Americans in Concentration Camps excerpt
The Crisis

Source: “The Crisis” is a quarterly magazine founded by the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in 1910. It is one of the oldest black periodicals in America struggling for human rights for people of color. The excerpt below is from the article “Americans in Concentration Camps” which appeared in the September 1942 issue of “The Crisis”. It was written by Harry Paxton Howard.

... “Protective” Custody
... Army and Federal government officials...expressed...lynchings had to be prevented; for this, it was necessary to herd Japanese and Japanese-Americans into concentration camps – “for their own protection.” ... It is a sad commentary on the American way of life when we find it necessary to put American citizens behind barbed wire in order to protect them.

... The government ... could have clamped down on the Hitler-like racial fury of the anti-Japanese press, could have given wide circulation to the facts regarding Pearl Harbor and the splendid loyalty of most Americans of Japanese descent. ... So, instead, we slapped the “Japs” into concentration camps – for the protection of American soldiers in Japanese hands. So our Army also got some “prisoners” – and hostages.

... Filth and Squalor
There was no direct torture. It was an American, not a Nazi, concentration camp. Some of the older inhabitants ... suffered from insufficiency of their customary rice.... lacking tubs, buckets, washing machines, or sufficient soap. Perpetually dusty and dirty eyes were painful and “troublesome.” Babies found unwashed diapers painful as well as odorous. ... children sickened and died, living in a filth and squalor..... But there was no “torture.”

... It Concerns the Negro
What has happened to these Americans in recent months is of direct concern to the American Negro. For the barbarous treatment of these Americans is the result of the color line. ..... These men, women, and children have been taken from their pleasant homes and long-cultivated farms and businesses because their skins are yellow ... .... Americans of German or Italian descent ... are not being stuck into filthy and noisome shacks in vile concentration camps because they are of German and Italian ancestry; they are white....

Negros have been told again and again “Work quietly, be industrious, mind your own business, and you will get justice even in America.” That is what these yellow-skinned Americans believed. They worked, cheerfully and industriously. They turned deserts into beautiful and fertile farmland, grew vegetables and fruits for themselves and for others. They distinguished themselves at school, abstained from politics, had the lowest crime-rate of any group in the entire country. They earned the respect of all decent white persons ....

What has been their reward? They have been plundered of everything, and crowded in concentration camps fit only for pigs. ... And if native-born Americans of Asiatic descent can be denied all civil rights and civil liberties, what about Americans of African descent?

... This is an integral part of the struggle for human and racial equality. It concerns every Negro. It concerns every believer in democracy and human equality, regardless of color.