Rumors of “American Concentration Camps”: The Emergency Detention Act and the Public Fear of Political Repression, 1966-1971

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Abstract: In the late 1960s, a rumor began to spread among African American communities and radical New Left students that the American government was building concentration camps to incarcerate them. The rumor did not disappear completely until 1971 when Congress repealed the Emergency Detention Act, a law that authorized the government to arrest and detain those who were suspected to engage in espionage or sabotage in times of internal security emergencies. Four factors contributed to the spread of the rumor: (1) Radicalization of social protests and the general mistrust of the government, (2) Widespread police brutality and close surveillance of the activists, (3) Lingering historical memory of the Japanese American Internment, and (4) Revival of the memory of the Holocaust in American political culture.

Introduction

On January 20, 1961, when John F. Kennedy took the Oath of Office, America seemed to be filled with aspirations for a new decade of progress...
and hope. The new President was young and handsome, and spoke with confidence about American prosperity that would be shared with the rest of the world. This new prosperity, Kennedy claimed, would be built through communal efforts rather than by individual aspiration for personal success: “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country,” he exhorted the people. Kennedy urged Americans to remember that they were the heirs of the Revolution, and invited them to carry the torch that had been passed on to fight all forms of human poverty and oppression.

Earl Warren, who assisted Kennedy as he took the oath, had already been engaging himself in the task of promoting civil rights and civil liberties in American society as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court for the previous eight years.¹ Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954), which renounced school segregation as “inherently unequal,” had marked a pivotal victory for those who had been hoping for an end to institutionalized racial discrimination in the United States.² In Yates v. United States (1957), the Court had overturned the conviction of several Communists for conspiracy to advocate the overthrow of the government.³ Justice Harlan’s opinion ruled that people should be convicted only when they advocated concrete actions to overthrow the government and not when they advocated the abstract idea. The Yates decision anticipated the major shift in the Court’s stance towards emphasizing libertarian principles rather than favoring national and internal security matters at the expense of individual freedom of speech and thought.⁴

If Kennedy’s inauguration opened a new decade of hope, November 22, 1963, when Kennedy was shot to death in Dallas, Texas, marked “the end of a time of hope, the beginning of a time of troubles.”⁵ The struggle to change the social system to create a more equal and integrated society took its toll – it cost the lives of many Civil Rights leaders and activists. Americans in the 1960s saw much violence in the public arena within the United States,
perhaps more than ever since the Civil War fought a hundred years before to end slavery. People were clubbed, beaten, hosed and shot, for marching, sitting in, praying and speaking for the end of segregation in the South, discrimination in the North, and military violence abroad. In the latter half of the 1960s, large cities in the North witnessed continuous riots. Rioters and protesters collided with law enforcement officers, resulting in further violence.

As Kennedy had urged, Americans in the 1960s asked what they could do for their country. Countless organizations were built to make collective efforts to change the social structure and race relations in the United States as well as to help the poor abroad. People, however, also asked what their country could do for them. Civil Rights activists demanded equal voting rights and employment opportunities, as well as the minimum standard of living to maintain human dignity. They also demanded law enforcement to stop hideous crimes against them and other minority citizens. Some protested against police brutality. Many demanded peace at home and abroad.

Moreover, people asked what their country could not do for them. A large number of students burned their draft cards to resist the government’s claim to their lives that would be expended in the escalating war in Vietnam, and they were angered by the government’s attempt to repress the anti-war protests. After 1965, when protestors started to clash with police in inner cities and college campuses, the issue of the balance between social dissent and internal security became an urgent political question. Was it legitimate for the government to use violence against its own people to repress dissent if the protestors resorted to violence? What sort of repressive power could the government use? Could the government conduct surveillance of the people by illegal means? Could the government detain people to prevent civil disturbances?

It was against this social background that the specter of “concentration
“concentration camps” emerged in the American imagination. A rumor started to spread that the government was preparing a massive roundup and incarceration of African Americans and radicals in “concentration camps.” Even though the government denied the existence of such camps or any plans to construct them, the rumor did not disappear until September 1971, when the government repealed the Emergency Detention Act, the law that was perceived as giving legal grounds to the rumor.

This article explores the “concentration camp” rumor that spread in the United States between 1966 and 1971. The paper will look at mainstream as well as vernacular newspapers and magazine articles that reported on the issue, and analyze who were particularly concerned about “concentration camps” and why. In the latter section, the paper will contemplate the social and cultural context of the time and elucidate the reasons why the rumor attracted attention from the public and in the media.

Before getting into the analysis of the rumor itself, the legal background of the “concentration camp” rumor needs to be given. It is important to note that the rumor was not totally groundless. America at that time had a piece of legislation that would give the government power to detain people on the grounds of internal security before any criminal act was committed. The law was called the Emergency Detention Act, Title II of the Internal Security Act of 1950.6

(1) The Emergency Detention Act of 1950: A “Concentration Camp Law”

In September 1950, Congress passed what is considered to be one of the most repressive pieces of legislation in American history in terms of civil and individual liberties.7 The Internal Security Act of 1950, sometimes called the McCarran Act after its sponsor, Senator Patrick McCarran, enforced compulsory registration of Communists and their sympathizers with the Attorney General, and authorized the government to conduct preventive detention in times of internal security emergencies.
Title I of the Internal Security Act was named the Subversive Activities Control Act. It provided that the government establish the Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB), which was to determine if a particular organization was a Communist organization. If the SACB so determined, it could order the organization to register with the Attorney General as such, and also to annually submit the list of its members as well as its financial statement. If the organization failed to register, it was a duty of the individual members to register, and the failure to do so resulted in criminal prosecution.

