IN AUGUST 1943, Galen M. Fisher’s seminal essay entitled “Our Two Japanese-American Policies” appeared in *The Christian Century*. It portrayed the two diverse policies then employed by the United States government respecting the two large population concentrations of Americans of Japanese ancestry (AJAs). Along the West Coast AJAs had been recently interned by the government. This policy involved removal from their homes and communities and tremendous property losses. In the Hawaiian Islands AJAs had been allowed to remain in their homes and function as a necessary and appreciated part of Hawaiian society. What accounts for this discrepancy? Fisher noted several factors. First, on the mainland, agitation, popular pressure and threats of violence preceded the decision to intern AJAs. The anti-AJA bias of General John DeWitt, then the commander of the Western Defense Command, was also portrayed as a significant factor. By contrast, Fisher commended the calming hand of General Delos Emmons, who served as DeWitt’s counterpart in Hawaii. Fisher wrote:

> About 37 percent of the islands’ population is of Japanese ancestry. One might therefore have expected a more drastic treatment of the Japanese than prevailed on the mainland. The contrary was the fact. General Emmons as well as civil leaders of public opinion did all in their power to preserve the self-respect of the Japanese residents. Only 390 persons of Japanese extraction were interned, and half of those were consular and other officials of Japan. A few hundred others were evacuated to mainland relocations centers. The remaining 159,000 Japanese were treated like all other inhabitants.¹
Fisher then highlighted “the litmus test of the two policies:” in Hawaii, AJAs responded to patriotic appeals with unparalleled zeal. On the mainland, many normally loyal AJAs were temporarily disillusioned with American ideals and institutions given the distrust and disrespect that had been shown them. The author revealed possible “cynical” motives for the Hawaiian policy: Hawaii’s AJA work force was needed in the islands. Also, tremendous logistical difficulties would have been involved in evacuating them to internment camps given the paucity of available shipping. Fisher emphasized that the islands, in contrast to West Coast states such as California, had a tradition of racial fair play. In summation, Fisher identified this last mentioned factor, together with General Emmons’ personal qualities, as underwriting the benign Hawaiian policy toward AJAs. “There is abundant reason to ask,” he concluded, “whether a similar policy could not have been applied to advantage on the mainland.”

The following year, Carey McWilliams continued this same theme of contrasting a successful Hawaiian AJA policy with the disastrous alternative on the West Coast. Similar to Fisher, McWilliams emphasized the Hawaiian tradition of relative racial tolerance and General Emmons’ sensible and level-headed behavior in contrast to that of General DeWitt. Economic considerations involving the Hawaiian work force and the scarcity of shipping in 1942 were also identified. Then, almost as an afterthought, he noted that “a military dictatorship was promptly imposed upon the people of Hawaii of the most exacting, complete, and minute character.” Yet, he did not explore this additional factor beyond this statement. Fisher’s only mention of Hawaii’s wartime military government had been the briefest passing reference to the declaration of martial law after the Pearl Harbor attack.

Since that time, the comparison of the mainland and Hawaiian AJA policies has remained essentially unchanged. Roger Daniels, the dean of historians commenting upon official treatment of AJAs during World War II, has emphasized the personal role of Emmons, Hawaii’s labor needs and the aforementioned logistical problems in carrying out a mass internment
in Hawaii.4 Many others have repeated this well-established interpretation.5 Nevertheless, it has a serious flaw. While this account does not completely ignore the fact of Hawaii’s wartime military government, it does ignore the fact that this standard comparison drawn between Hawaii and the West Coast makes a contrast between proverbial apples and oranges. Throughout most of the war, and certainly in 1942 when the internment decision was made for West Coast AJAs, Hawaii experienced what one author has called “the only true fascism which has ever existed on American soil.”6 By contrast, democratic government existed along the West Coast. Hawaii was governed similar to an extended military base. By contrast, the West Coast states were characterized by the kind of mass hysteria unfortunately typical of democracies during times of high anxiety. The failure to explore this crucial difference between the relative political settings of America’s two wartime AJA policies has resulted in a two-dimensional portrait.

