

KONRAD LINKE, *Das Tulare Assembly Center: Alltag in einem Lager für Japanoamerikaner im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2014), 276 pp.

In February of 1942, two months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 authorizing the forced relocation and incarceration of about 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry living on the Pacific Coast of the United States. The internees lost most of their property and many spent more than four years in the camps, even though the majority of them (62%) were American citizens. This so-called Japanese-American Internment during World War II is generally viewed today as one of the greatest injustices committed by the U.S. government in the twentieth century. Yet it took the government more than four decades to formally apologize for this action. President Ronald Reagan finally signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 admitting that the internment had been based on “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership” and granted a small monetary compensation to individual internment camp survivors.

With his book *Das Tulare Assembly Center: Alltag in einem Lager für Japanoamerikaner im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Konrad Linke furnishes us with a new contribution to the rich body of scholarship on the Japanese-American Internment that has been developing since the 1950s. In his historiographical review, the author elucidates the many topics previous studies have addressed, including the measure’s constitutionality, the role of Congress and the courts, the executive branch, and the military, as well as the significance of race and ethnicity, forms of accommodation and resistance, and the part anthropologists played in documenting it (2-7). What makes Linke’s study new and different is both its focus on Tulare, a previously rather unexplored internment camp in California,¹ and his methodology. His approach consists of a combination of *Alltagsgeschichte* (Lüdtke) and microhistory (Ginzburg), along with “thick description” (Geertz) and a decentralized analysis of pow-

er structures (Foucault) and social force fields (Thompson) (9-18). His declared goal is “to examine the complex interrelation of normative structures and objective circumstances, on the one hand, with subjective perception and action, on the other”² (1). The author does not want to downplay the power of the military in controlling the internees’ life and also takes a close look at the role of the so-called civilian property manager, Nils Aanonsen—a Norwegian American who was appointed to manage the camp on behalf of the Western Defense Command (WDC). Nonetheless, his main focus is on the agency of the confined Japanese Americans themselves. According to the evidence he found, the internees were not passive victims but constantly tried and to some extent succeeded in retaining their dignity and some control over their everyday lives within the confines of living in the Tulare Assembly Center (8-9).

The book is divided into eleven chapters framed by an introduction and a conclusion. After stating his goal and reviewing the historiography (1-8), Linke offers an eight-point explanation of the various theories and methodologies he utilizes (8-18). Finally, he describes his sources—an impressive variety of government and military records as well as archival reports and oral history records from the *Japanese (American) Evacuation and Resettlement Study* (JERS)—and explains the definition of important terms. Regarding, for example, the highly contested use of “internment,” “imprisonment,” “incarceration” or “confinement” in recent scholarship, Linke argues that it is best to use different terms depending on the specific context given the rather diverse nature of the camps (18-21).

The first two chapters of the book’s main part recount the historical context, from the beginning of Japanese immigration to the West Coast of the United States in the 1880s and the events following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, to the forced relocation of Japanese Americans into camps guarded by the U.S. military in the spring of 1942. These two chapters provide an excellent survey of the Japanese immigrant experience as well as of how the white majority perceived and treated them. It also reveals that the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II fit into a long pattern of virulent racial prejudice and anti-Japanese

¹ The book is a slightly edited version of the first part of Linke’s dissertation manuscript, which compared the Tulare Assembly Center to the Gila River Relocation Camp in Arizona.

² My translation.

laws that had existed on the West Coast for decades before Pearl Harbor. Already ineligible for naturalization (due to a 1790 immigration statute), first-generation Japanese immigrants (*Issei*) were also legally prohibited from owning or even leasing land throughout California, Washington, and Oregon in the 1920s. Their descendants (*Nisei*) also experienced stinging social and economic discrimination despite their U.S. citizenship. Thus, race was clearly an essential factor in the general disregard, the long-standing mistreatment and, finally, the war-time internment of people of Japanese descent in the United States (23-65).

