prisoner of War

PTO – Pacific Theater of Operations

PX – Post Exchange

SPD – Special Projects Division

SS – Schutzstaffel or Protection Squadron / Defense Corps

V-E Day – Victory in Europe Day

V-J Day – Victory in Japan Day
APPENDIX B: MAPS AND CHARTS
POW Camps Within the Continental United States as of August 1, 1943

POW Camps Within the Continental United States as of June 1, 1944
Monthly Census of Prisoners of War Interned in Continental United States: 1942 - 1946

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<td>Japanese</td>
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<td>248,781</td>
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<td>371,683</td>
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<td>June a 1946</td>
<td>162</td>
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* There were 32,000 PW's on military and civilian work projects which terminated 15 June 1946. All PW's were repatriated by 30 June 1946 except 141 Germans, 20 Italians, and 1 Japanese serving sentences in U. S. penal institutions.
Distribution of Man-days in Prisoner Labor for the Major Fields of Contract Work:
1943 - 1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Forest operations</th>
<th>Food processing</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>20,882,852</td>
<td>5,047,867</td>
<td>4,229,588</td>
<td>4,058,878</td>
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<td>1943</td>
<td>1,466,080</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12,794,923</td>
<td>3,800,055</td>
<td>2,976,524</td>
<td>3,287,184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand total: 34,219,185 man-days.*
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“What Shall Be Done With Germany?” *SEE*, April, 1945, pp. 36-37.

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**Books**

Auger, Martin F. *Prisoners of the Home Front: German POWs and "Enemy Aliens" in Southern Quebec, 1940-46*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005


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Bailey, Ronald H. “Lessons in Democracy: The secret and controversial attempt to teach German POWs about freedom while they were still in captivity.” World War II Magazine, August/ September, 2008. pp. 52-59.

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http://artifactsjournal.missouri.edu/2012/03/wwii-propaganda-the-influence-of-racism/