Title II, the Emergency Detention Act, authorized the President of the United States to apprehend and detain any person who the government believed with reasonable ground would probably “engage in” or “conspire with others to engage in acts of espionage and sabotage” in the event of invasion, war, or insurrection. The FBI compiled a list of potentially subversive persons so that the Attorney General could order their detention once the President made a public proclamation that an “internal security emergency” existed.

One notable fact about the law was that the Emergency Detention Act was drafted by liberal Senators who had a particular historical precedent in mind – the Internment of Japanese Americans. The Japanese Americans living on the West Coast of the United States were forcefully relocated and interned in the ten War Relocation Centers in the interior during World War II. The Emergency Detention Act was modeled after the Internment. In fact, the drafters of the bill insisted that the Emergency Detention Act was an improvement over Internment, because they had added some clauses for civil liberties protections so as to formally legislate an emergency detention program in time of a national or internal emergency in the future.

Shortly after its passage, organizations that opposed the Internal Security Act formed a coalition. The members of the National Committee to Repeal the McCarran Act included Carey McWilliams, a liberal journalist,
Methodist Bishop Gerald Kennedy, and well-known liberal professors such as Ralph Barton Perry and Robert Morse Lovett. There were other organizations that expressed their opposition to the law as well: Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), to name a few.

These individuals and organizations opposed the Internal Security Act because they thought that the Act seriously violated the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and thought. The opposition labeled the Subversive Activities Control Act “a thought-control law” since the Act caused an individual to face prosecution based not on the act s/he committed but on his/her beliefs or associations. They also pointed out that the compulsory registration amounted to “self-incrimination” that was forbidden by the Fifth Amendment since registration would inevitably lead to serious curtailment of individual freedom. Title II was also an extremely controversial law at the time of its passage. Those who opposed the law scoffed of it as a “concentration camp law.” Nevertheless, the appeals from the left to amend or repeal the Internal Security Act bore no fruit in the 1950s.

After the passage of the Internal Security Act, the Attorney General designated six potential campsites for detention pursuant to this Act; Florence, Arizona; Wickensburg, Arizona; Avon Park, Florida; Allenwood, Pennsylvania; El Reno, Oklahoma; and Tule Lake, California. However, the budget allocation for the detention camps was terminated in 1957, and later the sites were either sold to private owners or changed into minimum security Federal prisons. Title II was never invoked, and it might have been forever forgotten as an obsolete and ineffectual piece of law, had it not attracted people’s attention a decade later.

(2) Spread of the “Concentration Camp” Rumor
In July 1967, Raymond Okamura, a Japanese American nisei from Berkeley, California, sent a letter of inquiry concerning the Emergency Detention Act to the headquarters of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), an ethnic political organization of Japanese Americans. Okamura was disquieted by a rumor spreading in minority communities that the government was preparing “concentration camps” for those who resisted government policies. In his letter, Okamura called for action by the JACL to repeal the Emergency Detention Act, because “the American Japanese, as the historic victims, have a public duty to prevent a revival of these camps.”

The source of the rumor was a booklet titled Concentration Camps, U.S.A., published in 1966 by a freelance journalist, Charles R. Allen, Jr. He was commissioned to do research on the emergency detention camps by the Citizens Committee for Civil Liberties (CCCL), a leftist organization founded in 1961 whose primary goal was the nullification and repeal of the Internal Security Act, which, it considered, was “the extension and legal arm of mccarthyism [sic].” The booklet was the report of Allen’s research on the camps.

Concentration Camps, U.S.A. contained accounts from Allen’s trips to the detention camps in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1952, Allen visited Allenwood, Pennsylvania, and conversed with the officers from the Bureau of Prisons renovating the prison buildings in preparation for the detention of subversive citizens for the time when Title II was activated. In 1966, Allen toured five of the six former camps. He reported that Allenwood, El Reno, and Florence camps were in the state of “immediate stand-by” with the estimated capacity of 3,000-8,000, 1,500, and 3,500 inmates respectively. Wickenburg and Tule Lake, according to the booklet, had changed ownership but were maintained as detention campsites with the estimated capacity of 3,500 and 8,000-10,000 respectively. Allen noted other sites, Mill Point (West Virginia), Greenville (South Carolina), Montgomery
(Alabama), Tucson (Arizona), Safford (Arizona), McNeil Island (Washington), Elmendorf (Alaska), as available detention sites. Concentration Camps, U.S.A. concluded that the total known estimated capacity of detention centers in the United States was 26,500.

Allen emphasized the imminence of the government’s possible use of the detention camps. He insisted that there were no less than twenty-four separate occasions, in which members of Congress tried to force the White House to declare a state of internal security emergency, “which would put Title II of the McCarran Act into action as quickly as one could switch on a TV set.”

