

## **Past Wrongs, Future Choices**

PWFC Works in Progress Series

### **Japanese Concentration Camps: In the Agenda of Negotiations between Brazil and the United States during World War II**

Monica Okamoto, Universidade Federal do Paraná, [setuyo2@gmail.com](mailto:setuyo2@gmail.com)

Past Wrongs, Future Choices works in progress are unfinished works, sufficiently developed to be shared for comment and discussion. Circulation in the academic community is encouraged. Please contact the author(s) before copying or republishing this work in whole or in part. Copyright © 2024 by Past Wrongs, Future Choices. All rights reserved.

Spring 2024

Monica S. Okamoto<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

There are numerous works that deal with the relationship between Brazil and the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, with special attention to the period of World War II,<sup>2</sup> however, with the exception of *Prisioneiros de Guerra (Prisoners of War)*, by Priscila Perazzo, no in-depth works were found that explore the connection of this alliance with the confinement and compulsory removal of Japanese from areas considered “strategic for national security”. Even Perazzo makes only brief mention of these incidents in her book, giving greater prominence to the seclusion of Germans and Italians. In the author's perception, “[...] there were few situations of internment of Japanese in Brazil detected in this research. The most significant case occurred in the colony of Tomé Açú”.<sup>3</sup>

However, in addition to Tomé Açú, in the state of Pará, according to some records, the Japanese were also imprisoned in the prison of Ilha das Flores (Rio de Janeiro); Ilha Anchieta (São Paulo), in the so-called “imprisonment camps” in Pindamonhangaba, Bauru, Ribeirão

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor at the Department of Modern Foreign Languages at Federal University of Parana (UFPR) and Postdoctoral fellow at the Graduate Program in Education at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). E-mail: [setuyo2@gmail.com](mailto:setuyo2@gmail.com) <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3014-6783>.

\*This work is part of the *Past Wrongs, Future Choices* Project coordinated by Jordan Stanger-Ross and Audrey Kobayashi, and received financial support from the *Scholars in Residence* Program (May 2023), at the University of Victoria, Canada.

\*\*Larissa Schmitz Nunes participated in this work as a research assistant (Dec. 2022 – May 2023).

\*\*\*Special thanks to Akira Miyagi, Eiki Shimabukuro and Reinaldo Yukihide Kanashiro from Associação Okinawa Kenjinkai do Brasil for donating the Muribushi journals and other relevant materials for the research and for the interviews, which were of great contribution. I also thank the documentarist Mário Jun Okuhara for the interview and for the materials provided.

\*\*\*\*Jun Sawada: Liberal Arts (International Studies and Humanities) student at Soka University of America, participated in this work as a research assistant under the sponsorship of the Pacific Basin Research Center fund (Jun – July 2023).

\*\*\*\*\*Special thanks to Philip S. MacLeod (PhD). Bibliographer for Latin American & Caribbean Studies, Luso-Hispanic Studies and Comparative Literature. Interim Bibliographer for African Studies of Emory University Libraries.

<sup>2</sup>Ricardo Antônio Silva Seitenfus, *O Brasil vai à Guerra: O Processo do Envolvimento Brasileiro na Segunda Guerra Mundial*. 3. São Paulo: Ed. Barueri/ Manole, 2003; Rebecca Herman, *Cooperating with the Colossus: A Social and Political History of US Military Bases in World War II Latin America*. Oxford University Press, 2022; Stanley Hilton, 1979. "Brazilian Diplomacy and the Washington-Rio de Janeiro “Axis” during the World War II Era,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*. 59, no. 2 (1979): 201-231.

<sup>3</sup> Perazzo, Priscila Ferreira, *Prisioneiros da Guerra: os 'Súditos do Eixo' nos Campos de Concentração Brasileiros (1942-1945)*. São Paulo: Impr. Oficial, Humanitas, 2009, p. 89.

Preto, Pirassununga, and Guaratinguetá<sup>4</sup> in the interior of the state of São Paulo; at the Hospedaria dos Imigrantes, at the Police Stations of the State Department of Political and Social Order (DEOPS or DOPS), and at the concentration camp from Granja Canguiri, in Paraná.

Given the above, this work intends to explore the confinement of Japanese and Japanese-Brazilians in the so-called “concentration camps” or “imprisonment camps”, and show that these actions were triggered as part of the military and economic negotiations between Brazil and the United States. In fact, the repression, persecution and restriction of civil rights against the Nikkei in Brazil were measures imposed by the American government as demonstrations of Brazilian alignment during the Second World War.

It is worth clarifying that, comparatively, the North American “model” of evacuation and internment of the Japanese and their descendants, executed in Brazil, was adapted to the social, political and economic circumstances of a poor country and under the command of a dictator who gave absolute powers to the police authority in their practices of investigation and the application of torture and murder.

These repressive measures resulted in the occurrence of a series of fratricides within the Japanese-Brazilian community in the postwar period that became known as the *Shindo Renmei* (League of the Path of Subjects) incident. After the end of these conflicts within the Nikkei community, some Japanese and Japanese-Brazilian leaders chose to voluntarily “erase” this period as they considered it shameful for the history of the Japanese Diaspora. The erasure of past traumas was also seen, by some Nikkei intellectuals at the time, as a necessary procedure to begin the integration of the Japanese into Brazilian society. For these Nikkei, integration was the only path to economic ascension for Japanese descendants who, from then on, began to spread the idea of the existence of racial democracy in Brazil. In addition to the Japanese community, the Brazilian government and the Japanese Consulate also apparently discarded and destroyed evidence from this period driven by political intentions.

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://memorialdaresistencia.org.br/lugares/campo-de-aprisionamentoguaratinguetaera-vargas/> accessed: June 29, 2023.

The lack of evidence and the concealment of these places of repression within the history of Brazil can be attributed, among other factors, to two long periods of dictatorship established in the country between 1937 to 1945 and 1964 to 1985. It was not by chance that government bodies such as the São Paulo State Department of Political and Social Order (DEOPS-SP or DOPS), which were very active, especially during dictatorial periods, had their files kept confidential and their access restricted for more than seventy years. The D.E.O.P.S., founded in 1924, had the purpose of investigating, preventing, and punishing crimes of a political and social nature against the security of the State. It was disestablished in 1985 but its archives became available to the public only from the mid-1990s.<sup>5</sup>

Since the 1930s, DEOPS maintained links with the American Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (after its official creation in 1947), which applied training to Brazilian agents and participated in the interrogations in the national territory.<sup>6</sup> The United States, in turn, also recently opened its secret official archives to researchers, which has allowed a greater understanding of geopolitics at the time of conflicts.

With regard to the bibliography on the subject, there are few records about this period in the official history and archives of Japanese-Brazilian entities. We sought support in DEOPS archives, US government websites, correspondence from diplomats, documentary and biographical works by Japanese immigrants, commemorative books by Japanese-Brazilian associations and investigative work by journalists from the Japanese-language press in Brazil. We also explored articles published by the Brazilian press during the war period, as well as archives from Itamaraty (Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Interestingly, in some commemorative books by Japanese-Brazilian associations (with the exception of the Okinawa Association of Brazil) we find very tenuous and even complimentary statements about the actions of the Brazilian government during the war.

---

<sup>5</sup> Caroline S. Bauer and René E. Gertz, "Arquivo de Regimes Repressivos. Fontes Sensíveis da História Recente V." In Pinsky, Carla Bassanezi; De Luca, Tania Regina eds. *O Historiador e suas Fontes*, 173-194. São Paulo, SP: Contexto, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; Marcos Tarcisio Florindo, "O DEOPS/SP na Era Vargas. Crescimento Institucional, Administração Burocrática e Práticas Tradicionais de Atuação Policial," *Aurora*. 5, no. 7 (2011): 124-139.

Even the Japanese-Brazilian newspapers, which were back to circulation in 1946, point out that Japanese immigrant was always well-received by Brazilians and that racial prejudice did not exist in Brazil. This concealment/erasure of part of the history of Japanese immigration will also be analyzed in this work, taking into account the post-war context of the Washington government's sudden lack of interest in Brazilian affairs, in contrast to the gradual growth of bilateral relations between Brazil and Japan from 1950 onwards.

Regarding the sources of this research, I highlight the work of two Nikkei journalists from the Japanese-Brazilian press who brought to light the history of the Japanese Diaspora in times of war and contributed to elucidating the facts of the past: Osamu Toyama<sup>7</sup>, author of the work *Cem Anos de Águas Corridas* (One Hundred Years of Running Waters) and Masayuki Fukasawa<sup>8</sup>, author of *Se um Grão de Arroz Não Morre* (If the Grain of Rice Doesn't Die).<sup>9</sup> Both journalists are emphatic in pointing out maneuvers by the US government in the cases of repression against the Japanese in Brazil during the war period. Another point in common in their work is the publication of testimonials by Japanese victims of the violence practiced by the Brazilian government during the period of conflict. We emphasize that both Toyama and Fukasawa carried out a vast survey in the editorials of pre-war Japanese-Brazilian newspapers, thus showing the other side of the story. Nevertheless, these investigative works, despite being essential in recovering the memory of the Japanese during the period of conflict, must be analyzed carefully, since the authors seem to demonstrate a dominant emotionality in their narratives. As journalists who follow the investigative line, Fukasawa and Toyama seem to seek their readers' adherence to the causes they defend. Another necessary addendum is that Toyama's work often lacks precise information about his sources, such as, for example, the publication dates of the newspaper articles he cited.

---

<sup>7</sup> Toyama was born in the city of Hamamatsu in 1941 and graduated in Sociology from Doshisha University in 1965. He has lived in Brazil since 1966, where he worked for several years at the Japanese-Brazilian newspaper *São Paulo Shimbun* (São Paulo News), before retiring.

<sup>8</sup> Fukazawa was born in Shizuoka in 1965, and he has lived in Brazil since 2000. Currently, he works as editor-in-chief of the *Nikkei Diário Brasil Nippon newspaper*.

<sup>9</sup> Osamu Toyama, *Cem Anos de Águas Corridas da Comunidade Japonesa*, São Paulo: AGWM, 2009; Masayuki Fukasawa, *Se um Grão de Arroz Não Morre: Colônias de Imigrantes Japoneses: Desvendando onde e como Tudo Começou*, São Paulo: Editoria Journalística União Nikkei LTDA, 2018.

In addition to these authors, we also work with the memories of three Japanese immigrants: the artist Tomoo Handa (1906-1996), author of *The Japanese Immigrant: History of his life in Brazil* (1987); the journalist Koichi Kishimoto (1898-1977) who in 1947 published *Isolated in a Territory at War in South America*, a work considered controversial, subversive and unpatriotic by the Brazilian government and which, after years of censorship, had its relaunch in 2022 ; and, finally, Tsunetoshi Tokuo , whose diary was published by Sumu Arata in a special series of the Japanese-Brazilian newspaper *Diário Nippaku* between December 13, 1994 and August 1, 1995 and, later, published in the work *The Martyrdom of the Japanese Immigrant During the Pacific War*.<sup>10</sup>

Although none of these authors were confined in concentration camps or were victims of compulsory removal, they reproduce the testimony of the victims with whom they had contact, in addition to narrating, naturally, their opinions and feelings about what happened, since they were not immune to suffering in these times of persecution, psychological oppression, moral violence, and financial losses. Finally, it is important to consider that only recently these works of an intimate nature on the subject (memoirs, interviews, and diaries of Japanese immigrants) have been published, but still with a restricted reach to the general public, and many of these productions circulate only within the Japanese-Brazilian community. This effort of remembering and claiming for the history of the current generation of Nikkei leads us to reflect on the right and duty of memory. Apparently, many facts about this period remain hidden, and with the death of victims and witnesses, these memories are at risk of being extinguished.

This discussion on the defense of memory, however, has become increasingly complex as we delve into the episodic situations of each victim and the legal protections unavailable to Japanese immigrants in the 1940s and 1950s in Brazil. We will see in this work that the Japanese community itself, the Japanese-Brazilian entities and associations, in communion

---

<sup>10</sup> Tomoo Handa, *O Imigrante Japonês: História de Sua Vida no Brasil*, São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiro, 1987; Koichi Kishimoto, *Isolados em um Território em Guerra na América do Sul*. São Paulo: Ateliê, 2022; X

with the Japanese consulate in Brazil, were afraid to preserve the war memories of the Japanese Diaspora.