The following nine chapters (67-228) provide a thorough examination of daily life at the Tulare Assembly Center. Linke looks at the camp's opening in late April of 1942, its administrative structure, and the living conditions of its inmates, including their everyday schedule, food, housing, sanitation facilities, as well as opportunities for work, consumption, education, religious practice, sport, and recreation (chs. 3,4 and 8). The camp's many rules and regulations are described in great detail together with the role of the military, the civil administration and the inmate council in enforcing these rules and punishing offenders (chs. 5-6). The author also pays special attention to communication and information policies within the camp, analyzing, among other things, the contents of the *Tulare News*. This English-language newspaper was produced by the inmates but closely supervised by a special unit of the WDC, who took a keen interest in making sure that camp life was always presented in a positive light (ch. 7). Despite many positive aspects in the relationship between Tulare's inmate population and the camp's civil administration, there was also some friction among these two groups, as well as occasional disagreements between *Issei* and *Nisei* and increasing tension and mistrust between the military leadership and the inmate council. Finally, despite Aanonsen's repeated objections, the WDC insisted on abolishing the inmate council on August 1, 1942. Moreover, in the interest of consolidating its Japanese-American inmate population, the military decided to close down the Tulare Assembly Center altogether shortly thereafter. In late August of 1942, all of Tulare's 4,942 internees were transported to the Gila River Relocation Camp in Arizona (chs. 9-10). Depicting these last weeks at the camp and the distress many inmates felt about being

forced to leave their home state, Linke also takes a close look at the WDC's final report on the Tulare Assembly Center, especially the military's evaluation of the internees' level of loyalty to the United States. The documents examined in this chapter (ch. 11) show an astonishing lack of empathy and common sense among many WDC employees, who seemed unable to understand why many of the Japanese Americans, who had been dispossessed and imprisoned without having committed any crime, were not more enthusiastic about declaring their love and loyalty to the very government responsible for their ordeal.

In his brief conclusion, the author reasons that life at Tulare, despite its drawbacks, offered inmates at least some opportunities for meaningful work, community involvement, and some small level of self-government. Furthermore, Linke stresses that the relationship among the internees, the civilian administration, and the military was not always characterized by one-sided oppression and manipulations but presented a complex field of interaction. Confirming his original thesis, he states that the Japanese Americans at Tulare maintained their dignity and at least some sense of self-determination throughout their confinement. The author also points out that the previously unexplored sources he found in working on the study suggest topics for further research, such as communication exchange between the administrators of different internment camps or a comparison of different camp newspapers (229-32). In addition to its bibliography and index, the book also includes an appendix containing several tables with background information on Japanese Americans, the internment process, and the different camps under the jurisdiction of the WDC, as well as a variety of original documents relating to the administration, the programs, and the inmate council of the Tulare Assembly Center (249-76).

There can be no doubt that *Das Tulare Assembly Center* contains a wealth of new information regarding Japanese-American internment camps. Based on his extremely meticulous examination of a huge number of sources, Konrad Linke is able to describe the experience of Japanese-American inmates at Tulare in a level of detail hardly reached by any similar study. This in itself is an impressive accomplishment. However, one wonders if the author made the right choice in cutting the second part of his original manuscript (dealing

with the Gila River Relocation Camp) entirely from the book, instead of perhaps focusing on fewer details of one camp but then comparing and contrasting the two camp experiences. Also, some kind of assessment of the general differences between internment camps in the United States and other internment camps during World War II (e. g., the Japanese camps in the Philippines or the German concentration camps) could have provided additional insights. Devoid of such comparative elements,

the study sometimes comes across as more descriptive than analytical in nature. Nevertheless, the book has many merits. Among the most important are Linke's fascinating insights into the previously hidden world of a confined living space *sui generis*, his discovery of a host of new sources and the questions he raises in his conclusion, which will hopefully encourage further innovative research in this field.

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