He also quoted a radio interview with a former FBI agent, Jack Levine:

Oh, yes, the FBI has got a very carefully laid out and detailed plan of action. ... This plan has been set up under the authority of the Emergency Detention Act (Title II of the McCarran Act) ... the FBI has labeled it Operation Dragnet ... the FBI estimates that within a matter of hours every potential saboteur in the United States will be safely interned.

Allen also pointed out that the Emergency Detention Act could be used to deal with ghetto uprisings and radical social protests.

The rapidly mounting and increasingly organized resistance of the Negro [sic] people and those bearing arms in self-defense against the force and violence of the bigot mobs, the police and national guard – could well provide the pretext for the White House to declare that such resistance was in actuality an “insurrection from within;” and of course that, in turn, under the McCarran Act, would fill the detention centers with the militants of the civil rights movement.
The booklet created genuine fear among the people, particularly those in radical organizations and African American communities. An African American Congressman reported that one of his African American interns witnessed copies of the report being sold within a black community for as much as $50 a copy. Representative Abner J. Mikva, who became one of the sponsors in the Title II repeal bill, also reported his encounter with the students at a predominantly African American high school who had heard the “concentration camp” rumors. His assertions “that the law was not intended for blacks and other minority groups were to no avail,” he recalled.

A report released by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) seemed to further support Allen’s findings on the imminence of the invocation of the Emergency Detention Act. The HUAC report, Guerrilla Warfare Advocates in the United States, released on May 6, 1968, declared that there were “mixed Communist and black nationalist elements” that were “planning and organizing guerrilla-type operations against the United States.” The Report concluded that:

Acts of overt violence by the guerrillas would mean that they had declared a “state of war” within the country and, therefore, would forfeit their rights as in wartime. The McCarran Act provides for various detention centers to be operated throughout the country and these might well be utilized for the temporary imprisonment of warring guerrillas.

The media both reflected and exacerbated public anxiety about “concentration camps.” As early as 1966 an article which made a mockery of the issue appeared in Saturday Review:

An unconfirmed rumor has come to my attention that our FBI is well
prepared for a World War III in which our major enemy will be China. Detention camps have been secretly prepared in which will be “relocated” all the Chinese in the United States so that they may be screened, and prevented from sabotaging the war effort and from signaling Peking with short-wave radios.23

The article went on to advise people on how to distinguish between the Japanese (“our friends”) and the Chinese (“our enemies”).

In March 1968, the Washington Post published an article which was much more serious in its tone. According to its staff writer Paul W. Valentine, the Washington Post conducted a survey over several months and found that the fear of “concentration camps” among the inner city African American communities was deep and widespread.24 Valentine himself visited Allenwood and received confirmation from Superintendent P. A. Schuer that the Bureau of Prisons was not preparing to convert the prison into a detention camp. He also interviewed Assistant Attorney General J. Walter Yeagley, who assured him that there were no plans to reactivate any detention camps. He reported, however, that radical African American leaders such as Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown made speeches about ten to twenty-four camps under construction, and Martin Luther King, Jr. said publicly that he feared “some form of detention system as a part of the white reaction to possible black violence.” The article also quoted a boxing promoter saying, “The kids I see coming in off the street have all heard there’s going to be some kind of mass camps.” Roy J. Jones, director of Howard University’s Center for Community Studies, commented in the article that the belief in the existence of the camps were so strong because of what African Americans feel was “an increasingly belligerent mood of the white establishment.” The rumor also existed among some New Left whites who saw themselves as “potential tenants of the camps.”

In May 1968, Look magazine carried a six-page article titled “America’s
Concentration Camps: The Rumor and the Realities.” 25 William Hedgepeth vividly portrayed the kind of agitation that was seen on the streets.

“What do you mean, am I serious?” The Negro [sic] gave a querulous, squinting look. He cocked his head like a cross-examining attorney. “Only way this system know how to put people down is by hitting ‘em with clubs, Mace, tear gas. And them twenty-four concentration camps ain’t sitting out there for nothing. The blacks can’t fill up twenty-four camps. It’s me an’ you, man, me an’ you!”

A small group of young men and women, five or six little boys, two dogs and a hen had gathered around us on the street. “A-men,” one said. Others nodded. 26

Hedgepeth reported that Martin Luther King, Jr. said to him six days before his death, “I see a ghetto perhaps cordoned off into a concentration camp.” 27 King had been distressed by the collapse of the Civil Rights coalition between African Americans and liberal Whites. In his book, Why We Can’t Wait, published in 1964, he criticized the White backlash as a source of deteriorating race relations in the urban areas. 28 He himself did not believe in the rumor but felt there was a possibility. 29 He warned Hedgepeth, “The more there are riots, the more repression will take place, and the more we face the danger of a right-wing take-over, and eventually a Fascist society.” 30

Besides the detailed report on the Emergency Detention Act and the public fear of detention camps, the article mentioned the “Internal Security Act of 1968,” a bill that was sponsored by Senator James Eastland (D-Mississippi). 31 The bill was an attempt to apply the wartime definition of treasonable conduct to peacetime activities. Although the bill never passed, it nevertheless showed that some politicians were pushing for stricter laws to deal with civil disturbances.
The fear of “concentration camps” was not confined to radical African Americans. The *Chicago Daily News* carried an article titled, “When black professional people start talking like Rap Brown (and they are) ...,” written by L. F. Palmer, Jr. Palmer reported that in the South Side area of Chicago, middle-class professional African Americans were talking about the rumor that a concentration camp was being built in Algonquin, Illinois, for the purpose of incarcerating African Americans.