### **Brief history of Japanese Immigration and Anti-Asian racism in Brazil (1880-1945)**

The anti-Japanese campaign had already existed in Brazil since the 1880s, when the entry of Asian immigrants was still being discussed. The first stance of resistance against the Japanese was presented in Decree No. 528, of June 28, 1890, which prohibited the entry of immigrants of the black and Asian “race”. However, shortly afterwards, in 1892, the Senate annulled the ban, and proposed the establishment of the Amity and Commerce relationship with China and Japan.<sup>11</sup> Even after the signing of the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation between Brazil and Japan in 1895, many Brazilian statesmen remained wary of the entry of Japanese until the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to Brazil in 1908.

From the 1910s to the mid-1920s, there was instability in the Japanese immigration flow to Brazil. In this experimental period of Japanese immigration, both immigrants and farmers felt disappointed by the experience, which led the Brazilian government to suspend the subsidy in 1913, thus reducing the immigration flow of Japanese. In mid-1915, the Brazilian government, influenced by news of the Yellow Peril in South America, decided to limit its relationship with Japan. At that time, the flow of Japanese immigrants to Brazil was completely suspended. But with the reduction in the European immigration flow to Brazil, due to world conflicts, the Brazilian government restarted the subsidy program for Japanese immigration in 1917, and suspended it again in 1922.<sup>12</sup> However, an international event influenced the situation of Japanese immigration to Brazil from 1925 onwards: the North American law, enacted in 1924, which prohibited the entry of Japanese people into the United States. This law led the Japanese Diet to approve an emergency plan in the same year authorizing the Japanese government to cover the costs of sending emigrants to South America. Thus, from 1925 to 1934, the number of Japanese immigrants arriving in Brazil increased considerably, which worried those resistant to the entry of Japanese.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Leão Neto, 1990.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> By the mid-1940s, the Japanese-Brazilian population reached 150,000. Source: Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, *Brazil: Five Hundred Years of Settlement*, Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2000.

In fact, since 1920, some Brazilian statesmen were against the opening of Brazilian ports to African and Asian immigrants and supported their opinion by pointing out the problems and disturbances that the Japanese would cause to the Brazilian nation with their incomprehensible language, their very different customs, and their unattractive physical appearance. These politicians also warn about the danger of Japanese workers who, with their cheap competition, used to harm the nationals. However, the biggest concern of the Brazilian government was regarding the crossing of races between the Brazilian and the Japanese, which would cause “irremediable harm” to Brazil, the emergence of mestizos; on the other hand, if there were no crossing of races, there would be another inconvenience, ethnic cysts that would be a hindrance to the unity of the Brazilian nation. For these reasons, in 1923, a project was presented proposing to ban the entry of black immigrants and restricting the entry of Asians by 5% per year. This restriction was imposed because these immigrants were considered inassimilable and harmful to the formation of the Brazilian race.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, Brazilian politicians in favor of the entry of Asian immigrants argued that the Japanese had not brought any type of disturbance as a working class. For them, Japanese immigration would bring to Brazil the intensification of commercial relations with the “powerful Asian empire” and the solution to the problem of lack of labor. However, opinions were divided during the First Eugenics Congress in Brazil, which took place in 1929. Brazilian academics and politicians warned of the danger of Japanese and African immigration in the eugenics issue, highlighting that Brazil should follow the American example. In general, Brazilians show resistance to the entry of Asians, as they were traditionally considered inassimilable, of low intellectuality, with socialist tendencies, and with different psychological characteristics from Westerners.

---

<sup>14</sup> Discussions in Europe surrounding the racial issue labeled mixed-race populations as degenerate, as was the case in Brazil. It is known that technological development gave power and superiority to the “Indo-European race”, and the idea of nationalism became linked to the homogeneity of the nation, not only physical, but moral, intellectual and spiritual, and that these characteristics were genetically transmitted. As a consequence, human diversity was classified, and if a nation or “race” was unable to defend or harness the potential of its natural resources, then there was nothing more legitimate than the “fittest and strongest” doing it for them. Based on this premise, the imperialist countries of the West set out to conquer and dominate Africa, Asia and Latin America, labeling them as degenerate, inferior and weak. Given the historical context described above, we can understand the feeling of inferiority that gripped the Brazilian nation for a long period (Monica Okamoto, *The French Influence on Brazilian Discourse in Japan: Immigration, Identity and Racial Prejudice*, São Paulo: Porto de Ideias Editora, 2016).



It was within these discussions that took place especially at the Brazilian Eugenics Congress that we can understand the anti-Japanese campaign that gained strength in the National Constituent Assembly in Brazil between 1933 and 1934. The 1930s were the period of the greatest flow of Japanese immigrants to Brazil, which resulted in fierce debates among congressmen. Brazilian statesmen began to fear Japanese imperialism and its military strength.

By making a quick synopsis of the international historical context in the 1930s, we can understand the aggravating factors that caused this resistance to the entry of Japanese immigrants into Brazil. According to Valdemar Carneiro Leão, the 1930 Revolution had repercussions on the immigration issue as it ended regional powers. Without political supremacy, the large States, focused on the coffee economy, lost autonomy and, consequently, were forced to accept new determinations, such as Decree No. 19,482, of December 12, 1930, which changed the conditions for entry of immigrants in order to solve the urban unemployment crisis and contain the disorderly entry of foreigners.<sup>15</sup>

In Japan, on the other hand, the alternative to the crisis was territorial expansion and encouraging emigration. In addition to population growth, the Japanese government was facing problems in the international trade of its manufactured products, which resulted in drastic measures such as containing production costs and devaluing the yen. Mass unemployment promoted the emergence of ultranationalist factions that demanded the restoration of traditional values, the fight against capitalism and the strengthening of the Emperor (Ibid., p. 51).

The radical stances of the Brazilian government (wanting to contain the entry of foreigners) and the Japanese government (encouraging the departure of its surplus population and starting an expansionist campaign in Asia) clashed in interests. This increased the apprehension felt by Brazilians about the “Yellow Peril” and “Red Peril”.

Anti-Japanese Brazilian politicians and the press warned the population about the “terrible intention” of the Japanese empire to create, for its subjects, a new nation, the *Shin Nihon* – or New Japan – in South America, hence their concern about the entry of immigrants

---

<sup>15</sup> Valdemar Carneiro Leão (Year?) p. 51

Japanese, who were called an “imperialist and warlike people”. Brazilian statesmen reaffirmed the importance of rigorous selection of immigration elements as a form of defense of the "Brazilian race", and understood that the health and physical strength of the immigrant were not enough to convince them of their eugenic characteristics, requiring valorization of their mental characteristics and moral qualities.

There were also politicians who believed that Japanese and German military forces, infiltrated within the immigrant community, had plans to conquer South America. For these statesmen, Brazil was at risk of being eliminated by the Japanese, and that despite their fragile appearance, the Japanese had overthrown the Russian giant in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).

The condition of Japanese immigrants and foreigners, in general aggravated after the rise to power of Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945). Discourses of intolerance and racial discrimination were, from that moment on, implemented by decrees restricting the entry of Jews, gypsies, blacks and Japanese, as well as the civil rights of foreigners residing in Brazil.

Decree No. 383, dated April 18, 1938, for example, determined several prohibitions against foreigners, who from that date could not participate in political activities, form any type of association, or speak foreign languages in public. Radio broadcasts and the publication of ethnic newspapers in a foreign language were prohibited. In the following years, other decrees were enacted closing schools and ethnic newspapers, freezing assets, and restricting bank withdrawals.

This set of measures was part of Getúlio Vargas' nationalization campaign in the 1937-1945 period established by the Estado Novo, in which the government defended the strengthening of patriotism and Brazilian culture, to the detriment of foreign influence. However, these were not the only reasons that led Vargas to persecute German, Japanese and Italian immigrants, as we will see below.

## **Brazil-US Alliance: The Good Neighbor Policy,<sup>16</sup> Fear of Japanese-Nazi Domination in South America, and American Pressure for Internment**

The Brazilian writer and critic Mário de Andrade (1993), since the end of the 1930s, was concerned about the aggressive cultural advance of the United States over Brazil. According to him, the economic and psychological distance between the two countries could turn influence into domination.<sup>17</sup> Mário could not have been more accurate in his assumption. However, at least during World War II, power relations between the two nations were bilateral.

Researchers who have dedicated themselves to the history of the relationship between Brazil and the United States are unanimous in stating that the Second World War had a great impact on Brazil. In effect, the American “Good Neighbor Policy” gave great room for maneuver to Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas, who negotiated loans from the United States for the development of the Brazilian industrial park<sup>18</sup>. In fact, there were improvements in the port and railway system, a considerable development in the industrial, agricultural and mining fields; financial aid for the intensification of rubber production in the Amazon Valley and the implementation of a steel complex in the country (National Steel Company of Volta Redonda in Rio de Janeiro, founded in 1941). Moreover, military equipment was modernized, in addition to training and combat experience for the Brazilian Armed Forces.<sup>19</sup> Finally, yet importantly, this alliance made then-president of Brazil Getúlio Vargas envision the possibility of Brazilian supremacy in South America with American support.<sup>20</sup>

As for US interests, the alliance with Brazil meant providing information by tracking alleged fifth column “spies” infiltrated in the German, Japanese, and Italian communities<sup>21</sup>, concessions for the installation of US military bases in Brazilian territory, commercial

---

<sup>16</sup> “President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office determined to improve relations with the nations of Central and South America. Under his leadership the United States emphasized cooperation and trade rather than military force to maintain stability in the hemisphere.” <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/good-neighbor> Accessed 18 April 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Mário de Andrade 1993 citation

<sup>18</sup> Juliana Bezerra, “Política da Boa Vizinhança,” <https://www.todamateria.com.br/politica-da-boa-vizinhanca/> Access 18 April 2023.

<sup>19</sup> F. McCann, “Brazil and World War II, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Perazzo, *Prisioneiros da Guerra*, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> The Brazilian population at the time consisted of four million Italians, one million Germans and 200,000 Japanese (F. McCann, “Brazil and World War II, 1995).

advantages, and pressures on the Vargas government to carry out the confinement, imprisonment and compulsory removal of “Axis subjects<sup>22</sup>” as proof of alignment with the United States.

Negotiation processes between Brazil and the United States, however, were not quick or without tensions and intimidation on the part of the US chancellery. It is relevant to mention that when analyzing the official documents of the time, we noticed few mentions that explain the negotiations between the two countries, which leads us to infer that a good part of these operations were negotiated verbally and kept as top secret for decades.<sup>23</sup> Many researchers agree that “Brazilian involvement [in World War II] remained hidden [...] concomitant with the void in Brazilian historiography.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, many of the negotiations between Vargas and Roosevelt were not fully exposed by historiography and, even today, remain hazy. We note that there is little information about how, in fact, the negotiations for the termination of diplomatic and commercial relations between Brazil and the Axis countries and the connection between the alignment with the United States and the persecution of Japanese and Germans in Brazilian territory took place.

### **Elimination of German Influence from Brazil**

Considered one of the biggest challenges facing the American chancellery, the Brazilian alignment led to years of “war of nerves” and tensions between the two nations. Apparently, this scenario officially ended after the third Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held in Rio de Janeiro, at the beginning of 1942. However, before the Meeting, there was a long trade dispute and numerous negotiations between the Brazilian Foreign Ministry and the US government. Washington's strategy was to negotiate its multifaceted policy with the Brazilian government, sometimes approaching the United States, sometimes Germany

---

<sup>22</sup> This was the official expression used by the government at the time to indistinctly designate the German, Italian, and Japanese immigrants who were in Brazil during the Second World War.

<sup>23</sup> All telegrams and letters sent to the American government by Jefferson Caffery, American Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, who held office in Brazil between July 13, 1937 and September 17, 1944, were analyzed. Source: <https://history.state.gov/> accessed from September to November, 2023. See especially Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1940, The American Republics, Volume V, The Undersecretary of State (Welles) to the Ambassador in Brazil (Caffrey), May 8, 1940, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1940v05/d42>. Other sources were correspondence from diplomats and the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Source: Archive of the Itamaraty Historical and Diplomatic Museum in Rio de Janeiro. March 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Seitenfus, *O Brasil vai à Guerra*, 2003, p. 19.

and Japan. Although the United States represented an important trading partner for Brazil, trade disputes and the advantages offered by German and Japanese governments were undeniable. Proof of this was that from 1937 onwards, Germany overtook the United States and became Brazil's largest importer, thus realizing North American fears. In 1938, Brazil stood out as one of the largest non-European consumers of German products. In addition to the commercial dispute with Germany over the Brazilian market and raw materials, Washington also feared that Vargas' apparent sympathy for the Third Reich regime would turn into a Nazi advance in South America. It is clear that the American government was very afraid of for Brazil to align itself with the Axis countries, ordering its foreign ministry to concentrate its efforts on this issue. In fact, this was the main mission of American Chancellor Jefferson Caffery: (who was ambassador to Brazil between 1937 and 1944) “to prevent Brazil from joining the Axis powers”.

