



A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America

Greg Robinson

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The confinement of some 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II, often called the Japanese American internment, has been described as the worst official civil rights violation of modern U. S. history. Greg Robinson not only offers a bold new understanding of these events but also studies them within a larger time frame and from a transnational perspective.

Drawing on newly discovered material, Robinson provides a backstory of confinement that reveals for the first time the extent of the American government's surveillance of Japanese communities in the years leading up to war and the construction of what officials termed "concentration camps" for enemy aliens. He also considers the aftermath of confinement, including the place of Japanese Americans in postwar civil rights struggles, the long movement by former camp inmates for redress, and the continuing role of the camps as touchstones for nationwide commemoration and debate.

Most remarkably, *A Tragedy of Democracy* is the first book to analyze official policy toward West Coast Japanese Americans within a North American context. Robinson studies confinement on the mainland alongside events in wartime Hawaii, where fears of Japanese Americans justified Army dictatorship, suspension of the Constitution, and the imposition of military tribunals. He similarly reads the treatment of Japanese Americans against Canada's confinement of 22,000 citizens and residents of Japanese ancestry from British Columbia. *A Tragedy of Democracy* recounts the expulsion of almost 5,000 Japanese from Mexico's Pacific Coast and the poignant story of the Japanese Latin Americans who were kidnapped from their homes and interned in the United States. Approaching Japanese confinement as a continental and international phenomenon, Robinson offers a truly kaleidoscopic understanding of its genesis and outcomes.

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