On June 3, 1968, *Nation* carried a column on the concentration camp rumor. The column entitled “Concentration Camps?” reported the government’s response to the rumor. Attorney General Ramsey Clark denied the current existence of such detention camps and stated that the government had no plans to build any in the future. Clark expressed his feeling that Title II did not pose a threat because “It’s all so academic because it’s so remote.” The columnist, however, supported the repeal of Title II, since as long as the law was on the statute book, “rumors of the kind now afloat [would] add to the current tension and uneasiness.” He welcomed the fact that the American Civil Liberties Union was preparing to file an action which would have sought an injunction against enforcement of Title II on the ground that it was unconstitutional.

It was not only the mainstream media that reported on the rumor. An article in the *Hokubei Mainichi*, a Japanese-American newspaper, criticized the media coverage of the “concentration camp” issues. The article first reported that Stokely Carmichael had made a speech on the subject of concentration camps at a rally. According to the article, many popular radio talk shows referred to the Evacuation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II, as a result of the interest in the subject. Japanese Americans, however, were disturbed by many erroneous statements being broadcast. The article gave as an example Ray Taliafferro’s statement during a Radio Station KNEW program “that Chief Justice Earl Warren has publicly apologized many, many times for his role in the
Evacuation.” In fact, being pressured by the Japanese Americans such as Edison Uno, Earl Warren had continued to refuse to apologize for supporting the internment in early 1942.35

African American newspapers covered the issue as well.36 The Black Panther Party members were most interested in the concentration camp issues since they perceived themselves as the major target of incarceration, and they sponsored rallies with Japanese American students on the issue of concentration camps. Black Panther stated:

On September 22, 18 years ago Congress, by a two-thirds vote, made an official public law 831. Now it is known as the Internal Security Act of 1950. ... Thus giving the pigs the power to arrest and jail anyone they think will engage in or probably conspire against the government of the United States. You can be snatched off the streets or from your home and never be heard from again. ... Anyone considered as a ghetto dweller can be a threat because the manner of life you are forced to live warrants change, not to mention, revenge.37

Thus, the rumor about the “concentration camps” attracted attention from the mainstream media as well as the vernacular ethnic media, such as that of African Americans and Asian Americans.38 Moreover the media coverage was not limited to a particular region in the United States. Stories on the “concentration camps” appeared in newspapers not only in Washington, D. C. and New York City, but also in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, St. Louis, and Honolulu, among other places.39 The issue appeared in various magazines such as Newsweek, Nation, Look, Time, and Atlantic Monthly.40

From these reports, it is quite clear that the fear of concentration camps was particularly, though not exclusively, widespread among African American communities and radical anti-war groups. Why did the idea of “concentration camps” suddenly become so credible among those groups at
this time? The following section will consider the social and cultural context of America in the late 1960s, and explore the factors that have contributed to this widespread rumor.

(3) Reasons for the Spread of the “Concentration Camp” Rumor

Why did the idea of “concentration camps” attract public attention? Four points will be considered as contributing factors for this phenomenon: (a) The change in the nature of social protest between the early and late 1960s; (b) Increasing surveillance and police brutality against the social protesters; (c) The historical memory of the Japanese American Internment; and (d) The shift in the cultural meaning of “concentration camps” in American society.

a) The Changing Nature of Social Protest

One factor that contributed to the acceptance of the “concentration camp” rumor in the late 1960s was widespread public mistrust of the government and, moreover, in American democracy. This shift happened due to the changes in the nature of social protests that took place in the mid-1960s. In the early 1960s during the Civil Rights movement, the major task of the social activists was to end racial segregation in the South. After the *Brown* decision, the people in the South, African Americans in particular, had to convert the effects of the *Brown* decision into political and social reality.

The most influential Civil Rights organizations were the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Starting with the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott led by Martin Luther King, Jr., Civil Rights activists persistently fought each and every site of segregation.