Finally, American concerns grew with the establishment of the *Estado Novo*, dictatorship instituted by President Getúlio Vargas on November 10, 1937, which lasted until the end of the Second World War. Nevertheless, a telegram sent by Secretary of State to Ambassador Caffery, dated November 12th, 1937, shows that the American government, at first, did not believe that the fascist nature of the new Brazilian government represented a direct link with the Rome-Berlin Axis, and that any conclusion would be premature. The Secretary, however, advised Caffery that:

I wish at as early a moment as you deem appropriate you would endeavor to have a private conversation with President Vargas which will not be known to the public and ascertain from him what his reactions may be to the claims publicly made in Rome and in Berlin [Page 314]that **the recent change in the Brazilian Government is one which is sympathetic to the regime in Germany and in Italy** [...] I suggest for your consideration that you instruct the principal consular officers under your jurisdiction to have a conference with you in Rio and that you advise them very confidentially of your need to have the fullest information which they may obtain for you with regard to the **activities of the German and Italian colonies within**

**their respective jurisdictions, and likewise all information possible concerning increased propaganda from German and Italian sources.**<sup>25</sup>

Following the instructions of the Secretary of State, on November 13th, 1937, Caffery met with Vargas requesting a position on Brazilian foreign policy. According to Caffery, Vargas, during the meeting, openly declares that “my government has absolutely no connection with Rome, Berlin and Tokyo”. This statement by Vargas, however, was not without intimidation on the part of Caffery who, a few years later, admitted to having pressured Vargas during the meeting, threatening to prevent American imports of Brazilian coffee.

Apparently, the American government's greatest concern, especially from 1940 onwards, was with the fifth column spies and the significant presence of German descendants in Brazil, in addition to the existence of the Integralist Party, which had Nazi tendencies. Finally, Brazil's own Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oswaldo Aranha, warned Americans that a good number of Brazilian army officers had "great admiration for the German military machine."<sup>26</sup> These facts were enough to cause great American fear regarding possible Nazi domination in Brazil and, simultaneously, give bargaining power to the Vargas government, which requested a loan from the American government to purchase equipment for the construction of a steel plant. Caffery, in a telegram dated July 16, 1940, in tone of warning, informs that:

If the Germans furnish the arms and finance the steel project, or if they do either of those things, it is idle for us to hope to maintain our present position in Brazil; it is equally idle to talk of financial or economic plans on a large or [Page 50] small scale if these two matters are not taken care

---

<sup>25</sup> “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Brazil (Caffery),” November 12, 1937, Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1937, The American Republics, Volume V, [Hereafter FRUSDP] <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1937v05/d334> accessed Sep. 22nd, 2023,(my highlight).

<sup>26</sup> “The Ambassador in Brazil (Caffery ) to the Secretary of State,” July 16th, 1940. FRUSDP, 1940, The American Republics, Volume V, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1940v05/ch1subsubch4> accessed

of... The time has come when we must decide whether keeping Brazil out of the German orbit is worth taking these risks, if they are risks, or not.<sup>27</sup>

Faced with this imminent threat, in September 1940, Roosevelt, practicing the “Good Neighbor Policy”, presented a concrete proposal to provide resources for the construction of the first steel plant in Brazil,<sup>28</sup> leading Vargas to give in to pressure from the American government in his struggle against Nazi-Japanese-fascism in South America.

Another issue to be negotiated between Brazil and the US was the American military occupation of points considered vulnerable on Brazilian territory to Nazi attack. In the years before the American entry into the war, the strategic geographic position of the Brazilian coast and its vulnerability to sudden European forces was already discussed as a priority by the US Secretary of State and Ambassador Caffery, as we observed in the exchanges of correspondence between the two in 1937. It is interesting to comment that since this period, the US has already feared the tracking of messages by German spies. An example in this sense is the request of Secretary Sumner Welles, who always requested that the most important communications be made by air mail pouch, as he suspected that telegraph codes were being tracked by the German government.<sup>29</sup>

After a few years of tense negotiations, Washington presented a program to modernize and expand Brazil's air services, which was called the “Vasp program”. In this proposed agreement, based on the telegram from the Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Brazil (Caffery) dated January 4, 1941:

In return for the **elimination of German influence** and control in Vasp, this Government would take the necessary steps to obtain prompt release of

---

<sup>27</sup> “The Ambassador in Brazil (Caffery) to the Secretary of State,” July 16th, 1940, FRUSDP, 1940, The American Republics, Volume V, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1940v05/d54> accessed

<sup>28</sup> F. McCann, "Brazil and World War II, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> “The Ambassador in Brazil (Caffery) to the Secretary of State,” May 24, 1940. FRUSDP, 1940, The American Republics, Volume V, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1940v05/d54> accessed Nov. 23, 2023.

equipment for Vasp, which we have reason to believe can be effected, despite the heavy demands of our armed forces.<sup>30</sup>

It appears that Brazil accepts the American proposal for the Vasp program, since on July 25, 1941 it issued DECREE-LAW No. 3,462 authorizing Panair do Brasil, S.A., "to build, improve and equip airports in Amapá, Belém, São Luiz, Fortaleza, Natal, Recife, Maceió and Salvador, and provides other measures."<sup>31</sup> These works were only possible thanks to the financial support of the American government, which intended to build military bases on the Brazilian coast, thus guaranteeing the defense against the Nazi advance in that region and in vital maritime routes in the South Atlantic. In return, on April 6, 1941, Brazil and the United States signed an agreement on the measures to be taken in the event of an alleged Axis attack on Brazilian territory. In the document, the United States would commit to helping Brazil "when expressly requested and that the United States would provide, in any case, for the modernization of Brazil's armament".

Despite the agreement reached, the US War Department asked President Roosevelt to issue an executive order demanding that Ambassador Caffery "force Vargas' consent to the occupation of the Bulge<sup>32</sup> by the United States and [...] that the vulnerable points are the Iceland and Natal [coastal region of northeastern Brazil]." Caffery and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil Oswaldo Aranha played strategically, waiting for the right moment to convince President Vargas to agree to the occupation<sup>33</sup>.

---

<sup>30</sup> "The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Brazil (Caffery)," January 4, 1941, FRUSDP, 1941, The American Republics, Volume VI <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v06/d519> accessed Nov. 23, 2023.

<sup>31</sup> Decree-Law No. 3,462 of July 25, 1941, Legislation, Câmara dos Deputados <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1940-1949/decreto-lei-3462-25-julho-1941-413450-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html> accessed Nov. 23, 2023.

<sup>32</sup> "A salient, also known as a bulge, is a battlefield feature that projects into enemy territory. The salient is surrounded by the enemy on multiple sides, making the troops occupying the salient vulnerable". [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salient\\_\(military\)#:~:text=A%20salient%2C%20also%20known%20as,troops%20occupying%20the%20salient%20vulnerable](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salient_(military)#:~:text=A%20salient%2C%20also%20known%20as,troops%20occupying%20the%20salient%20vulnerable) Accessed: April 18, 2023.

<sup>33</sup> "Ambassador Jefferson Caffrey (1996-1974), Latin American Posts, Brazil (1937-44)" <https://cafferycollection.wordpress.com/brazil-1937-44/>. This agreement was later made official on October 1, 1941: "Lend-Lease Agreement Between the United States and Brazil, Signed at Washington, October 1 1941," FRUSDP, 1941, The American Republics, Volume VI <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v06/d548> Accessed: April 18, 2023.



American pressure on Latin countries reached its peak when the Imperial Air Service of the Japanese Navy bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, marking the beginning of war between the United States and Japan. Indeed, in January 1942, the United States summoned representatives of Latin American countries to the third Meeting of American Foreign Ministers in Rio de Janeiro, intending that all immediately break off diplomatic and commercial relations with the Axis. Unlike Argentina and Chile, which remained neutral, Brazil announced its break with the Axis countries at the end of the Meeting. Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas himself seemed already resolute about aligning himself with the United States when he declared in his opening speech that “it is the purpose of Brazilians to defend, inch by inch, their own territory against any incursions and not to allow their lands and waters to serve as a foothold for the assault on sister nations”<sup>34</sup>. In this way, Brazil officially confirmed its alignment with the United States, being from then on considered a “special ally” of the United States. This Brazilian approximation, according to Perazzo, would make Washington, in exchange, promise to project Brazil as “the leader of South America, thus neutralizing Argentina’s desire for hegemony.”<sup>35</sup>

Finally, to formalize the confluence of interests and conveniences of both nations, on March 3, 1942, Brazil and the United States signed a Bilateral Agreement<sup>36</sup>. The ratification of the Agreement, in fact, had the main purpose of sealing the “secret” negotiations that were already taking place previously between the two parties. In addition to funding for the construction of the steelworks complex in Volta Redonda (RJ), the US government also granted credits for the construction and modernization of airports along a good part of Brazil’s coastline, and consequently, the American military occupation of this area.

### **Trade Disputes with Japan**

Another threat in the American geopolitical theater was Japan, which until 1934 was one of the largest importers of cotton from the United States, but with the deterioration of the

---

<sup>34</sup> “Brasil segue os EUA e rompe com o Eixo,” Memorial da Democracia <http://memorialdademocracia.com.br/card/brasil-rompe-com-o-eixo> Accessed April 06, 2023

<sup>35</sup> Perazzo, *Prisioneiros da Guerra*, 2009, p. 74.

<sup>36</sup> “Agreement Between the United States and Brazil Regarding Principles Applying to Mutual Aid in the Prosecution of the War, Signed at Washington, March 3, 1942,” FRUSDP, 1942, *The American Republics*, Volume V <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1942v05/d793> Accessed April 06, 2023.

Japanese-American trade balance, the Japanese government began to consider the possibility of importing raw cotton from Brazil, creating in 1935 the Mission of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Japan, led by Hiraō Hachisaburo.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, Japan was not the only country looking for suppliers for its textile industry; Germany also emerged as a major importer of Brazilian cotton. Thus, the increase in Brazilian exports of this product to Germany and Japan weakened Brazil's traditional economic partnership with Great Britain, the United States and France. American pressures increased after the signing of a bilateral agreement between Brazil and Germany in 1934. Getúlio Vargas, in his diary of May 1937, reports the complaints of the United States about the German agreement and the trade restrictions that Brazil was suffering with tariffs and reductions in import quotas by the

Allies. 38

According to Osamu Toyama, the Japanese-Brazilian newspapers *Burajiru Jihō* (Brazil News 1917-1941) and *Nippak Shimbun* (*Jornal Nipo-Brasileiro* 1916-1941) report that the US government carried out numerous maneuvers in several Brazilian sectors with the intention of harming the Japanese government.<sup>39</sup> Although the two largest prints of the Japanese-Brazilian community at the time were great rivals in terms of sales and ideological line, both presented identical opinions about the pressures of the United States on Brazilian diplomats and politicians to align themselves with anti-Japanese actions. According to Toyama, these forms are unanimous in pointing to the United States as the country behind the anti-Japanese laws passed by the Legislative Assembly of Brazil in the mid-1930s.<sup>40</sup>

On May 23, 1934, the *Nippak Shimbun* published an article denouncing American concerns about the presence of Japanese immigrants in Brazilian territory, in which the editor Saku Miura states: “it is not pleasant for the United States to see Japanese people, whom they

---

<sup>37</sup> Henri Delangue, "The Origin of Significant Japanese-Brazilian Trade and Investment Relations: Origin, Content and Consequences of the 1935 Japanese Trade Mission to Brazil," *Econometrics*, 1-39. Bruxelles: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Henrique Pons Agnelli, *Vestindo a Wehrmacht: as exportações brasileiras de algodão para a Alemanha, 1934-1940. XIV Congresso Brasileiro de História Econômica & 15ª Conferência Internacional de História de Empresas*. Varginha, 15-17 November, 2021: 1-24.