The story of military government in Hawaii is well documented. Many books and articles have fully described its scope and intent. Yet, this information has not been included in the aforementioned comparisons of America’s two Japanese-American policies during World War II. This article will seek to include this important missing ingredient in the story. As a result, readers should come away with a more complete understanding of why the Hawaiian policy was not employed on the mainland and why the mainland policy was rejected for Hawaii.

A fundamental reason for Hawaii’s different policy can be found in the language of the United States Constitution. Article I, section 9, paragraph 2 of that document states: “The Privilege of the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended, unless when in cases of rebellion or invasion the public safety may require it.” Immediately following the Pearl Harbor attack, military authorities used this clause to justify their suspension of all civil liberties in Hawaii.7 To a large measure, this action had the effect of interning everyone in Hawaii, thereby making a serious consideration of a segregated internment for only AJAs somewhat redundant. In spite of military government, some continued to regard Hawaiian AJA internment as necessary.
However, the harsh facts of military government enabled persons such as General Emmons to demonstrate that internment in Hawaii was not needed and indeed would hamper the war effort.

Hawaii's wartime policy of controlling its Japanese residents had been carefully planned well before December 7, 1941. Whereas on the West Coast AJAs were an insignificant fraction of the general population, in Hawaii Territory they were more than one-third of the people. In this sense, they were somewhat analogous to the Sudetan Germans of Czechoslovakia, a comparison not lost on Hawaii's military establishment. Following the fall of France, the military in Hawaii began to promote interracial unity in the islands. Advisory boards consisting of each significant ethnic group, including Japanese, were created. Thereafter, Army and FBI officials gave regular community talks promoting the concept that everyone living in Hawaii belonged on the same team. Ironically, this effort was later vilified in the Roberts Commission Report, the government's earliest official study of the Pearl Harbor attack. Specifically, the Commission charged, AJA "fifth columnists" had not been arrested prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor out of fear "that their arrest would tend to thwart the efforts which the Army had made to create friendly sentiment toward the United States on the part of Japanese aliens resident in Hawaii and American citizens of Japanese descent resident in Hawaii and create unnecessary bad feeling."

In fact, the Army's program was quite conservative and not prone to wishful thinking. Major General Charles D. Herron, who commanded the Hawaiian department of the Army until February 1941, estimated that 10 percent of Hawaii's residents of Japanese ancestry were evenly divided between loyal and disloyal elements and that the remaining 90 percent were sitting on the fence "until they saw which way the cat was going to jump." Given this perception, the Army did not regard interracial goodwill as the foundation of its AJA policy in Hawaii. General Walter Short, Herron's successor, worked with the territorial legislature to strengthen the executive powers of the territorial governor in case of war in the Pacific. By the fall of
1941, when General Short testified before the territorial legislature in favor of a bill to strengthen the executive, he and many others expected that Japan would someday attack the Philippines or some other area in the southwestern Pacific, thereby dragging the United States into war. Under such circumstances, strengthened executive powers in the territorial governor’s office might have sufficed. However, the Army had contingency plans. As early as 1940, it had begun to explore the erection of military government in Hawaii in case the islands actually became a combat area. This more dire alternative included steps not contemplated by the territorial legislature, namely, the Commander of the Hawaiian Department of the Army becoming Military Governor, the closure of the civil courts and the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus.10

The attack on Pearl Harbor was the “invasion” that activated the Army’s past planning to install military government over Hawaii’s entire population. General Short pressured the civilian territorial governor in the heat of the emergency to acquiesce to the new order. Throughout the remainder of that anxious December, and indeed until the successful conclusion of the Battle of Midway the following June, reasonable people did not seriously question the necessity for military government in the islands. After Midway, Hawaii was no longer threatened by invasion, yet authorities continued to use the attack of December 7, 1941, to justify the continued existence of military government.11