Two aspects characterized the nature of the Civil Rights movement. One was its basic philosophy of non-violent civil disobedience, and the other was the coalition between African Americans in the South and liberals in...
the North. In 1962, John F. Kennedy sent Federal troops to protect James Meredith, the first African American student who tried to attend the all-white University of Mississippi. On August 28, 1963, over 250,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial for the March on Washington demanding racial equality. In his famous “I have a Dream” speech, King spoke to America’s integrationist dream: “one day the state of Alabama ... will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.” When the TV showed the scenes from Alabama, where Sheriff Bull Connor ordered the attack on non-violent demonstrators with dogs and fire hoses, it was quite clear to many Americans where the evil stood: Jim Crow and the bigotry of the Southern whites. If some white men, such as Bull Connor and George C. Wallace, governor of Alabama, had stood for America’s racial oppression, there were other white men, such as John and Robert Kennedy, who represented America’s conscience.41

After the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act were passed, however, the Civil Rights movement witnessed an aggravating situation. Even though legal segregation came to an end, the situation in the North did not improve very much.42 The frustration and desperation arising from the deteriorating conditions in the urban ghettos in the North led some African Americans to abandon the philosophy of non-violence. In the Watts section of Los Angeles, a violent riot broke out in 1965, and urban riots continued in the latter half of the 1960s. On the other hand, the continuation of civil disturbances, particularly in the ghettos, alienated many white liberals who had supported the Civil Rights reforms. The inter-racial liberal coalition collapsed as violence and disorder increased in American society in the late 1960s.

In 1966, Stokely Carmichael, a leader of the SNCC, proclaimed that what was needed for African Americans was not integration but “Black Power.” The Black Power movement departed from the Civil Rights movement by
adopting an anti-white, anti-integrationist stance. Militant groups believed that only armed revolution could bring social justice to African Americans. The Black Panther Party for Self Defense, formed in Oakland, California, by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966, was the most radical of these groups.

The polarization of American society was not only seen in race relations. The escalating Vietnam War caused Americans to doubt the legitimacy of America’s role in the War. New Left organizations started to vocally oppose the War. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the largest anti-war student organization, sponsored the first large-scale anti-war protest in Washington, D. C. in April 1965. Anti-war activism grew, and by 1968, almost all the university campuses across the nation witnessed protest activities such as sit-ins, teach-ins, rallies, marches, and picketing. Protest in front of the Pentagon against military escalation resulted in over six hundred arrests and fifty cases of hospitalization from teargassing and beating. Anti-war protests as well as anti-racism protests grew more militant as the state repression increasingly resorted to violence.

Not only did the protests become violent but the content of dissent shifted between the early and late 1960s. During the Civil Rights era, protests were targeted against the Jim Crow laws and racial prejudice of Southern whites who sought to maintain hierarchical race relations. As expressed in President Kennedy’s nationally televised speech, “The heart of the question is whether all Americans can be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities,” the Civil Rights movement was based on a fundamental trust in the American Constitution. Martin Luther King’s speech united the majority of Americans by showing the vision of hope for the new American Dream. On the contrary, protests in the late 1960s were narrated in more critical tones. The great majority of SDS members, which exceeded 70,000 at its peak, believed that the Vietnam War “indicated moral illegitimacy of the American government.” SDS’s ideology was part of a larger New Left
criticism. As was exemplified by *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* written by William Appleman Williams, the New Left academics did not believe in the liberal theses offered by “consensus historians” who had reigned over the American intellectual world in the previous decade. Terms such as “the U.S. imperialism” or “totalitarianism” were often used in the New Left writings to refer to the U.S. regime, while the intellectuals a decade before used those terms only to emphasize the difference between the “free” America and the Stalinist U.S.S.R. or Nazi Germany.

For the radicals among racial minority groups, such as the Black Panther Party, the American government was nothing but a “racist government.” Their platform showed no hope for liberal political institutions or American democratic ideals.

> We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community. We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. ... The Germans are now aiding Jews in Israel for the genocide of the Jewish people. The Germans murdered six million Jews. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million black people; therefore, we feel that this is a modest demand that we make.

The platform of the Black Panther Party clearly revealed their mistrust of the government. It also compared the history of African Americans with the history of Jewish people. By 1968, the oppressed or alienated had lost hope in the American ideal, and their historical experiences seemed to substantiate the “concentration camp” rumor, rather than to refute it. It seems only logical that the Black Panthers, as well as other radicals, readily accepted the rumor when it appeared.

Even the general public was starting to lose trust in the government,
because of the government’s failure to solve the problem of poverty which seemed to be creating “two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal,” and their inability to stop the deteriorating military operation in Vietnam or restore law and order within the nation. In this kind of political culture, “American concentration camps” may not have sounded like such an incredible idea.

b) Police Brutality and Surveillance

Another factor that contributed to the spread of the “concentration camp” rumor was the close surveillance conducted and frequent violence inflicted on protest groups by government authorities. Activists during the Civil Rights era had faced violence as well, but the relationship between the activists and the law enforcement officers during the post-Civil Rights era was much more confrontational than that in the first half of the 1960s.

In the early 1960s, Civil Rights activists met with widespread acts of terrorism from right-wing organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, that resisted desegregation. Violence against activists and racial minorities was rarely punished or prevented, because the perpetrators of crimes were often closely connected with, if not members of, law enforcement agencies, particularly in the Southern states. Initially, the FBI’s intervention into the crimes against Civil Rights activists remained minimal, which extremely frustrated the activists. Sometimes, this led to severe tension between the FBI and the activists. However, the FBI was not in direct confrontation with the Civil Rights activists.