<sup>39</sup> [Footnote for *Burajiru Jihō*/*Nippak Shimbun* issues]

<sup>40</sup> Toyama, *Cem Anos de Águas Corridas da Comunidade Japonesa*, 2009.

consider their enemies, invade the region they have as their backyard”.<sup>41</sup> *Burajiru Jiho*, in turn, despite being more thoughtful in its positions, denounced the commercial competitions of the Americans and made accusations reporting that, at the seventh Pan-American Conference (Uruguay) on December 5, 1933, the United States intended to form an economic bloc to hurt Japan. *Jiho* also narrates the events that preceded the approval of the law that limited the entry of Japanese immigrants to 2% in Brazil<sup>42</sup>, and again accuses North American interference in Brazilian affairs. It also mentions the existence of an American spy network set up in Brazil with access to information from the Japanese embassy. The newspaper ends by analyzing the relationship between Brazil and the United States, which, for the editors of *Jiho*, was “revolting”, since “the situation in Brazil was one of submission to the Americans, as they are good buyers of Brazilian coffee. On the other hand, Brazil owes them a lot of money.”<sup>43</sup>

This article could simply be seen as biased, since *Burajiru Jiho* was a newspaper financed by the Japanese consulate in Brazil. However, the accusation of Brazilian submission to the Washington government, which were “good buyers of Brazilian coffee”, in the assessment of *Burajiru Jiho*, does not seem totally unfounded to us, given that more than 50% of Brazilian coffee exports were destined for the United States. On the other hand, 30% of Brazilian imports came from the United States, and as mentioned above, the American ambassador Jefferson Caffery had threatened the Brazilian government to cut coffee imports if President Vargas did not yield to the pressures of the American military occupation on the coast.

From June 1934, *Burajiru Jiho* published a series of articles narrating American dissatisfaction with the bilateral trade balance, in particular the case of cotton imports from Japan. According to *Jiho*, almost 70% of vegetable cotton production in Brazil was in the hands of Japanese immigrants from the State of São Paulo, which had been threatening American production. Therefore for the press, “it is clear that the United States cannot show

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>42</sup>Decree-Law No. 24,215 of May 9, 1934 Legislation, Câmara dos Deputados <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1930-1939/decreto-24215-9-maio-1934-557900-publicacaooriginal-78647-pe.html> Accessed: April 18, 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, pp. 185-187

itself indifferent to it. At the Pan American Economic Congress [...] the United States hoped to form an anti-Japanese economic bloc under its leadership”.<sup>44</sup> *Jiho* reports that the incidents in Manchuria in 1931 and in Shanghai the following year also angered the United States, which maintained interests in these areas. For the editors of *Jiho*, “this same Japan was expanding to Brazil, a huge country, right in the central region of South America, an American zone of influence”.<sup>45</sup> The newspaper *Nippak* reports that Brazil was being threatened by the US government with retaliatory actions if it did not reduce its cotton production. As we can see, pre-war Japanese-Brazilian newspapers were completely pro-Japan and anti-American in terms of commercial and geopolitical negotiations, which evidently influenced the mentality and opinion of the Japanese community in Brazil.

### **US Pressures**

We can infer that these were the scenarios for trade disputes with Germany and Japan and for the American government's fear for possible Nazi domination in South America, which gave Vargas “bargaining power” to negotiate benefits, political advantages and economical. The Brazilian chancellery simultaneously conducted negotiations with Germany, Japan, and the United States until the end of the 1930s.

Although repressive actions and the dissemination of anti-Axis news constantly appeared in the Brazilian press, Americans seemed unconvinced of the Brazilian alignment. Even after the signing of the Bilateral Agreement, a report dated March 12, 1942, sent by Brigadier General Raymond Lee, of the War Department of the United States, points out the flaws in the Brazilian defense and Vargas's lack of commitment. Lee concludes that in the event of an enemy attack in South America, the obsolete military equipment of the Brazilians, as well as the lack of training and certain sympathy for the Nazi regime on the part of many Brazilian soldiers would cause a revolution. Lee still warns in his report about the sabotage activities of the “fifth column”, especially in the State of São Paulo, which were strengthening, and that according to:

---

<sup>44</sup> Toyama, *Cem Anos de Águas Corridas da Comunidade Japonesa*, 2009, pp. 183-184.

<sup>45</sup> [Idem, p. 185]

a source of former reliable information states that the **Japanese have a complete military organization in Brazil** controlled by Japanese officers, including some generals who were sent to Brazil from Japan for the specific purpose of directing this organization. That part of the organization in the vicinity of São Paulo numbers more than 25,000. Indications are that similar Japanese organizations are located strategically in the interior, and **their principal duty will be to prevent the arrival of assistance to many key points**, as the Japanese have acquired through purchasing or leasing of property control of strategic positions dominating principal railways, certain fortifications controlling land through which drinking water conduits and electric cables pass to the Brazilian fortresses of Itaipu at São Vicente and Monduba e Guarujá, **both built for defending the Port of Santos.**<sup>46</sup>

Lee criticizes the lack of action on the part of President Vargas who, despite his personal demonstration of cooperating with the American government in the fight against the enemies of the Axis, has not been able to adequately control the Nazi-Japanese advance within his territory. In this way, the general suggests a more incisive pressure on Brazil, since:

The present condition in Brazil has gone far beyond the classification of a **mere war of nerves**, but that the government can handle the situation **provided the Army gives it full backing**. The political stability of the Vargas regime **also depends to a large extent upon the support of the United States. Without our strong support, the present government may fall.**<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> “Memorandum for the Assistant Chief of Staff, WPD: Subject: Situation in Brazil,” March 12, 1942, Reproduced at 100 Anos de Imigração Japonesa no Brasil, <https://www.ndl.go.jp/brasil/pt/data/L/G006/G006-NARA00011.html>, accessed April 21, 2023, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 1.



Three Brazilian regions deserve mention in the case of Japanese immigrants and their descendants: the states of Pará (in the North), São Paulo (Southeast) and Paraná (South), where incidents of expulsion, confinement in concentration camps and forced labor of internees occurred between 1942 and 1945. Interestingly, these three states (with the highest concentration of Japanese) were also construction sites for American military air bases and intense investigations by the FBI, in partnership with DEOPS, of alleged fifth column spies.

It is worth clarifying that the repression of immigrants was already a political practice of the Vargas government since the beginning of the 1930s as part of its Program for the Nationalization of Brazil, whose objective was to unify the national identity by forcing immigrants to integrate into Brazilian society and culture. The term “Axis subjects” meant, for Vargas, more a threat to his National Project than a threat to national security. The confinement of these immigrants, therefore, served as an extra justification for the adoption of repressive measures by the federal government against foreigners residing in Brazil.

### **Japanese Internment in Brazil**

The Japanese immigrant, even before his arrival in 1908, was already considered an undesirable element by the Brazilian elite. If we take as a basis all the laws and decrees sanctioned against the entry of the Japanese since the end of the nineteenth century, we will understand that the oppressive measures practiced by Vargas during the Second World War only enshrined the discourse of racial prejudice and discrimination against Asians already existing and defended for decades by radical Brazilian politicians such as Miguel Couto, Felix Pacheco, and Xavier de Oliveira.

The Brazilian chancellery also showed many reservations in relation to the Japanese, both for xenophobic reasons and due to belligerent political issues. On March 25, 1942, Carlos Martins, Brazilian ambassador in Washington, sent a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oswaldo Aranha, reporting news and comments from the American press about the Japanese in Brazil. The Brazilian ambassador cites, in particular, a report from The Evening Star newspaper, which compares Brazil's racial and immigration policy with that of the United States and considers the possibility of the Brazilian government adopting the same measures of internment of Japanese

people, as occurred on the coast of American Pacific<sup>51</sup>. For Martins, this would be a temporary solution and Brazil should have consider a more definitive project, since Japanese imperialism was proving to be aggressive and Japanese immigrants were difficult to assimilate.<sup>52</sup>

In another letter from April 1942, the Brazilian ambassador tells Oswaldo Aranha how the American government carried out the “redistribution” of Japanese residents on the Pacific coasts (considered strategic military zones) to internment camps in distant regions, thus suggesting the American internment policy as actions to be followed by Brazil as well. This conduct, in the Brazilian diplomatic view, would not only contain the ethnic threat of the “yellow peril”<sup>53</sup>, it would also protect against acts of sabotage and espionage by the Japanese fifth column, and would reinforce the demonstrations of Brazil's alignment with American pressures.<sup>54</sup>

We can conclude, therefore, that Brazilian diplomacy seemed to be in line with US guidelines in dealing with Japanese and Japanese descendants, and much of what was publicized in the United States ended up being followed, to a certain extent, by Brazilian politicians. The problem lay, however, in the inadequacy of the American models of conduct and thought, which were not functional or possible to be implemented in the Brazilian social and political context. The construction of the so-called Japanese internment or relocation camps was one of those American ideas which was incompatible with the Brazilian economic reality, which had as a priority, at that moment, investing resources and capital in boosting national development. As a poor nation with a semi-colonial economy, Brazil had no interest in using its meager resources to build mass incarceration camps for thousands of immigrants. The resolution found by the

---

<sup>51</sup> In 1943, the *Revista de Imigração e Colonização* journal published a translation of the article by the North American Galen Fisher on the evacuation of the Japanese from the North American coast. See Galen Fischer, “The Evacuation of the Japanese from the North American Pacific Coast,” *Magazine of Immigration and Colonization* 4, No. 3 (1943), pp. 521-534.

<sup>52</sup> Perazzo, *Prisioneiros da Guerra*, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> The theory of the ‘yellow peril’ was widely disseminated by so-called ‘yellow journalism’, which used to convey sensationalist news about the threat that Japanese immigrants posed to America, since everyone was inevitably a spy for the Japanese government. Well before World War II, the United States was already concerned with tracking secret Japanese operations through war planning such as War Plan Orange (Orange indicating Japan). This plan had been articulated since 1906, shortly after the Japanese victory in the war against Russia (1904-1905), and its mission was to predict Japanese naval tactics and deal with a possible confrontation with Japan. Plan Orange failed, however, as it did not anticipate the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, when Japanese aircraft destroyed the American naval fleet. See Fukasawa, *Se um Grão de Arroz Não Morre*, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Perazzo, *Prisioneiros da Guerra*, 2009.



Brazilian government, which, in a way, satisfied American pressure and did not drastically affect its finances, was to transform some colonies and agricultural schools into places of confinement for immigrants, as well as to use existing prisons and penal colonies to incarcerate the so-called "prisoners of war".

In the case of the internment of the Japanese in the United States, the scenario was quite different. The American government, after declaring war on Japan on December 8, 1941, immediately began a plan to build internment or relocation camps (so called by the federal government) as a matter of urgency in inhospitable and arid regions of the country to remove, compulsorily, Japanese and Japanese American citizens residing on the American West Coast. The US government's decisions regarding the fate and treatment of the Japanese and Americans of Japanese ancestry took a course of radicalism and violation of civil rights, unprecedented in the history of the United States.

Making a brief account of what was the compulsory evacuation of Japanese Americans to internment camps during the period of World War II, we can point to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor as the starting point of a wave of collective hysteria and fear about the national security with the American people. Within months, the government took drastic action against Japanese Americans residing on the Pacific coast. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 authorizing the establishment of military zones, later signing a new Executive Order No. 9102 on March 18, 1942 with the purpose of justifying the evacuation of Japanese (two-thirds of whom were American citizens) and individuals who had up to 1/16 of Japanese ancestry from the so-called strategic military zones. 120,000 Japanese Americans were required to adhere to the curfew and prohibited from moving to other locations voluntarily. Finally, in a short period of time, they were all removed from their homes, forced to sell their belongings and goods at cost prices, and to transfer, with only the luggage they could carry, to internment camps that the government called "relocation centers". These camps externally resembled, penitentiaries, in being made up of collective dwellings isolated from the

urban environment, surrounded by wire fences, guarded by armed guards, and lacking minimum conditions for health and hygiene.<sup>55</sup>

These events, which affected the lives of thousands of Japanese-Americans, also affected the fate of the Japanese Diaspora in Brazil. The compulsory removal and confinement of “Axis subjects”, it seems, followed the American concept of internment for war enemies, and like many models from abroad copied and reproduced by the Brazilian elite, these actions took on more aggravating proportions in Brazilian territory.

Comparatively, the practices of internment of Germans, Italians and Japanese in Brazil began in August 1942, after Brazil declared war against Germany and Italy. Due to the infeasibility of the Brazilian government building places to imprison foreigners from the Axis countries, prisons and agricultural colonies were transformed into institutions of confinement. Accused of pro-Nazi propaganda, sabotage and espionage, the so-called “Axis subjects” remained imprisoned until the end of the conflict in August 1945. These places were sporadically inspected by the International Red Cross and members of the diplomatic missions, especially the Spanish consul, who made serious allegations of mistreatment and precarious housing, hygiene and food conditions.<sup>56</sup>

In reality, as previously mentioned, the oppression of foreigners from the Axis countries began long before Brazil's diplomatic break with Germany, Italy and Japan in 1942. Since 1937, President Vargas had issued numerous decrees restricting civil rights of these citizens such as: not being allowed to participate in activities of a political nature and in public affairs in the country; the ban on broadcasting radio programs in a foreign language<sup>57</sup>; the prohibition of the teaching and use of a foreign language in public spaces<sup>58</sup>; the requirement of mandatory control and

---

<sup>55</sup> Perazzo, *Prisioneiros da Guerra*, 2009; National Archives, Japanese-American Incarceration During World War II. <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation#background> accessed April 11, 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Perazzo, *Prisioneiros da Guerra*, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Camara dos Deputados, Legislação Informatizada DECRETO-LEI No. 383, DE 18 DE ABRIL DE 1938 - Publicação Original

<https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1930-1939/decreto-lei-383-18-abril-1938-350781-publicacaooriginal.html#:~:text=Veda%20a%20estrangeiros%20a%20atividade,que%20lhe%20confere%20o%20art.> accessed April 11, 2023.

