

SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW

GOVERNOR RALPH L. CARR OF COLORADO IN THE TURMOIL OF WORLD WAR II—AMERICA

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In the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States declared war against Japan on December 8, and belatedly issued a parallel declaration against Germany and Italy three days later. In the ensuing turmoil, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, leading to the wholesale uprooting of West Coast inhabitants of Japanese heritage. The subsequent Executive Order 9102 (March 18, 1942) and Public Law 503 (March 20, 1942) mandated the eviction, relocation, and incarceration of the target populace.¹

Close to 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry,² including 30,000 children, then living in the West Coast states and now classified as “enemy aliens,” suffered the exclusion experience for three years in a dozen concentration camps, located in the most desolate, hostile areas of the country.³ More than seventy percent of all those “enemy aliens” had been born in the United States—hence, they were full-fledged American citizens. The enormous ravages wreaked upon these victims were detailed later in the

¹For the details, consult such sources as Roger Daniels, *The Concentration Camps, North America: Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II* (Malabar, FL: R.E. Krieger, 1981), and *Prisoners without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Macmillan, 2004); Bill Hosokawa, *JACL in Quest of Justice* (New York: William Morrow, 1982); Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Jacobus tenBroek, Edward N. Barnhart, and Floyd W. Matson, *Prejudice, War, and the Constitution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

²The figure of 120,000 is roughly equal to the whole 1950 population of Tampa, FL, or Baton Rouge, LA, while exceeding that of Phoenix, AZ, or San Jose, CA, in the same year. See Thomas James, *Exile Within: The Schooling of Japanese Americans 1942-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); War Relocation Authority, U.S. Department of Interior, *Evacuated People: A Quantitative Description* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946).

³The larger ten of these concentration camps, then euphemistically called “relocation centers,” were located in California, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, and Arkansas. Each housed 10,000 to 20,000 evacuees. See Deborah Gesensway and Mindy Roseman, *Beyond Words: Images from America's Concentration Camps* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); John Howard, *Concentration Camps on the Home Front: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

report of the U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians.⁴ Meanwhile, neither the 160,000 Japanese-lineage Americans in Hawaii nor the 201,000 Italian and German aliens residing in the Western states at the time were subjugated to similarly discriminatory treatment.⁵

Yet, in Colorado at least, this story of national infamy has a solitary hero in the person of Ralph Lawrence Carr. Born in 1887 in Rosita, a small silver-mining town of south-central Colorado, and schooled in Cripple Creek, a historic gold-mining town west of Colorado Springs, Carr earned a law degree from the University of Colorado. Then he began his practice in Antonito, another small town in south-central Colorado, bordering New Mexico. Thereafter, having progressively held the positions of county attorney, state assistant attorney general, and then U.S. district attorney, Carr was elected the governor of Colorado in 1939 and served two terms through 1943.

Under Executive Order 9102, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) had the task of relocating and handling the excluded population of Japanese lineage. In a Salt Lake City meeting on April 7, 1942, the new WRA head, Dr. Milton S. Eisenhower, requested the cooperation of the governors of fourteen Western states in the resettlement of the displaced people. Governor Carr, who had opposed Executive Order 9066 from the outset,⁶ stood totally alone in declaring his state's welcome for the evacuees.⁷ Against overwhelming opposition everywhere, he argued that "one cannot test the degree of a man's affection for his fellows or his country by the birthplace of his grandfather!" He declared that "I am dedicated to the proposition that the Constitution must operate and function in time of war just as it does in time of peace," and insisted

⁴U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1982). Also, see John Hersey, "A Mistake of Terrifically Horrible Proportions," in *Manzanar*, J. Armor and P. Wright, eds. (New York: Times Books, 1988), 1-66; and Howard, *Concentration Camps*.

⁵Andrew W. Lind, *Hawaii's Japanese* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947); tenBroek et al., *Prejudice, War*, 99, 112-13, 116, 120; U.S. Department of Justice, *Report to Congress of the United States: A Review of the Restrictions on Persons of Italian Ancestry during World War II* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2001). At the time, national surveys by two opinion research firms revealed some noticeable contrasts in popular attitudes against the Germans compared to opposition against Japanese, Adam Schrager, *The Principled Politician: The Ralph Carr Story* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2008), 174-75, 250-51.

⁶Schrager, *Principled Politician*, 112, 133.