In contrast, the FBI adopted strenuous methods to counter protesters and activists during the late 1960s. J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, believed that the social protesters were causing civil disorder and therefore were a threat to internal security of the country. Moreover, the Black Nationalists and the New Left groups were dedicated to “social revolution,” which, in Hoover’s mind, equaled Communist rhetoric. During the 1960s,
the FBI developed massive counter-intelligence programs to conduct surveillance on, disrupt, and sometimes destroy organizational activities of the protesters. These counter-intelligence programs, or COINTELPRO, were designed “to create an elite informant squad and send it around the country and the world in pursuit of ‘domestic subversive, black militant, or New Left movements.’” The informants not only gathered information about the protest groups, but actively disrupted their activities, conducted media campaigns against them, arrested and convicted many of their leaders, and in the case of COINTELPRO-BPP, the counter-intelligence program against the Black Panther Party, the informants and police officers even participated in the assassination of its members.

Although the FBI had, to a large extent, autonomy over internal security matters, the Department of Justice also created new agencies for the surveillance of groups that might cause civil disturbances. In 1967, the Attorney General established the Interdivision Information Unit in order to keep an eye on protest groups throughout the United States. The Unit collected information on campus or community protest activities from all over the country, including detailed weekly reports from the FBI. The Unit lasted until 1976.

The tension between the public and the government escalated to the point of social crisis in 1968 and 1969. It was at this time that the rumor was given greater credibility among the activists and minority communities. The surveillance, disruption, and actual clashes between the social protesters and law enforcement officers substantiated the “concentration camp” rumors during the late 1960s. A logical conclusion is that the anxiety present at the time propagated the belief in the “concentration camp” rumors and that caused further distress.

c) Historical Memory of the Japanese American Internment

The public mistrust of government and the tension between the
authorities and protesters formed a cultural background for the wide acceptance of the “concentration camp” rumor. Yet it is also important to note that there was a historical precedent of American “concentration camps” that added reality to the rumor. The vivid image of the barbed-wire and a watchtower came from Americans’ historical memory of the Internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

The documents from this period on the “concentration camp” rumor reveal the fact that the memory of the Internment was still alive in Americans’ minds in the late 1960s. In Concentration Camps, U.S.A., Charles Allen quoted a Bureau of Prisons officer who described the facility they were preparing in 1952, “Oh, it won’t be any picnic. Probably won’t be any better – if as good – as [sic] the Japanese Camps.” Newspapers reported that the concept of concentration camps for African Americans were “often compared with the Japanese [American] relocation program in World War II.” The previously-quoted Look article referred to the Internment as “a grisly precedent for this type of mass imprisonment.”

Japanese American newspapers started to carry articles on the camp experiences and to review the Internment policy itself. As a matter of fact, it was around this time that Japanese Americans started to critically review the government’s decision to relocate and intern the entire Japanese American population on the West Coast. Literature started to refute the official justification of the Internment – military necessity – and developed an argument that the policy was more affected by racism than military concerns. It was not until the late 1960s that the War Relocation Authority camps, in which Japanese Americans were incarcerated, came to be referred to as “concentration camps” rather than “Relocation Centers” or “internment camps.”

The Wartime Internment of Japanese Americans provided a concrete historical precedent of preventive detention in the American public memory, and by doing so gave people a sense that “it can happen in
America.” Due to the historical memory of the Japanese American Internment, the rumor of “concentration camps” was not easily brushed aside. Also some Japanese Americans strongly believed that their wartime experiences should be made known to the American public, and that they had an obligation to take action in order to prevent other Americans from experiencing the same kind of tragedy. These people got involved in the repeal movement of the Emergency Detention Act and started to tell about their wartime experiences to other Americans. The public, who learned about the Internment, generally came to support the repeal of the Emergency Detention Act, because the mass incarceration of innocent citizens into “concentration camps” seemed to most Americans unjust and totalitarian. Japanese Americans played a major role in the process of Title II repeal between 1967 and 1971, and the existence of the former internees left Americans little choice but to take the fear of “concentration camps” seriously in the late 1960s.

d) The Shift in the Cultural Meaning of “Concentration Camps”

Another notable shift that occurred between 1966 and 1971 happened in the cultural and political meaning of the term “concentration camps,” a phenomenon that had to do with the shift in the collective American memory of the Holocaust. According to the historian Peter Novick, the Holocaust did not become an important part of American culture until the late 1960s. In the 1940s and 1950s, the mass murder of Jewish people in Europe was considered just one of many atrocities Nazis conducted during WWII. Americans were generally not interested in listening to the survivors’ stories, particularly after West Germany became an important ally of the United States. The “DPs (displaced persons)” who immigrated to the United States were encouraged to forget about the past and assimilate into American culture.

The situation changed in the 1960s. Novick argues that the trial of Adolf
Eichmann in Israel, and the subsequent publication of the controversial *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by Hannah Arendt, caused people to perceive the Holocaust as a uniquely Jewish experience.66 The breakout of the Six Day War in the Middle East in 1967 drove the American Jewish community to use the Holocaust as a cultural metaphor to get the United States government’s support for Israel.67 Ethnic relations in American society were changing as well from an “integrationist” to “particularist ethos.”68 Ethnic groups started to emphasize their differences from rather than similarities with one another. The attitude toward victimhood shifted from a despised to an honored status. The voicing of pain and outrage started to be considered empowering as well as therapeutic. Against this background, the “market” for Holocaust memories grew since the late 1960s. There was more demand for survivors’ stories, and therefore increased supply.69

The fact that “concentration camps” became a culturally loaded term made the accusation of “American concentration camps” a strong metaphor that pointed to the historical oppression and exclusion of minorities in America. Title II outraged Americans because it was perceived as a law authorizing the government to build “concentration camps.” In the late 1960s political culture, people reacted strongly to the term “concentration camps” because of its association with the Holocaust, which was starting to become an important part of American historical and political consciousness.