<sup>58</sup> Camara dos Deputados, Legislação Informatizada - DECRETO-LEI No. 1.545, DE 25 DE AGOSTO DE 1939 - Publicação Original. <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1930-1939/decreto-lei-383-18-abril-1938-350781-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html> accessed February 24, 2024.

registration<sup>59</sup>; the prohibition on newspapers in a foreign language<sup>60</sup> and the confiscation and freezing of the assets of foreigners (individuals and legal entities) to compensate for the damage caused by enemy countries<sup>61</sup>. The right to come and go was also violated, with the requirement to issue a safe conduct and the government reserving the right to make changes to entry and exit permissions without prior notice. All foreigners were required to carry an identification card or nationality certificate under penalty of being arrested for failing to comply with orders, in addition to being investigated on charges of espionage. There were recorded in the archives of DEOPS/SP (State Department of Political and Social Order of the State of São Paulo) numerous cases of warnings for non-compliance with orders, arrests on suspicion of espionage, and closures of schools, newspapers, commerce, and even hospitals owned by Japanese immigrants or Japanese descendants.

SUPERINTENDÊNCIA DE SEGURANÇA POLÍTICA E SOCIAL  
DELEGACIA ESPECIALIZADA DE ORDEM POLITICA E SOCIAL

**TERMO DE ADVERTÊNCIA** 43

R. O. 151.178  
R. E.

Aos Onze dias do mês de Janeiro de 1944, nesta cidade de São Paulo, na Delegacia Especializada de Ordem Política e Social, onde se achava o Dr. Eduardo Louzada Rocha, Delegado Adjunto, comigo, escrevente do seu cargo, abaixo nomeado e assinado, compareceu "JOSE TAKAYAMA", filho de Itizo Takayama e de D. Tone Takayama de nacionalidade Brasileira, com 22 anos de idade, de profissão Comerciarío, residente a Rua Bandeirantes - Gargão, n.º 50 que foi detido em 10 de Janeiro de 1944 por, contrariamente as disposições em vigor, estar se expressando em público em idioma Japonês. Foi advertido e se comprometeu solenemente a, sob as penas da lei, não reincidir na infração, bem como a cumprir e acatar zelosamente todas as disposições legais e regulamentares em vigor, especialmente as decorrentes do atual estado de guerra. De como assim o disse, mandou a autoridade lavrar este termo, que, lido e achado conforme, vai devidamente assinado.

Eu, Joaquim Marcondes Campos, escrevente, o datilografei, em parte, e assino.

Autoridade   
 Escrivente 

AO ARQUIVO GERA

São Paulo, 11 de Janeiro de 1944

P. 1768

Termo de advertência de José Takayama. São Paulo, 11 de janeiro de 1944. Pront. 1768 - José Takayama, DEOPS/SP, DAESP.

Image 2: Term of warning for speaking Japanese in public. São Paulo, January 11, 1944. Source: Medical Record 1768. DEOPS/SP, DAESP.

<sup>59</sup>Camara dos Deputados, Legislação Informatizada - DECRETO No. 3.010, DE 20 DE AGOSTO DE 1938 - Publicação Original <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1930-1939/decreto-3010-20-agosto-1938-348850-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html> accessed April 11, 2023.

<sup>60</sup>Camara dos Deputados, Legislação Informatizada - DECRETO-LEI No. 3.689, DE 3 DE OUTUBRO DE 1941 - Publicação Original <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1940-1949/decreto-lei-3689-3-outubro-1941-322206-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html> accessed April 11, 2023.

<sup>61</sup>Camara dos Deputados, Legislação Informatizada - DECRETO-LEI No. 4.166, DE 11 DE OUTUBRO DE 1942 - Publicação Original <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1940-1949/decreto-lei-4166-11-marco-1942-414196-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html> accessed April 11, 2023.

These nationalist and repressive measures transformed the daily lives of thousands of foreigners and their descendants in Brazil. Colonies of immigrants were under constant police surveillance and resented by other Brazilians, who denounced the existence of Japanese schools, businesses, Japanese-language newspapers, hospitals and even “clandestine” post offices under Japanese ownership. Searches, seizures, and arrests of Japanese community leaders or even simple workers were common. Many of these victims of imprisonment reported torture, poor sanitation, and humiliation.

In fact, the Brazilian police apparatus of the Vargas era was certainly not prepared to deal with the repression of immigrants, most of whom were simple workers. The “police state” was created by Vargas to contain possible rebellions by revolutionary groups contrary to his totalitarian government; therefore, he gave broad powers to the police authority to apply methods of extreme violence such as torture, which was one of the practices carried out by the police repression apparatus (Cancelli, 1993).

It is not surprising that the testimony of numerous Japanese inmates contains reports of torture and mistreatment by the police who, according to victims, made no distinction between violent criminals and immigrant workers. Even though they were instructed to follow the rules of the Geneva Convention of July 27, 1929 in the treatment of foreigners from the Axis countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Brazilian political police (DOPS or DEOPS) did not have the a clear standard for the treatment of civilian internees, since the guidelines were established to regulate the conditions of prisoners of war. Without a mechanism to protect civilians<sup>62</sup>, the Brazilian State ended up applying rules based on popular prejudice and custom.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> It was only in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols that international norms were instituted regarding Humanitarian Rights, both of civilians and military personnel.  
[https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conven%C3%A7%C3%B5es\\_de\\_Genebra](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conven%C3%A7%C3%B5es_de_Genebra) accessed April 11, 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Perazzo, *Prisioneiros da Guerra*, 2009



Image 3: DOPS emblem. Credit: Public Archive of the State of São Paulo.<sup>64</sup>

### **War memories of the Japanese in the city of São Paulo**

The life and desires of many Japanese immigrants in Brazil during the Second World War were recorded in the pages of their diaries, a common practice in Japan since the tenth century. These writings ended up becoming one of our few sources on the violation of Japanese civil rights in this troubled period of dictatorship and international conflict.

Tsunetoshi Tokuo, Koichi Kishimoto, and Tomoo Handa were recorded the events they experienced and interpreted in a confessional tone. Bearing in mind that these are personal records that were written, often, in moments of pressure and great emotionality, a careful interpretive exercise was required to account for the moment and the feelings of the authors. Among the three authors, Tsunetoshi Tokuo was the only one who, most likely, did not intend to leave his writings as a legacy to later generations, but only to alleviate the tensions and stress caused by the belligerent circumstances. When reading his writings, everyday matters of his life as a law student and banker at a Nikkei institution appear frequently, but always in view of the new circumstances of restrictions caused by Vargas' nationalization policy and by the pressures of being a foreigner from an enemy country.

A recurring theme in Tsunetoshi's diary about his work was the desperation of his Nikkei clients who wanted to withdraw their deposits for fear of having their property confiscated by the government. For several days, Tsunetoshi described the insensitivity of his Brazilian manager,

---

<sup>64</sup> São Paulo State Government, Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo, Deop/SP <http://memorialdaresistencia.org.br/lugares/deops-sp/> accessed June 30, 2023.

who made it difficult to withdraw deposits from Japanese clients, even those with proven cases of illness<sup>65</sup>.

Other themes that appear frequently in his diary are the actions of Brazilian opportunists who took advantage of the persecution of Axis nationals to expel them from their lands and appropriate their assets, as well as stories of incarceration and torture from Tsunetoshi's friends and acquaintances. In his record of February 4, 1942, Tsunetoshi says: “all this daily difficulty makes us fed up with life in Brazil. When you think about a long-term plan, a hundred years, for example, I think we should go back to Japan. I officially received the dismissal letter today” (Arata, 2011: 36).

Police inspections of Japanese homes to confiscate maps, newspaper clippings, radio sets, weapons, and money were routine practices in the lives of Japanese immigrants. Tsunetoshi frequently recounts the arrest of friends and acquaintances, accused of spying, and the beating of many of them “to the point where they couldn't even walk. (Idem: 38).

As a law student at the University of São Paulo, Tsunetoshi reports that newspapers carried headline stories of Brazilian ships sunk by German submarines off the Brazilian coast. This news led law students and professors at the University of São Paulo to deliver protest speeches inciting the population. About this situation, he vents: “my colleague Túlio warned us that this could have negative consequences for us [Japanese]. I agree. I feel a deep sadness.” (Idem: 41). The next day, Tsunetoshi tells about the stoning of Tokiwa Pension by “exalted elements”, after a people's assembly in the center of São Paulo. Acts of repression against the Japanese gradually increased, according to the entries of September 9th and 12th, 1942:

The Japanese families who live on Conde de Sarzedas, Conselheiro Furtado and Tabatinguera streets are completely lost after receiving the sudden expropriation order. About 400 families who have lived in the neighborhood for over 30 years are in a desperate situation. There are many Nisei who were born there, but

---

<sup>65</sup> Regarding the freezing of assets belonging to foreigners from the Axis countries, we found mentions of these measures in the Deops records, in which, in one of the cases, the delegate reports that many Japanese had already carried out the full withdrawal of their bank accounts, even before of the “banks receiving notice of the freezing of credits of nationals of the axis countries... this circumstance clearly demonstrates that they were previously oriented regarding the decision that would be taken by the Brazilian government” , consequently giving rise to suspicions of infiltration of spies within the community. Source: DEOPS, Medical Record 8342. Subject: Niponismo Alta Paulista, January 31, 1942.

nothing can be done because of the Order. The cyclone of expropriation of the 400 families ended up generating 400 dramas. [...] who would have imagined the sudden disappearance of the Japanese quarter that lived peacefully for more than 30 years?" (idem: 42 emphasis added).

In order to understand the impact of this expropriation order on Rua Conde de Sarzedas, it is essential to understand what it represented to the Japanese at that time. Tomoo Handa (1986), in his memoirs, tells that the first Japanese moved there in 1912 and that, little by little, that street became an "oasis" for the Japanese who came from the interior, almost a nucleus of colonization within the city of São Paulo, as this was where all the trade in Japanese products was concentrated. This included guesthouses, hotels, Japanese food restaurants, and the most varied services offered to the Nikkei public, ranging from dentists, doctors, and lawyers to carpenters, tailors and watchmakers. The famous Rua Conde still housed a Japanese association, a journalistic company, a sports club and the first primary school founded by the Japanese, Taishô. The expropriation order caused a great commotion not only among the local residents, but for the entire Japanese Brazilian community of the State of São Paulo.

Another interesting fact reported by Tsunetoshi, on September 26, 1942, was the Japanese radio announcement about the 'Atlantic Maneuver', in which "part of the Japanese Navy would head to the Atlantic Ocean to join the German and Italian fleets. [...] Thus, the newspapers accused Japan of complicity in the recent sinking of the Brazilian ship, causing shock in many regions." (Idem: 43). Interestingly, on November 18, 1942, Tsunetoshi tells of a visit from a friend who owned a large fishing company in Paranaguá, in the State of Paraná, which was confiscated after the area was declared a Military Zone (Idem: 44). Apparently, there is a connection between this fact and the beginning of the compulsory removal of Japanese and Germans from the coastal areas of Brazil. The following year, Tsunetoshi reports on July 8 and 13, 1943:

the sudden order to evacuate ten thousand German and Japanese families from the coastal strip. [...] I feel great compassion listening to the stories of people who were forced to leave Santos. They were forced to leave in five or six hours and they didn't even have time to prepare properly. Among them were couples who were sent to São Paulo separately, as the husband was absent. Thus, the

wife was upset while the husband, equally desperate, sought to find out in the market the whereabouts of the young son he had left at home. What a tragedy! (Idem: 48 emphasis added).

Tsunetoshi was referring to the incident that became known in the community as the “expulsion of Japanese and Germans from Santos,” which occurred on July 8, 1943. Ironically, the city of Santos was the place where the first Japanese immigrants had landed on June 18, 1908.