President Roosevelt had earlier been convinced of the necessity to employ a policy of mass internment for Hawaii’s Japanese residents. Military government ultimately made that extremely awkward, inefficient, and ugly possibility unnecessary. Under military government, all of Hawaii’s inhabitants were fingerprinted, registered and issued personal identification cards, which they were required to carry at all times. Military censorship was instituted both for newspapers and radio broadcasts. At the outset, the press and radio were restricted to use only the English language, but as the mechanisms for control became regularized some greater flexibility in language use was permitted. Persons were arrested and given no reasons. Trial by jury
was suspended as seen fit by the military, and those trials allowed to occur were in the spirit of military government. One critic wrote of these trials: "No matter what evidence is produced the ‘trial’ will result in conviction. An acquittal before these tribunals is a rare animal. Accordingly, in most cases a plea of guilty is entered to avoid the imposition of a more severe penalty. Those who have the temerity to enter a plea of not guilty are dealt with more severely for having chosen that course." Some were accused of specific crimes, but, as this same critic noted, many were found guilty merely for "violating the spirit of martial law."12

Under Hawaii’s military government, travel was restricted, telephone conversations were required to be in English and employment was controlled. Commercial fishing, dominated by AJAs before the war, was prohibited due to the opportunity to communicate with submarines. Strict curfews were enforced and all persons of Japanese extraction were not allowed to possess weapons, maps, signalling devices or similar objects. The 6,435 square miles comprising the tight geographic confines of the islands were run as a military reservation. During the war, servicemen would call the 604 square miles known as Oahu, which was the most heavily populated island, “the Rock.” The military governor would call it “one of the greatest fortresses on earth.”13

Fear of AJA “fifth columnists” in Hawaii explained both the pre-war planning for military government and its maintenance after the real threat of invasion had passed. Ironically, General Short himself, Hawaii’s first military governor after the Pearl Harbor attack, would be undone by this fear. Anticipating sabotage by Hawaii’s Japanese, he had ordered that all war planes be kept close together on the ground to facilitate the task of protecting them. When the attack from the air came, Short’s earlier decision insured their easy destruction. Blamed for this and other errors, Short was relieved of his command and replaced as military governor by General Delos Emmons in mid-December.14

Several vignettes demonstrate the nature of Hawaii’s military government. Emergency Service Committees, popularly
known as "Morale Committees," served in a kangaroo-court capacity. AJAs deemed suspicious by these groups were hauled before a committee and advised to donate blood to erase their suspected disloyalty. Public schools also were conduits for the military government. AJA children were given lessons on "Americanism" to take home to their alien parents. These same children were also taught defense regulations and martial law in school. AJAs on relief were ordered to be shipped to the mainland, a fact that caused some to remove themselves from the welfare rolls to avoid "evacuation." At the outset of the war, no AJAs were accepted for military service and consequently Hawaii’s young men of other racial groups were also not taken, so as not to leave only young men of doubted loyalty on the scene. In the midst of the Battle of Midway, Emmons reversed course and sent a group of AJAs that had been inducted prior to December 7, 1941 to the mainland for military training. This move inaugurated an ingenious aspect of the military’s policy to control Hawaii’s AJAs. AJA Army units once trained would be deployed in Europe, where their valorous deeds would receive more than normal Army publicity. This would serve to remove thousands of AJAs from the islands, while their military accomplishments would help nourish the loyalty felt by AJAs remaining in Hawaii. Once Hawaii’s AJAs began to be drafted for military service, it was done with an apparent dual motive. Of the 32,197 men inducted by Hawaiian Selective Service boards during the war, 49.9 percent were AJAs, while only 14.8 percent were Caucasian.15

Both those friendly toward and opposed to the prolongation of Hawaii’s military government after the victory at Midway acknowledged that the desire to control AJAs underwrote that decision. For some, military government chafed only as it applied adversely to Hawaii’s white citizenry. Punishment meted out to those of Japanese ancestry met with far less criticism.16 Other whites were quite willing to accept personal inconvenience and loss of liberties if it guaranteed military control over AJAs. In 1944 Walter F. Dillingham, President of Oahu Railway and Land Company, gave the following testimony before a Congressional investigating committee:
We [most of Hawaii's whites] were perfectly willing to go to bed at 10 o'clock and 8 o'clock and go without lights and all the rest of it, and nobody wanted any change, irrespective of what was said, that was the truth. . . . They felt that if there was anything lurking in the minds of [Hawaii's] Japanese or any tendency for any Japs to get together or any desire to do a thing like that, they were denied that opportunity under the curfew and were a darned sight safer as American citizens under that kind of military control, when the fear of immediate punishment was facing a violator of military law, as against cases dragged along in the courts. . . . It is the fear of punishment. . . . It was the teeth in the military control that made people feel comfortable.17

