

Japanese Internment in the United States

Iwao Matsushita



OVERVIEW

During World War II, the United States government confined approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans to detention centers surrounded by barbed wire and patrolled by soldiers. More than two-thirds of those relocated were native-born American citizens. The dislocation, degradation, and disruption of their lives remains an unparalleled and shameful event in American history. The excerpts below tell the story of one couple who suffered a two-year separation. Iwao Matsushita, an Issei (a first-generation immigrant and alien ineligible for citizenship) living in Seattle, was imprisoned as a security risk immediately after Pearl Harbor at Fort Missoula, Montana. His wife, Hanaye, also an Issei, was confined at the Hunt relocation center in Idaho. Iwao's attempts to be reunited with his wife appear here in two letters. The first was addressed to Attorney General Francis Biddle, the second to the United States attorney in Seattle. The couple finally reunited in the camp at Hunt in 1944.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- What is Matsushita requesting?
- How are Matsushita and his wife suffering?

I was born a Christian in a Methodist minister's family, educated in an American Mission School, came to this country in 1919 from sheer admiration of the American way of life. I have always been living, almost half and best part of my life, in Seattle, Wash., and never went to Japan for the last twenty-four years, despite the fact there were many such opportunities, simply because I liked this country, and the principles on which it stands.

I have never broken any Federal, State, Municipal, or even traffic laws, and paid taxes regularly. I believe myself one of the most upright persons. I have never been, am not, and will never be potentially dangerous to the safety of the United States. There isn't an iota of dangerous elements in me, nor should there be any such evidence against me. . . .

My wife, with whom I have never been separated even for a short time during last twenty-five years, and who has the same loyalty and admiration for this country, is living helplessly and sorrowfully in Idaho Relocation Center. You are the only person who can make us join in happiness and let us continue to enjoy the American life.

Many friends of mine who were here with me in 1942 and later transferred south . . . are now enjoying reunion with their families.

My wife, who is ill and under a doctor's care . . . has been patiently waiting for my return for two long years. . . . This was the third Christmas she had to observe so miserably. I don't like her to be tortured like this on account of my

being detained here. I like to help her, nurse her, and cheer her up. When I heard a certain wife died alone without her husband at her side, I simply couldn't but shudder at the thought that the same fate might be falling upon us. As we never lived apart in our married life for 23 years before my apprehension, it is simply unbearable to have to live like this for so long. . . .

I can assure you that there is not one iota of danger to the safety of the American public when I am allowed to live with my wife.

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