### **Expulsion of the Japanese and Germans from Santos**

The constant attacks on merchant ships on the Brazilian coast by German submarines seem to have been the reason that led to the evacuation of Japanese and Germans from the region of Santos (100 kilometers from the capital of the State of São Paulo)<sup>66</sup>. According to a diary entry by Koichi Kishimoto (2022: 95), to combat the German maritime attack, the United States sent numerous warships to Brazilian ports and other military fortifications, and the port of Santos was one of them.

The eviction order caused chaos and despair among the residents, who had to abandon all their assets and head to the train station in less than six hours. Thus, everyone was brutally and unexpectedly removed, including women in an advanced stage of pregnancy and families with children or sick elderly people, according to the reports of victims and witnesses<sup>67</sup>.



<sup>66</sup> The circumstances of the evacuation were not clarified, due to the lack of data and works on the subject, with the Muribushi magazine, from the Okinawa Immigration Research Center in Brazil (Okinawa Kenjinkai do Brasil), one of the few sources found. In April 2022, the Center released the special edition O Incidente de Santos, which includes interviews with sixteen Japanese victims of Santos' expulsion.

<sup>67</sup> Okinawa Kenjinkai Association of Brazil, “The Santos Incident,” Muribushi Magazine (2022), São Paulo.



Image: Headline of the *Folha da Noite* newspaper, All Japanese and Germans from Santos have already been removed to São Paulo on July 8, 1943, highlighting the removal of Japanese and Germans from Santos.<sup>68</sup>

The Santos Press reported that Japanese and Germans (called “Gestapo infiltrators”) were removed from Santos by national security measures and shipped to the city of São Paulo. In the article in *Folha da Noite*, on July 8, 1943, the news is narrated in a way that praises the rigorous action of the police, which in less than twenty-four hours acted in the compulsory removal of the “Axis” residents, and did not give in to requests for the release of Germans who “invented illnesses to escape police measures”.

In fact, in less than twenty-four hours, 6500 Japanese and five hundred Germans were removed from their homes and taken directly to the train station, from where they were taken to the Hospedaria dos Imigrantes, in the city of São Paulo. Kishimoto (1947) describes the moments of chaos and fear faced by evacuees at the Santos train station, after having been forcibly removed from their homes.

Forced to abandon their homes, commercial products, furniture, in short, everything else, leaving with only the clothes on their backs, people were pushed away amidst the shouts of armed soldiers. Some women carried at most a few personal belongings, and the endless line of people pushed like a flock of sheep, followed amidst the cries and screams of children, groans of elderly people, muffled by the screams of relentless soldiers, towards the railway line. They were confined in trains, treated as if they were cargo, locked with heavy chains, to continue their journey to the Hospedaria dos Imigrantes, in São Paulo. (Kishimoto, 1947: 27 apud Muribushi, 2022: 20)

According to Takashi Maeyama (2004: 245), the police action was so sudden and violent that some people suddenly started showing symptoms of depression and strange behavior. Upon arriving at the Hospedaria dos Imigrantes, in São Paulo, the situation of the Japanese and German immigrants continued to be severe, since only one meal was served daily and there were not enough mattresses and blankets for everyone. Takashi Kanashiro says that the meal was “something cruel [...] at meal times, each one took a bowl that had been worn down by use and

---

<sup>68</sup> *Folha da Noite*, July 08, 1943, No. 35.263, Issue 23.

joined the queue that started at nine o'clock in the morning, and the last ones even waited until around noon to be able to receive a bowl of food. (Muribushi, 2022: 89). The accommodations were precarious and:

Many faced the freezing nights by sleeping on empty sacks laid out on the cement floor. Hunger, cold, tiredness and the uncertainty of the future left people depressed and irritated, on the verge of exhaustion. From the fourth day, actions began to be taken regarding the fate of the still astonished evacuees. Without receiving even a piece of bread or a glass of water, they were again loaded into freight cars, locked with padlocks, and left towards the interior of the state. (Kishimoto, 2022: 99, 100).

After four long days confined at the Hospedaria, the inmates were sent to the interior of São Paulo on a freight train. However, when they arrived at the Marília station, Mr. Takashi Kanashiro says that he was surprised by the reception of his countrymen:

A few hundred compatriots warmly welcomed us and distributed lunchboxes of homemade food. I don't think I'll ever forget that emotion and feeling of gratitude at that moment. [...] Thanks to the provisions of the Japanese association of the interior [...] household utensils and work were provided; they really welcomed us impeccably, and for the first time we breathed a sigh of relief. (Muribushi, 2022: 90).

The solidarity of fellow countrymen was also appreciated in São Paulo, when Dona Margarida Watanabe (as she was known), a member of the Japanese Catholic Commission, organized donations and food for the inmates at the Hospedaria (Kishimoto, 2022).

These immigrants expelled from Santos were not only victims of humiliation and mistreatment by the Brazilian government, but also of irrecoverable financial losses. After the end of the conflict, the assets, real estate, and properties of the Japanese and Germans expelled from Santos had been appropriated by local residents or by the federal government. There has never been any type of compensation or official apology from the federal government to the victims, who lost all property and property rights during the war period.

## German Spies in Santos and the Tracking Operation by the FBI

It is important to mention that the municipality of Santos was one of the cities tracked by the American Intelligence Service, where, according to Kessler (1994: 421) “in 1942 FBI agents intercepted radio messages from **Josef Jacob Johannes Starziczny**, a German spy in Brazil, and prevented a submarine attack on the SS Queen Mary”. Starziczny lived in Santos and provided data on the movement of vessels. In fact, the city of Santos was considered a center of German espionage, which had numerous consulates, one of the largest ports in Latin America, and a large number of immigrants, mainly Germans and Japanese.<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, Ambassador Caffery sends a telegram to the Secretary of State on April 2, 1942 requesting that the FBI be informed immediately that messages from Germans had been intercepted and that they had identified a German spy and "his true name is **Josef Starziczny** and that his signature is on file at Hazelwood and Tarney, patent attorneys, New York. (SANTOS)." Caffery goes on to report that Starziczny

was in contact with a crew member of the SS Uruguay named Boettscher, whose assumed name was Fass and who was in contact in New York or Hoboken with a German named Vogel. That Vogel also maintained contact with Otto Uebele, the **former German consul in Santos** who was arrested again today and from whom efforts are being made to obtain the addresses of Boettscher and Vogel.

Caffery further informs that

Ulrich and Otto Uebele (who) furnished all fuel oil destined **for Axis vessels at Santos** and it was they he placed himself in touch with in connection with the supplying of submarines. That an employee of the British Consulate at Santos named Esilvac Mosilveira or Silvio was to

---

<sup>69</sup>Portogente, Nazistas em Santos e São Vicente <https://portogente.com.br/artigos/6022-nazistas-em-santos-e-sao-vicente>

produce routing orders of British vessels through an intermediary named Giesele **located at Santos** whose cover name was Green.<sup>70</sup>

These messages from Caffery (constantly alerting the American government to the presence of German spies infiltrated in Brazilian territory, especially in the municipality of Santos) apparently led to a tracking operation by the FBI and the subsequent evacuation of German and Japanese immigrants' residents in Santos.

### **“Imprisonment camps” in the state of São Paulo**

According to the *Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo* website<sup>71</sup>, between 1942 and 1945, five locations in the interior of the State of São Paulo housed the so-called “Imprisonment camps” during World War II, where some Germans, Italians, and Japanese were sent and confined, due to suspicions of espionage and political activities which remained unproven. For Julia Gumieri, this was one of the cases that occurred in the Guaratinguetá Imprisonment Camp (where the Paulo Côrrea de Lima School of Agriculture operated at the time, and which from 1950 became the building of the Aeronautics School of Specialists), the place where “part of the crew of the German commercial ship Windhuk, who had resided in Santos since their arrival in Brazil, in 1939, fleeing the war, were incarcerated.<sup>72</sup>” Prisoners from Axis countries were subjected to forced labor and were susceptible to punishment in case of non-compliance with camp rules.

---

<sup>70</sup>Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1942, The American Republics, Volume V, The Ambassador in Brazil (Caffery) to the Secretary of State, April 2, 1942, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1942v05/d181> accessed February 24, 2024.

<sup>71</sup>The Memorial of the Resistance of São Paulo is located in the center of the city of São Paulo and was the headquarters of DEOPS for more than four decades. This Memorial is known as a reference space “destined for the documentation, preservation and communication of memories of political repression and resistance in Brazil”. São Paulo State Government, Memorial da Resistencia de São Paulo <http://memorialdaresistenciasp.org.br/> accessed July 4, 2023.

<sup>72</sup>São Paulo State Government, Memorial da Resistencia de São Paulo, Campo de Aprisionamento Pindamonhangaba <http://memorialdaresistenciasp.org.br/lugares/campo-de-aprisionamentoguaratinguetaera-vargas/> accessed July 4, 2023.



Image: photo of the current School of Aeronautics Specialists, formerly the Paulo Côrrea de Lima School of Agriculture, where the Guaratinguetá prison camp was located. Photo credit: Luciana Mascaro.<sup>73</sup>

Another city in the interior of São Paulo that housed an imprisonment camp was Pindamonhangaba, considered the largest of the five camps. This place, which was the stable of Haras Paulista, became a shelter for German, Italian and Japanese prisoners, who were forced to carry out rural work. With the end of the war, the field was closed and currently belongs to the Regional Hub of the Vale do Paraíba of the São Paulo Agency for Agribusiness Technology (Apta)<sup>74</sup>.




---

<sup>73</sup> São Paulo State Government, Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo, Campo de Guaratinguetá <http://memorialdaresistencia.org.br/lugares/campo-de-aprisionamentoguaratinguetaera-vargas/> accessed July 4, 2023.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

Image: One of the stables that served as a dormitory for prisoners in the Pindamonhangaba Imprisonment Camp. Photo credit: Andre Nieto. Folhapress.<sup>75</sup>

The agricultural school of Ribeirão Preto was also the place of confinement for twenty-four prisoners of war from 1943 onwards. The prison camp of Ribeirão Preto held German, Italian and Japanese immigrants until the end of the war and also forced prisoners to do forced labor. In 1948, the Practical School of Agriculture of Ribeirão Preto was closed and the building is currently part of the University of São Paulo<sup>76</sup>.



Image: Practical School of Agriculture “Getúlio Vargas” (photo from 1953). Photo Credit: Foto Sport. Public and Historical Archive of Ribeirão Preto.<sup>77</sup>

Another incarceration camp for Axis subjects was the “Gustavo Capanema” Practical School of Agriculture, located in the city of Bauru. Founded in 1942, this school received foreigners accused of suspicious activity and considered a threat to national security. From 1955 onwards, the property has housed the Agricultural Penal Institute.

<sup>75</sup>São Paulo State Government, Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo, Campo de Aprisionamento Pindamonhangaba <http://memorialdarestenciassp.org.br/lugares/campo-de-aprisionamentoguaratinguetaera-vargas/> accessed July 4, 2023.

<sup>76</sup>São Paulo State Government, Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo, Campo de Aprisionamento de Ribeirão Preto <http://memorialdarestenciassp.org.br/lugares/campo-de-aprisionamentoribeirao-pretoera-vargas/> accessed July 4, 2023.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



Image: Former Bauru Prison Camp (photo date 1971). Photo credit: Ruy Costa.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, the Practical School of Agriculture “Fernando Costa” was founded in 1942, and it was also known as Pirassununga Imprisonment Camp. In the same fashion as the other prison camps in the State of São Paulo, this place functioned both as a rural education center and as a prison for Japanese, German and Italian immigrants accused of espionage. Currently, the building has been integrated into the Pirassununga campus of the University of São Paulo<sup>79</sup>.



<sup>78</sup> São Paulo State Government, Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo, Campo de Aprisionamento de Bauru <http://memorialdaresistencia.org.br/lugares/campo-de-aprisionamentobauruera-vargas/> accessed July 4, 2023

<sup>79</sup> São Paulo State Government, Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo, Campo de Aprisionamento de Pirassununga <http://memorialdaresistencia.org.br/lugares/campo-de-aprisionamentopirassunungaera-vargas/> accessed July 4, 2023

Image: Pirassununga Imprisonment Camp/ Internal courtyard of the “Fernando Costa” Agricultural Practical School. Date of the photo: 1940s. Photo credit: Photographic collection of the Museum of the City of São Paulo.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to the existence of these prison camps, there were also Japanese settlements in various locations in the State of São Paulo, especially in the Alta Sorocabana region, which, according to researcher Priscilla Perazzo, were under constant surveillance and with freedoms restricted by local police stations, resembling therefore, a concentration camp<sup>81</sup>.

In the city of São Paulo, the Hospedaria de Imigrantes founded in 1887 kept Japanese and German immigrants investigated by Deops/SP and expelled from Santos in 1943 confined. The place was closed in 1978 and transformed into the Immigration Museum of the State of São Paulo.