A few of Hawaii's whites, led by John A. Balch, Chairman of the Board of Hawaii's Mutual Telephone Company, would not feel safe until and unless mass removal of Hawaii's AJAs was forced. "If the Germans can move 3,000,000 men from occupied Europe within a short period, surely our great government can move 100,000 from Hawaii to the mainland without grave difficulties," he wrote in August of 1942.18 Balch was in a distinct minority, as most prominent whites agreed with Dillingham. Very few concurred with U.S. District Judge J. Frank McLaughlin that after Midway, military government should have ceased to exist. Lawyers and judges were commonly suspected of having greater loyalty to open courts and legal business-as-usual than to insuring a society internally secure from sabotage.19

In wartime Hawaii, as well as in California, Japanese-Americans were viewed by most whites as untrustworthy by means of their racial and cultural background. Rumors were rife in the islands during the early months of the war that portrayed AJAs as having worked to inebriate servicemen the evening before the attack, having cut earthen arrows in cane fields to mark the way for Japanese aircraft, having deliberately created traffic jams during the attack to hamper defense efforts, having aided enemy parachutists after the attack, having poisoned water supplies, having used ham radio sets to jam the airwaves on December 7, having hidden weapons for later use and having signaled enemy submarines from shore. In addition, many believed that some of the attacking planes were piloted by
AJAs from Honolulu, and that one Japanese resident in Hawaii was designated to become the Imperial Military Governor and had his uniform hidden away for the day when he would assume office.20

In neither California nor Hawaii in 1942 did whites view their AJA neighbors as being part of the “American” community. Hawaii had a history of exploiting Japanese labor in cane fields under conditions that were paternalistic at best. Before the war, a superficial air of racial equality characterized Hawaii. However, in the words of one observer, after the Pearl Harbor attack, “the melting pot now boiled in earnest.”21 Colonel George W. Bicknell, an Army observer somewhat sympathetic to AJAs, reported the white Hawaiian mood in 1942; “Desire for revenge upon any and all individuals of Japanese blood was freely expressed. These expressions ranged from wishing to shoot each Jap on sight to devising the most lingering form of death.”22 Hawaii’s Japanese-Americans felt this hatred, as recorded by one contemporary AJA:

An extreme degree of fear was present. Their [AJAs] first reaction to a stranger was fear — fear of being questioned, fear of being suspected, fear of being accused of being Japanese. “What is going to become of us?” seemed the question they all asked. . . . Their state of mind was comparable to that of a criminal expecting a severe punishment for a major offense. Vividly their imagination pictured the drastic punishment which would be meted out.23

Similar to social changes that occurred in mainland AJA communities, authority in Hawaiian Japanese families shifted from the first generation “Issei” to the more Americanized second generation “Nisei.” Although under different systems of social control (military government versus internment camps), Hawaiian and West Coast AJAs appear to have undergone similar stresses during the war years. However, Hawaii’s AJAs never had to undergo mass removal from their homes and communities, a result for which the institution of military government can take much of the credit.

In Hawaii, the military-controlled press and radio virtually ignored the Roberts Commission findings of AJA sabotage that
helped make removal and internment practically inevitable on the West Coast. Indeed, California’s free press and radio helped excite the public mind for evacuation even before the Roberts Commission findings were released. In Hawaii, before and after, press and radio releases were designed to calm the populace. The ultimate purpose of those controlling Hawaii’s newspapers and radio broadcasts (i.e., the military authorities) was to prevent the fall of the islands to the Japanese. Accordingly, they worked to keep the civilian population stable and sensible as that served their objective. The ultimate purpose of those controlling West Coast newspapers (i.e., their editors and publishers) was to fill the void doubly created by an anxious public hungry for war news and a dearth of real war news resulting from the Roosevelt administration’s reluctance to provide evidence of military failure in the unhappy early months of the war. Understandably, the attention of a free press in a racist society focused upon supposed representatives of the enemy at hand — the Japanese-Americans living in their midst.

