American Civil Liberties Union records

Inventory

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GUIDE

Records of the National Office of the American Civil Liberties Union are held by Princeton University. The University of Washington has obtained microfilm copies of a selection of information files from those records.

As World War II began, President Roosevelt pledged to continue constitutional freedoms even in a state of war, a policy generally followed except for one major exception. Immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which created military zones to be run by the War Relocation Authority. All Japanese American citizens and Japanese aliens living within the military zones were to be interned. The ACLU denounced the order as contrary to liberty and due process and as racially motivated since it applied only to the Japanese.

As a result of Executive Order 9066, most Japanese Americans lost their homes, possessions, and in some cases their citizenship. Issues in the ACLU records include citizenship rights, property and land laws, deportations, renunciation cases, education and racism.

While western affiliates sought test cases--an activity made difficult by acquiescence among the Japanese--the ACLU split on the question of the limits of governmental power during wartime. A resolution approved the President's order in principle but provided four technical bases for challenging the order. The national organization's willingness to compromise on civil liberty issues during wartime led to considerable opposition from affiliates, especially those on the West Coast. Eventually the ACLU handled two leading cases involving the internment order, Korematsu and Hirabayashi.

Records included on the Manuscripts & University Archives microfilm are as follows:

General Clippings—Japanese American Cases

- 1942 (Vols. 2372-2373)
- 1943 (Vol. 2432)
- 1944 (Vol. 2583)

These clippings regarding the Japanese American internment were extracted from a larger general clipping series covering a variety of subjects in which the ACLU had a general interest but which were not directly associated with individual cases.

Correspondence—Federal Departments—Japanese American Internment
This series documents the ACLU's considerable correspondence with various departments of the federal government, especially in the area of due process.

An inventory of the material included on the three reels of microfilm appears below. Each line of the inventory represents a target page on the microfilm. Cases are listed by year, with many cases continuing over several years.

Researchers should be aware that this microfilm does not include all of the ACLU records pertaining to the Japanese internment available from Princeton. Most notably missing are three boxes of subject files dating from the post war period (bulk 1947-1949).

This microfilm is available for use in the Manuscripts & University Archives reading room. It is not available for loan. For information on viewing the original documents, terms regarding quotation in publication, or other administrative details, researchers should contact the Seely G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, 65 Olden Street, Princeton, NJ, 08544; Voice: (609) 258-6345; FAX: (609) 258-3385.

Special thanks to the Seely G. Mudd Manuscripts Library for permission to include this material from the ACLU archives and for information used here from its finding aids.

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