Image: Hostel for Immigrants. Date: late 19th century. Photo credit: Public Archive of the State of São Paulo.<sup>82</sup>

As we can see, the government of the State of São Paulo took advantage of the foundation of Agricultural Schools with the double objective of promoting the teaching of agriculture in rural areas and, at the same time, serving as prison camps for German, Italian and Japanese immigrants who in addition to imprisonment were also sentenced to compulsory labour in the fields.

### **Expulsion of the Japanese from the coast and confinement in the Granja Canguiri concentration camp in Paraná**

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> <https://tododia.jp/granja-canguiri-campo-de-concentracao-no-brasil/> access: July 4, 2023.

<sup>82</sup> São Paulo State Government, Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo, Hospedaria de Imigrantes <http://memorialdaresistencia.org.br/lugares/hospedaria-de-imigrantes-era-vargas/> accessed July 4, 2023



In the State of Paraná (in the southern region of Brazil), records of an incident similar to the one in Santos were found. On September 25, 1942, following the passage of a federal law that required the removal of all Axis immigrants from the Brazilian coastline, the government of Paraná expelled eighty-five immigrants from the coastal city of Antonina, of which fifty-three were Japanese, followed by twenty-two Italians and ten Germans. Prisoners who were unable to find accommodation in the city of Curitiba were later taken to experimental agricultural stations, such as Granja Canguiri, in Pinhais, in the metropolitan region of Curitiba (capital of Paraná). This place then became known as the Granja Canguiri Japanese concentration camp.

The Japanese and their descendants, taken to this place of seclusion, were forced to do compulsory labor in the fields and on the farm. A peculiarity of this concentration camp was the separation of children from their parents, as the children were sent to the city of Castro to be educated there. This made it impossible for the parents who needed to remain in the Canguiri concentration camp to escape if they wanted to see their children again<sup>83</sup>.

Housed in sheds and horse and oxen stables, the Japanese were still constantly humiliated by the population of the capital who made touristic visits during the weekend to the Canguiri field to observe the imprisoned Japanese as a demonstration of racial prejudice and authority<sup>84</sup>.



Image: current photo of Granja Canguiri after renovation.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup>Rodolfo Luis Kowalski, Bem Paraná, Paraná teve campo de concentração no Canguiri <https://www.bemparana.com.br/noticias/parana/parana-teve-campo-de-concentracao-no-canguiri/> accessed July 4, 2023.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Gazeta de Povo, Ex-residencia de governadores granja canguiri e reformada pada ser escola Agricola <https://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/parana/ex-residencia-de-governadores-granja-canguiri-e-reformada-para-ser-escola-agricola/> accessed July 4, 2023.

The former concentration camp of Granja Canguiri, which until 2010 was the official residence of the governor of Paraná, has been transformed into a Technology Center for Agriculture.

### **Tomé Açu (or Acará) concentration camp in the State of Pará**

Another dramatic and little-known incident was the confinement of Japanese people in Acará (a town 66 km from the capital, Belém, of the State of Pará). This region represented the first Japanese settlement in the Amazon in the pre-war period, but due to the malaria epidemic it ended up failing, causing Japanese immigrants to move to Belém.

From April 1942, the government made Tomé Açu, in the municipality of Acará, a place of confinement for “prisoners of war”<sup>86</sup> due to the ideal geographic configuration of the region, which was surrounded by an area of dense forest, with the river network being the only means of transportation. Around 480 Japanese families were confined there, followed by thirty-two German families and a few Italians.<sup>87</sup> After having their assets, businesses and properties confiscated by the government, the Japanese who lived in Belém and Vila Amazônia were arrested and sent to the Tomé Açu concentration camp. Those confined were practically abandoned to their fate in a place with equatorial climatic conditions considered to be “pernicious”, due to the spread of endemic diseases and lack of accommodation and food<sup>88</sup>. In the report of Japanese residents of Acará, the Japanese families that were taken to the place of confinement, in general, were sheltered by other Japanese families that already lived in the village.

According to most of the current and contemporary reports about the Tomé-Açu (or Acará) concentration camp, the reason for the confinement of the Japanese in that region was to protect

---

<sup>86</sup> Term used at the time for both military and civilians.

<sup>87</sup> Perazzo, *Prisioneiros da Guerra*, 2009

<sup>88</sup> Sarita Reed e Vinícius Fontana, BBC News Brasil, August 29, 2020, Campo de Concentração na Amazônia aprisionou centenas de famílias japonesas durante 2ª Guerra <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-53927273> accessed April 11, 2023.

the immigrants from civil and military hostilities in the region which preyed on the businesses and residences of the “enemies of war”<sup>89</sup>.

Although those imprisoned did not have to be confined behind high walls, there was military surveillance, curfews, energy rationing, restrictions on communication and movement, and censorship of correspondence. When an inmate fled to the forest, he was usually flogged upon returning. The government also stipulated forced manual labor in agriculture and carpentry.<sup>90</sup>

Contrary to the reports of Japanese people from Vila Amazônia who declared that they were forced to work for the government in a place that, for many of them, resembled a “concentration camp in the middle of the Amazon rainforest”<sup>91</sup>, the ex-soldiers from Pará who witnessed the war period seem to take another view. For them:

what was conventionally called a “concentration camp” at the time bore no resemblance to the European death camps [...] There was a curfew and electricity rationing, but there was no hunger or physical violence. [...] The majority lived with family members and only those who did not have a home lived in the general residence, called “hostel”. The government provided food and the guard contingent was reduced (Silva et al, 2014:23-24)

It is interesting to note that articles in Brazilian newspapers recurrently published articles about Brazilian concentration camps with an opinion similar to that of former military combatants from Pará. The newspaper *O Estado do Pará*, for example, published on January 3, 1943 a full page detailing the conditions and routine of the Tomé Açu concentration camp. According to the article, “Truly, Tome-Assu cannot be called a concentration camp. Because what you see there is more of a summer camp. Everyone enjoys ample freedom.” The report praises the administrator’s performance and highlights the quality of food and facilities for the inmates, as well as the

---

<sup>89</sup>Isabela Barreiros, *Aventura Historia*, October 13, 2019, O Campo de Concentração para “Inimigos da Nação” em Tomé Açu, no Pará <https://aventurasnahistoria.uol.com.br/noticias/almanaque/o-campo-de-concentracao-para-inimigos-da-nacao-em-tome-acu-no-para.phtml> accessed April 11, 2023.

<sup>90</sup> *Jornal Nacional*, October 25, 2011, Amazonas pede desculpas aos Japoneses por abusos na 2ª Guerra <https://g1.globo.com/jornal-nacional/noticia/2011/10/governo-do-amazonas-pede-desculpas-aos-japoneses-por-abusos.html> accessed April 11, 2023.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

development of the municipality after the improvements carried out by the government. It is evident from the photos and the content of the article that it intends to convey a humanitarian image of the Brazilian government and people in dealing with “enemies of war”.

For historian Priscila Perazzo (2009), the Brazilian press played a prominent role in building a “pro-Allied” discourse of the humanitarian treatment of foreign inmates, while at the same time reinforcing collective fear with stories about Japanese threats and Nazis in Brazilian territory.

According to Perazzo, The manipulations of the news carried out by the Brazilian press were necessary to counter the criticism and denouncements of the international delegations which visited places of confinement. In the Japanese immigrants' version, these anti-Japanese reports were nothing more than fallacious news invented by American propaganda services. Koichi Kishimoto accuses the United States of using these resources to alienate the Brazilian people. According to him (2022, 105), “the North American propaganda service mobilized two or three Brazilian newspapers to divulge, daily and with fanfare, news about the Japanese – in fact just rumors – received from different parts of the country. Tsunetoshi Tokuo (2018, 39) vents in his diary that “Japanese immigrants have always been praised by the Brazilian authorities for their diligent and docile nature. However, due to the current circumstances, news of arrests of compatriots accused of espionage frequently appear in the newspapers”.

But not all Japanese people seem to have the same testimony. Interestingly, in the book commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Foundation of the Mixed Agricultural Cooperative of Tomé-Açu and seventy-eight years of cooperativism in the Amazon, organized by the leaders of the colony in that region, the Tomé-Açu concentration camp was a “paradise”, where parties and even baseball games were held. The directors of the Cooperative say that the administrator of the concentration camp was “very friendly with the Japanese, he did not treat them as hostile people, he treated them in the same way as he did with Brazilians” (2009, 57).

These reports seem, to say the least, strange in view of the facts that Japanese immigrants from Pará and the Amazon had their goods and properties confiscated by the government, in addition to their civil rights being curtailed.

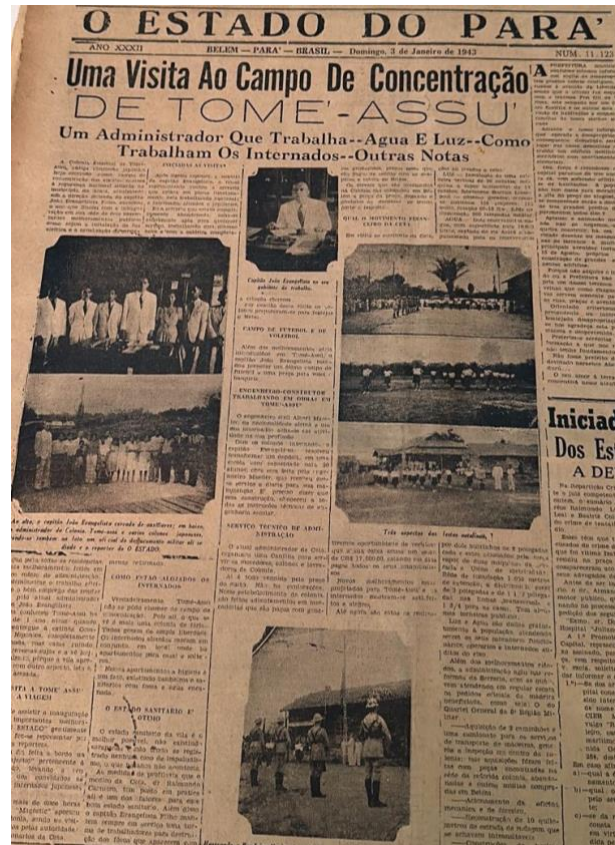


Image: A visit to the Tomé-Assu concentration camp as reported in the The State of Pará, January 3, 1943.<sup>92</sup>

## Consequences of repressions in the Japanese-Brazilian community

After the war in 1945, Japanese immigrants and their descendants would experience a new setback. After years of repression, with no access to information, with the recall of radio sets and the closure of Japanese-language newspapers, Japanese expatriates were lost and confused by the announcement of Japan's unconditional surrender. According to journalist Osamu Toyama:

Almost every [Japanese] colony went into a state of mental breakdown. The situation was beyond the grasp of the Japanese. Rumors soon arose. They spoke of Japan's victory, news that spread quickly throughout the colony, transmitted by word of mouth. But dissenting voices were also raised. They manifested conformation: patience, we lost (2009: 269).

<sup>92</sup> The State of Pará, Belém. January 3, 1943. Arthur Vianna Belém Public Library (PA).

For the majority of Japanese immigrants, the news conveyed by Brazilian newspapers was false, like so much other fallacious news that was published about Japan and the “Axis subjects”. How could they believe the news coming from an enemy source? The plastic artist Tomoo Handa (1987: 642), at the time, also could not believe the news of unconditional surrender, as we observe in his memoirs: “what seemed most impossible to me [...] was the surrender of all the military<sup>93</sup>, unless there was a revolution in Japan.”

All this spread of disparate rumors ended up culminating in one of the most violent incidents of fratricide within the Japanese community in Brazil, which became known as the *Shindo Renmei* (League of the Path of the Subjects) incident. The Japanese-Brazilian community was polarized into *kachigumi* (those who believed in Japan's victory in the war) and *makegumi* (those who accepted Japan's unconditional surrender), generating a tense climate of extreme turbulence that, over the following years, led to some more exalted members of the *kachigumi* threatening to kill those who did not believe in the Japanese victory (Kumasaka; Saito, 1970). In addition to Ikuta, at least twenty-two other Japanese people were killed and 147 were injured by the organization's attacks.<sup>94</sup>

The DOPS of the State of São Paulo intervened in the case, and between 1946-47, in an operation coordinated with local police stations, arrested 170 Nikkei who were sent directly to the prison on Ilha Anchieta, on the north coast of São Paulo.