**Conclusion**

The rumor of “American concentration camps” was a unique phenomenon that reflected the social crisis of the late 1960s. It happened at a time when many radical movements flourished, and the public seriously questioned the established social order and political institutions of the nation. It was also a time when direct confrontations between protesters and
government authorities took place on the streets, on campuses, and even in private spheres which were often under surveillance of law enforcement officers.

People’s interest in the concentration camp issue provided Japanese Americans with an opportunity to publicly discuss their wartime internment experiences, and thus helped their experience to become part of the shared American past. An even greater part of the American public became aware of the term “concentration camps” around the same time, because the rumor happened coincidentally at a time when the Jewish Holocaust came to be perceived as an important part of American historical memory.

The “concentration camp” rumor caused the social activists to form coalitions with each other. Those who felt threatened by the rumor held rallies and shared the history of political and racial oppression that they had experienced or were currently experiencing. The rumor brought people together to think about issues such as law and order, civil liberties, and the appropriate relationship between the government and its critics. Unsubstantiated as it was, the rumor provided a concrete image of “concentration camps,” a metaphor that could be shared by many people, minority and mainstream, who were concerned about the political repression conducted against the people in the tumultuous years of social reform in the late 1960s.

Notes


6 64 Stat. 987 (1950).


8 64 Stat. 1019 (1950). Details of the Act read:

Sec. 102. (a) In the event of any one of the following:

1. Invasion of the territory of the United States or its possessions,
2. Declaration of war by Congress, or
3. Insurrection within the United States in aid of a foreign enemy,

... the President is authorized to make public proclamation of the existence of an “Internal Security Emergency”.

Sec. 103 (a) Whenever there shall be in existence such an emergency, the President, acting through the Attorney General, is hereby authorized to apprehend any by order detain, pursuant to the provisions of this title, each person as to whom there is reasonable ground to believe that such person probably will engage in, or probably will conspire with others to engage in, acts of espionage and sabotage. (emphasis mine)


11 It was the Supreme Court that hindered the effect of the McCarran Act after its passage. The change, however, was to come slowly. The Supreme Court upheld the registration provision of the Internal Security Act in *Communist Party v. Subversive Activities Control Board*, 367 U.S. 1 (1961). In a 5-4 decision, Justice Frankfurter stated that freedom-of-speech protection was to be weighed against the public interest and the Fifth Amendment protection from self-incrimination should only be applied to individuals and not to a party. In *Aptheker v. Secretary of State*, 378 U.S. 500 (1964), the Court struck down the provision of the Subversive Activities Control Act denying passports to Communist Party members as a violation of the right to
travel. In the following year, the Supreme Court overruled Frankfurter’s previous ruling, and decided that the compulsory registration, which forced the members to give information that made them liable to prosecution under the Smith Act, amounted to self-incrimination, and therefore violated the Fifth Amendment. Thus, it became impossible to enforce the registration clauses in Title I. *Albertson v. Subversive Activities Control Board*, 382 U.S. 70 (1965).

12 Tule Lake was one of the ten War Relocation Authority Relocation Centers that detained Japanese Americans during the Second World War.


15 Preface in *Concentration Camps, U.S.A.* The executive secretary of the CCCL, Miriam Friedlander, was one of the forty-four individuals who had been ordered by the Subversive Activities Control Board to register as a member of the Communist Party. The order was vacated on January 28, 1966, as a consequence of the decision in *Albertson v. Subversive Activities Control Board*, 382 U.S. 70 (1965), which applied to the case the invocation of the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination. *Hearings*, 3353.

16 Allen, 59.

17 Allen, 58.

18 Allen, 59.

19 Testimony of Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), *Hearings*, 3068.


22 *Guerrilla Warfare*, 59.


25 William Hedgepeth, “America’s Concentration Camps: The Rumor and the Realities,” *Look*, May 28, 1968. According to the *Look* magazine article, the current conditions of the six detention camps were as follows. The Allenwood camp was operated by the Bureau of Prisons as a minimum-security facility for 230 inmates, “mostly Selective Service violators.” The Avon Park camp was leased in 1961 to the
State of Florida, which had since “incorporated the facility into its own prison system.” The Florence camp served as a minimum-security Federal jail for those awaiting trial. The campsite in Wickenburg had been returned to the private lessor. In El Reno, the Bureau of Prisons had dismantled its detention barracks and maintained the property “for beef-herd pastures.” The Tule Lake camp, a former Japanese-American Relocation Center, had been divided among many different owners. Hedgepeth, 89.

