

WXPost Hoover Fought Niseis Internment

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

In exposing J. Edgar Hoover's peccadilloes and his trespasses on constitutional rights, it has been easy to ignore his other side: capable, industrious and often brave and decent.

To be sure, we have disclosed many of the old FBI autocrat's wrongdoings. Long before Hoover's death in 1972 made him fair game for a timid media, Drew Pearson was detailing both his fine points and his foibles.

In 1934, for instance, Pearson wrote of Hoover's stubborn insistence on being provided with an armored Pierce-Arrow just like the President's. But he also told of Hoover's unstinting effort to mold his young agency into a team of talented crimebusters.

During World War II, Hoover often cut corners with civil liberties. But another yellowing file which until now has been overlooked tells of his lonely battle to block the internment of 120,000 Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor.

The shameful story of the internment itself is an oft-told tale. Still, details from old, secret files are worth reflecting on for what they tell of Hoover at his best.

Outraged that American citizens of any color would be locked up without even a suspicion of disloyalty, Hoover dispatched fiery memos of up to 10 pages to then Attorney General Francis Biddle.

Hoover cleverly argued that German-

Americans or Italian-Americans might be just as dangerous, knowing that the politically savvy Franklin Roosevelt would never relocate millions of those ethnic Americans.

Residents from the western Axis countries, Hoover suggested, "present a problem equal to that of Japanese aliens," most of whom wanted to become citizens and viewed citizenship as "a privilege to be appreciated."

To keep pressure on the Roosevelt administration, the FBI chief called on FBI field offices for reports that he used to back his views that Nisei residents should be locked up only if caught in illegal acts.

The sheafs of old documents show Hoover laboriously canvassed five cities, then arranged the FBI reports to emphasize his own views.

Most prominently displayed was the report from his San Francisco office which said, "It is not believed that there is a legitimate reason for the mass evacuation." Even the most "pro-Japanese subjects," he quoted his agents as telling him, "insist that this is also their country and they would do nothing to harm it."

By contrast, a warning from Portland a out the Japanese-Americans was cut to two paragraphs, and a report critical of the Nisei from Seattle was relegated to the end to the end of Hoover's lengthy memo.

Hoover's genuinely courageous fight, in the face of opposition from Cabinet members and others more influential than

he, failed to block the relocation. But history proved him right, and among Japanese-Americans and in Japan, where reports of his campaign have trickled out, Hoover remains a folk hero.

Operation Bird-Dog — A team of Internal Revenue Service agents turned out for the Muhammed Ali-Jerry Quarry fight in 1970, but their interest was in the spectators rather than the spectacle.

As part of a tax-collecting exercise code-named "Operation Bird-Dog", the agents listed the license tags of the ringsiders who flocked to Atlanta for the match. Their hope was to catch the boxing bunch living beyond their means shown on their tax returns.

While the well-to-do cheered on Ali and Quarry, the gumshoes outside the auditorium were compiling registration numbers of cars costing up to \$25,000. The lists were forwarded to IRS officers around the country, and the owners' income tax forms were pulled.

It appears, however, that the fight fans came by their wealth more honestly than the federal snoopers suspected. Of five forms pulled in St. Louis, for example, only one, belonging to a professional wrestler, showed signs of "inadequate taxable income."

Footnote: Reps. Benjamin S. Rosenthal (D-N.Y.), and Elliott H. Levitas (D-Ga.) are looking into this and other IRS-intelligence-gathering operations. The IRS told us that "Bird-Dog" was "not something we would routinely do."