⁷Ivona Elenton, "Governor Ralph Carr: An Archival Research Handbook to a Colorado Governor's Collection" (Uppsala University, Sweden, Master's Thesis, 2010), 28; Bill Hosokawa, *Colorado's Japanese Americans: From 1886 to the Present* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 90; tenBroek et al., *Prejudice, War*, 89.

that "if we do not protect and preserve the Constitution and the Bill of Rights for all men today, it will not serve as a protection for any man six months from now."⁸

For his steadfast, principled, and humanitarian stance in the face of the mass anti-Japanese hysteria of the day, critics maligned Governor Carr bitterly as a "Jap lover," even within his own state.⁹ A loss in his 1942 bid for a U.S. Senate seat rang the death knell for Carr's promising political future on the national stage. Thereafter, even the name of this man of principle has been mostly obliterated from the memory of both the general populace and the political circuit. He returned to his private practice as a country lawyer, continuing to fight Americans against "the shame and dishonor of race hatred" he had originally witnessed in small mining towns of Colorado and also against federal infringement upon Constitution-warranted state rights, particularly in relation to the water management issue in the western states.¹⁰ Eight years later, during a re-election campaign for the governorship in 1950, his life was cut short tragically by a heart attack at the age of 63. In the years following his death, even the name of this man of principle was mostly obliterated from the memory of both the general populace and the political circuit. But times change and so can memories.

Needless to say, Americans of Japanese heritage never forgot their debt to this exceptional public figure, a fighter and martyr for justice. Over the years, they repeatedly expressed their appreciation and respect for his "courageous stand for Democratic American principle." That phrase was inscribed on a gold watch, presented to Governor Carr at the 1946 Denver convention of the Japanese American Citizens League. In 1974, a plaque honoring him as "a wise, humane man, not influenced by the hysteria and bigotry directed against the Japanese-Americans during World War II" was placed just outside the governor's office in the Colorado capitol by the Japanese community and the Oriental Culture Society of Colorado. In 1976, the centennial year of Colorado statehood, a bust of the governor was built in Sakura Square in downtown Denver, touting him for his "wisdom and courage to speak out on behalf of the persecuted minority."

Belatedly in 1996, the Colorado legislature honored Carr for his "efforts to protect Americans of Japanese descent during World War II." And the *Denver Post*, which had been one of his most strident critics in 1942, selected Carr as Colorado's

⁸Schrager, *Principled Politician*, 90, 223, 238, 293, 301.

⁹For instance, in 1940, the Denver City Council "twice openly condemned the governor and his policy on the [Japanese] issue" (Schrager, 2008, 297). At the end, nevertheless, "Carr's belief in Japanese [proved] accurate. There were no examples of sabotage committed by anyone of Japanese ancestry living in the United States during the war." *Ibid.*, 315; also, tenBroek et al., *Prejudice, War*, 93, 139.

¹⁰Jason Brockman, "Biography of Ralph L. Carr" (The Governor Ralph L. Carr Collection at the Colorado State Archives), <http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/doit/archives/govs/carr.html>; Hosokawa (2002), 95, 97.

“Person of the Century” for his “humane leadership during one of the nation’s most troubled times.”¹¹ In the same year, another memorial was placed on the capital ground of Colorado as “a remembrance of Governor Carr and Those Americans Who Passed through the Gates of Amache . . . to secure the blessing of liberty.”¹² This was under the joint auspices of the Colorado Bar Association and the Japanese American community.

More recently, in 2008, the Colorado General Assembly designated a major north-south highway “Ralph Carr Memorial Highway” (U.S. 285 over the symbolic, 10,000-foot Kenosha Pass, all the way into New Mexico).¹³ Further, in the fall of 2009, the Denver City Council voted “for the preservation of the home of former Governor Ralph Carr.”¹⁴ Significant, likewise, was the dedication in May 2013 of the new Ralph L. Carr Judicial Center in Denver, “as a Symbol of the Rule of Law.”¹⁵

Thus, the thoughts and deeds of this remarkable man of integrity and courage live on to inspire and instruct, making Ralph Lawrence Carr somebody every American should know.

¹¹Hosokawa (2005), 99.

¹²<http://www.colorado.gov> (Colorado Capitol Art—Grounds, Memorial Pods—South Pod, No. 116).

¹³<http://www.Coloradocapitoljournal.blogspot.com/2008/03/us-highway>.

¹⁴Christopher N. Osher, “Denver backs preservation of Gov. Carr’s former home,” *Denver Post*, September 29, 2009.

¹⁵Dan Cordova, “A Symbol of the Rule of Law: The Ralph L. Carr Colorado Judicial Center Consolidates the Judicial Department into a Single Iconic Building,” <http://www.aallnet.org/main-menu/Publications/Spectrum/Archives/Vol-17/No-7/colorafo.pdf>.