On January 18, 1942, an editorial appearing in Honolulu’s chief newspaper advised the following:

The passing on of rumors is useless, it might be said, unpatriotic. After all, Army authorities have everything in hand and under control. They are not passing out any unfounded rumors, and they never will. They know and understand every phase of the matter. Their work, however, is not made easier by civilians repeating silly inaccurate statements.

Shortly thereafter, Los Angeles’ principal newspaper was passing on any and every vicious rumor concerning AJAs. For example, the Los Angeles Times gave extensive coverage to a report leaked from Congressman Martin Dies’ Committee on Un-American Activities that charged that AJA volunteer organizations were involved in espionage activities, that AJAs lived near power stations and other critical areas for purposes of future sabotage, that the Japanese had plans to poison or destroy Los Angeles’ water system and that seemingly average AJAs had powerful radios to send vital information to Tokyo. A review of the Honolulu Advertiser for the same period reveals ample cov-
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...average of weddings in Oahu and nothing relating to Congressman Dies or any other demagogic voice. Military censors saw to that.

In Hawaii, after December 7, there was no democratic government. There were no constituent assemblies to feel the hot blasts of public hysteria and racism. On the West Coast this was not the case. Petitions and resolutions negatively concerning AJAs could and did reverberate through the halls of democratic government. City and County Boards of Supervisors meetings served as forums where wild statements were uttered and treated with the dignity of fact. Indeed, the relationship between free government and a free press was symbiotic in this crisis. The deliberations and actions of city and county governments provided "copy" for sensationalist newspapers hungry for war news. Democratic legislative activities of higher levels of government also helped fuel the fires for AJA mass internment. Specifically, a Congressional investigative committee headed by California Congressman John Tolan conducted hearings on the West Coast regarding the AJA question from February 21 to March 12, 1942. The "democratic" hearing, amply covered by the "free" press, helped solidify the mass consensus for violating the constitutional rights of the West Coast's AJAs. And, as we have seen, press releases by Congressman Martin Dies served the same unfortunate end.30

Some scholars have stressed the various interest groups, including the Native Sons of the Golden West, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and the Western Growers' Protective Association, among others, that pressed for AJA "evacuation" from the West Coast during the early months of 1942.31 These manifestations were the natural products of a free society. In Hawaii, where free government and a free press had been shelved, anti-AJA interest groups were rendered harmless. Given the prevalent racism of that era, free expression and democracy led inevitably to publicly sanctioned harsh treatment of AJAs. Military government and a restricted press alone held the promise that the popular tendencies of that day might be thwarted.32

Since World War II, comparisons of America's two wartime Japanese-American policies have deemphasized Hawaii's experience with military government or ignored it altogether. This
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practice has created a false impression that the United States government employed a system of social control for West Coast AJAs but no meaningful system in Hawaii. While the traditional reasons given for the discrepancies between the two policies are valid, they are less significant than the overriding fact of military government in Hawaii. Hawaii's military dictatorship actively prevented anti-AJA hysteria from developing in the islands by cutting off all sources of real public debate. Paradoxically, in Hawaii, dictatorial government for all resulted in relative freedom for AJAs. In contrast, on the West Coast a general environment of freedom brought a temporary loss of Japanese Americans' liberty and a yet-to-be-repealed distortion of traditional constitutional guarantees.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 963.
8. Roger Daniels suggests that some pre-planning for interning AJAs on the mainland might have occurred before Pearl Harbor. See his "The Discussions to Relocate the North American Japanese: Another Look," Pacific Historical Review, 51 (February 1982): 71-77.
9. Robert L. Shivers, Cooperation of the Various Racial Groups With Each Other and With the Constituted Authorities Before and After December 7, 1941, Statement Presented

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10Allen, Hawaii's War Years, pp. 79-80, 82-83; Congressional Record, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., Appendix, A4670; Colonel George W. Bicknell, “Security Measures In Hawaii During World War II” (Typed unpublished MSS, University of Hawaii, circa 1944, Reel 54, item 5), p. 36.


18John Adrian Balch, Shall the Japanese Be Allowed to Dominate Hawaii? (Honolulu: s.n., 1942), p. 9.


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28Honolulu Advertiser, January 18, 1942, 18:1.