26 Hedgepeth, 85.
27 Hedgepeth, 86.
29 Hedgepeth, 86.
30 Hedgepeth, 86.
31 Hedgepeth, 91.
33 “Concentration Camps?” *Nation*, June 3, 1968.
35 Edison Uno conducted a persistent campaign to force Earl Warren to apologize for the statements he had made in early 1942 regarding Japanese Americans. He had made public statements, such as, “If the Japs [sic] are released no one will be able to tell a saboteur from any other Jap,” and “We believe that when we are dealing with the Caucasian race we have methods that will test the loyalty of them ... But when we deal with the Japanese we are an entirely different field and we cannot form any opinion that we believe to be sound. Their method of living, their language, make for this difficulty.” Uno’s crusade appeared as an impossible cause, even to the fellow Japanese Americans at that time. Ellen Endo, “Open End-o,” *Rafu Shimpo*, April 12, 1969.
38 “Back to McCarthy-McCarran,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1969. Japanese American media paid particularly close attention to the issue of Title II. *Pacific Citizen, Hokubei Mainichi, Rafu Shimpo*, among others, continuously covered the story of the Title II repeal campaign until the law was repealed.


41 In reality, the Kennedy Administration’s achievement in the area of Civil Rights reforms was limited. Norton, et. al., 624.


43 *Columbia Guide*, 40-1.

44 *Columbia Guide*, 41.


48 *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York:
In 1963, Medgar Evers, director of the NAACP in Mississippi, was shot to death in his driveway, and four African American children were killed in the Klan bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. In June 1964, three Civil Rights activists, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney, disappeared near Philadelphia, Mississippi. Their bodies were discovered on August 4. On December 4, the FBI arrested twenty-one persons, including the Neshoba County sheriff and his deputy.


William W. Keller, who studied the FBI files in detail, attributed the inaction of the FBI vis-à-vis the Klan violence to the ideological stance of J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI who had reigned over the agency since its birth in 1924. According to Keller, the FBI’s operation was based on the conventional anti-Communist discourse. In order to justify FBI’s surveillance and disruption of the Klan activities, Hoover tried to find commonality between Communists and Klansmen, with little success. Hoover, thus, stressed the fact that the FBI was an investigative agency and not involved with crime prevention. Keller, 92-7. Others contended that Hoover’s personal stance towards the issue of Civil Rights was not much different from the Klansmen after all. Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope Days of Rage* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987).

Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the most vocal critics of the FBI’s inaction in regard to the continuous occurrence of violence against African Americans in the South. J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, in turn argued that the Civil Rights movement was influenced by the Communist Party, and ordered wiretapping of King and other Civil Rights leaders. Keller, 103-10.


By the end of 1969, at least 30 members of the Black Panther Party were in custody facing the death penalty, another 40 facing life imprisonment, 55 facing sentences of thirty years or more, and still another 155 were forced underground or
into exile to avoid prosecution. Churchill, 105.
58 A Department of Justice memorandum from John W. Cameron, Deputy Chief, Interdivision Information Unit to Lawrence S. Hoffheimer, Community Relations Service, November 4, 1970. Interdivisional Information Unit, 1968-1976, Department of Justice, File, National Archives.
59 Allen, 14.
60 Valentine, “Negro Detention Camps.”
61 Hedgepeth, 87.
64 On the process of Title II repeal, see Raymond Okamura, “Background and History of the Repeal Campaign,” Amerasia Journal, 2:2 (Fall 1974): 73-94.
66 Novick, 132-42.
68 Novick, 6-7.
69 Novick, 83.
Masumi Izumi

1960年〜1970年のアメリカにおける「強制収容所」に関する噂の流布原因：
政治的抑圧に対する市民の恐怖感と緊急拘禁法

和泉真澄

アメリカ社会が黒人運動やベトナム反戦運動に揺れ動いていた1960年ごろより、黒人や左翼コミュニティのなかに、一つの噂が流れ始めた。「合衆国政府が国内に強制収容所を準備し、政府に不満をもつ者や黒人らを集団で送り込もうとしている」というこの噂は、1960年には、ブラックパワーや左翼系学生といったラディカルな反体制運動に関わっていた者のみならず、中産階級の黒人たちにまで影響を与えるようになっていた。本論は、この噂について取り上げた新聞・雑誌記事を分析すると同時に、当時のアメリカの社会的・文化的コンテキストを考察することにより、なぜこのような噂が流れたのかを解明することを目的としている。当時のコンテキストから、噂の流布原因として4つの要因が考えられる。すなわち、（1）1960年代後半の社会運動が、1960年代前半の公民権運動に比べて、反体制的であったこと、（2）当時の政府当局、とりわけ司法が反体制勢力や黒人運動家に対して、暴力をも辞さない抑圧的政策をとっていたこと、（3）「強制収容所」の歴史的先例として、第二次大戦中の日系アメリカ人の強制収容が記憶されていたこと、（4）1960年代末に、アメリカ文化のなかでユダヤ人の「ホロコースト」が一般に意識されるようになり、「強制収容所」という言葉が文化的に強い響きをもつ言葉となったことである。この「強制収容所」の噂は、1960年に噂の法的根拠となっていた緊急拘禁法が廃廃されることにより、最終的に終息を見ることであった。