The Brazilian press again places a negative emphasis on the image and reputation of the Japanese when reporting cases of violence committed within the Japanese-Brazilian community. The *Jornal de Notícias* (News), for example, in its article entitled ‘They do not understand...’<sup>95</sup>. features a report on a post-war clarification assembly that took place in São Paulo among some representatives of the Japanese community who did not accept the news of the surrender of Japan

---

<sup>93</sup> Japanese military were trained not to surrender under any circumstances; this was one of the items in the “socialization for death” of soldiers. On this subject see Kazuko Tsurumi, *Social Change and the Individual: Japan Before and After Defeat in World War II*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970.

<sup>94</sup>Heytor Campezzi, “Quase 80 anos depois, organização secreta do interior de SP que matava japoneses ainda é tabu: ‘História oculta’” Bauru e Marília, July 8, 2023, <https://g1.globo.com/sp/bauru-marilia/noticia/2023/05/08/quase-80-anos-depois-organizacao-secreta-do-interior-de-sp-que-matava-japoneses-ainda-e-tabu-historia-oculta.ghtml>, accessed February 24, 2024.

<sup>95</sup> *Jornal de Notícias*, July 21, 1946, Issue 83, *They don't understand...* <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=583138&pesq=Shindo%20Renmei&past=a=ano%20194&hf=memoria.bn.br&pagfis=730> accessed April 11, 2023.

and Brazilian Ambassador Macedo Soares. The article, in a provocative tone, calls the Japanese who were present at the meeting “arrogant” and “fanatics” for not recognizing the “defeat for the democratic forces”, nor the idea that Japan had been “reduced to a country of third order”. For *Jornal de Notícias*, the Japanese “only recognize and respect force”, since in the face of all the refusals to sign the act of surrender drawn up by the Brazilian embassy and by the representative of Sweden (in charge of negotiating for Japanese interests in Brazil):

This reveals the degree of fanaticism of the Japanese and the degree of divorce that exists between them and the rest of the nation, from which they are isolated. This finding shows the danger we had in our own home and that we didn't believe or worry about. These have not the slightest notion that they are in a foreign country whose laws they owe obedience and whose customs they must conform to. The situation created by the Japanese is the result of immigration. The individual departs, but remains linked to the homeland.

There were many informative materials in the media that pointed to the entry of Japanese immigrants in Brazil as responsible for the lack of national consensus and the threat of the ‘yellow peril.’ The Brazilian press, as an organ which formed public opinion, certainly interfered in the integration process of Asians into postwar Brazilian society.

With the defeat of Japan in the Second World War and the cases of fratricide provoked by the polarization of the Japanese community in Brazil between victors and defeatists, a small group of Nikkei intellectuals from the city of São Paulo believed that assimilation into Brazilian culture would be the only way not only for the social and economic rise of the new generation of Japanese Brazilians, but also for the softening of the ultranationalist sentiment of a large part of the Japanese immigrants, which culminated in the murder of several community leaders. More than just trying to merge with the dominant culture, the thesis of the assimilation into Brazilian culture defended by this Nikkei elite meant trying to “erase” from the collective memory the oppression, persecution, confinement, and imprisonment they suffered during the war period, as well as the terrorist attacks that had scared Brazilian society.



At that time, the Japanese-language press resumed publications in order to bring clarification to the confused Japanese community amid rumors and fallacious news that circulated orally. This attempt at "clarification" by the Japanese Brazilian newspapers, however, met with resistance and revolt from many members of the Japanese colony who launched, in retaliation, printed material that became known as "victorious" newspapers, which counterattacked the arguments and news of the so-called "defeatists".

### **Voluntary Erasure of War Trauma**

After the end of this period of violence and with the arrest of the terrorists, the most radical "victorious" newspapers gradually lost their initial intention until they disappeared completely in the 1950s. A small group of Nikkei intellectuals from the city of São Paulo, who made up the so-called "defeatist group", realized that the terrorist attacks had been contained, but that nationalist sentiment was still latent in a large part of the community. Thus, the Japanese consulate in Brazil and Japanese Brazilian entities such as the *Bunkyo* in the city of São Paulo, in an attempt to cleanse the image of the Japanese as inassimilable, fanatical, and militarily aggressive and to calm the fury of the "victors", began a process of concealment of past traumas. Thus began the erasure of data, sources, "victorious" newspapers, and any other type of documentation relating to the war and postwar periods.

Japanese-Brazilian associations, Nikkei newspapers, and the leaders of the institutions themselves, as well as Japanese-Brazilian academics together with the Japanese consulate, for a long time believed that by mentioning the facts of the past, such as the formation of nationalist groups like *Shindo Renmei*, they could rekindle the spirits of the most exalted members of the community, motivating them to new acts of violence, in addition to highlighting a part of the history of Japanese immigration that many considered shameful. Documentary filmmaker Mário Jun Okuhara talks about the Nikkei culture of shame that prevented the Japanese diaspora in São Paulo from bringing up the *Shindo Renmei* incident. In this way, Japanese Brazilian intellectuals focused on themes that narrated a trajectory of struggle and success of Japanese immigrants who, over more than a hundred years, "integrated" into Brazilian society and today have achieved a position of respect and the admiration of the Brazilian people. The discussion of some topics such as terrorist attacks and the imprisonment and confinement of Japanese people during the war,



curiously, became taboo within the Japanese community which, for decades, was careful not to touch on this subject, especially in commemorative books launched by associations, Nikkei academics and the Japanese consulate.

In fact, this story was forgotten for decades and not by chance ended up being revealed by someone outside the Japanese community, almost fifty years later. Journalist and writer Fernando Morais, in his work *Corações Sujos (Dirty Hearts, 2001)*, tries to reconstruct the events of violence provoked, according to the author, by the nationalist faction called *Shindo Renmei*. From the perspective of an individual with no identity connection with the collective memory of postwar Japanese immigrants, Morais narrates historical facts that could have been completely erased from the history and memory of Japanese immigration in Brazil. His book was received with some discomfort and embarrassment on the part of defenders of the image of the “model minority” of Japanese descendants. On the other hand, it encouraged current generations to rethink this period and to demand justice and reparation for the financial, physical, and moral damages suffered by the Japanese during the war.

The documentary *Yamino Ichinichi: The Crime that Shook the Japanese Colony (2011)*<sup>96</sup>, produced by lawyer and documentary filmmaker Mario Okuhara, certainly had this intention of reconstituting the past of Japanese immigrant history and redressing the injustice of that time. In addition to the documentary, Okuhara also filed a petition with the Truth Commission in 2013 demanding an official apology from the federal government for the civil rights violation committed against the Japanese in the postwar period. Official entities of the Japanese community such as *Bunkyo* were reticent about the Okuhara documentary and the public hearing at the Truth Commission, perhaps, among many reasons, out of fear that these events would rekindle old feelings that had been contained over time.

According to the precepts preached by transnational justice, all people who have had their civil rights curtailed and were victims of authoritarian governments have the right and duty to truth

---

<sup>96</sup> Mario Jun Okuhara, “Yami no Ichinichi - O Crime que abalou a Colônia Japonesa no Brasil” (versão português),” December 13, 2012, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDf\\_egB3MG4&ab\\_channel=MarioJunOkuhara](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDf_egB3MG4&ab_channel=MarioJunOkuhara) accessed February 26, 2024.

and memory.<sup>97</sup> Against this device, journalist David Rieff, author of the book *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and Its Ironies* (2016), believes that it is essential to rethink categorical positions about the duty and the right to memory as a form of reparation and justice against the atrocities and human rights violations committed in the past against a particular nation or people. For this author, history itself has proven that, in many cases, remembering can be more harmful than forgetting, causing feelings of retaliation, revenge and even injustice in the current generation.

It is at this point that we consider analyzing the acts of “erasure/concealment” by entities including the Japanese government and postwar Japanese people and descendants of Japanese people. Without a doubt, any act of atrocity committed against a people for racial, political and/or religious reasons must not be hidden. However, at a time of troubled social order (postwar and re-democratization of Brazil) and without a constitutional legal apparatus (no protection of human rights), the small group of post-war Nikkei intellectuals, together with the Japanese government, seem to have chosen the path of silence as a way of containing the hostile acts perpetrated by some members of the Japanese community.

The temporal distance of almost half a century, in the case of the Japanese, seems to have been important in cooling both the resentment of the families of victims of terrorist attacks and the traumas of the war period, as well as feelings of humiliation and indignation against the Brazilian government and *Shindo Renmei's* assassins. Believing or disbelieving Japan's unconditional surrender, after some time, ceased to be the main cause of the polarization of victors and defeatists within the Japanese community. It seems that the main cause was the moral questions raised by each group that led to violence and confrontation.

## Conclusion

The quest for modernization of the Brazilian industrial park and the promise of Brazil's supremacy in South America led the Brazilian government to align itself with Washington's interests. Although the dictatorial and authoritarian regime of President Getúlio Vargas was

---

<sup>97</sup> Justiça de transição, Memória, verdade e reparação <https://justicadetransicao.mpf.mp.br/> accessed July 07, 2023.

dissonant with the anti-fascist image that the Brazilian chancellery tried to convey during the Second World War, Brazil ended up aligning itself with the United States in combating the Nazi advance in the country. However, the rupture of diplomatic relations with the Axis countries represented more of a milestone for Brazil's industrial and economic development than a matter of national security against alleged fifth column spies.

There were no lack of justifications for the government and the political police (DOPS) to continue with practices that violated civil rights and legitimize racism and discrimination, especially against the Japanese. American commercial interests and the Nazi yearning for advance in Latin America gave the president and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil “bargaining power” in the game of political forces. With that, Brazil ended up ceding national territory to the American military occupation, providing secret information exclusively to the United States and putting in motion the national security control plan by imprisoning, persecuting, confiscating goods, confining in concentration camps, and expelling foreigners coming from the Axis countries from their homes.

It was up to Brazilian diplomats, however, to handle international criticism of the difficult and far from humane conditions of “prisoners of war” in concentration camps in Brazil. These confinement places were described by the Brazilian press as “summer camps”, where inmates had moments of leisure and entertainment, in addition to freedom of movement. It is important to consider that most of the newspapers, magazines, radio stations, advertising agencies and publishing houses in Brazil were owned by the *Diários Associados of Assis Chateaubriand*, one of the most influential pro-fascist men of the Vargas era.<sup>98</sup> Conveying a humanitarian image and, at the same time, meeting Roosevelt's aspirations with demonstrations of alignment, were the great challenges of the Brazilian chancellery.

The central point of this research was not only to discuss American interference in commercial, military and political affairs in Brazil, but to show that the national security measures of the United States, when transplanted to the Brazilian reality, resulted in disastrous adaptations and caused serious and irreparable consequences. Indeed, even with some room for manoeuvre, Brazil could not negotiate with the United States in an equitable manner, since the two countries

---

<sup>98</sup> Perazzo, *Prisioneiros da Guerra*, 2009

occupied practically opposite positions in the geopolitics of the time. Brazil represented on the international scene a country that was poor, agricultural, with many demands, under an atrocious pro-fascist dictatorship and subordinated to the forces of Washington. The Brazilian government did not have the resources to build an internment camp, as in the United States, so it took advantage of existing unhealthy prisons and inhospitable places like the Amazon to confine the so-called Axis subjects. The concentration camps operated by the Brazilian dictator Getúlio Vargas, however, were as cruel as those of the Third Reich, in terms of the lack of civil and individual liberties. In Article 168 of the Brazilian Constitution of 1937, the President of the Republic could authorize censorship, search and seizure, and deprivation of the right to come and go during a state of war. In contrast, the US Constitution provides in its Fifth Amendment specific protections of individual liberty, civil rights, and restrictions on the powers of government. It was not that the US government did not violate its own constitution during the war, but at least Japanese Americans had some internal legal protection.

In concrete terms, while the US government took sixty-eight days between planning, building internment camps far from the coast, and interning Japanese Americans, the Brazilian government, in turn, evacuated the coastal region of Santos in twenty-four hours, literally expelling the Japanese and German residents with only the clothes on their backs and transporting them to the interior of the state of São Paulo. In the case of the Tomé Açu concentration camp, the Japanese were confined in a region that was naturally inhospitable and left them to their fate. Imprisoning prisoners of war in agricultural colonies and common penitentiaries was also a common practice to avoid the construction of a place specifically for this purpose. The most dramatic consequences, however, occurred in the postwar period, when the Japanese community in Brazil became polarized into *kachigumi* and *makegumi*, which ended with a balance of twenty-three murders committed by Japanese against Japanese, dozens of wounded, and more than 170 arrests.

In short, we note the impossibility of equalizing the historical context of each country and the geopolitical position in the scenario of world conflict. Likewise, reparation and apology in both nations took completely different directions. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 granted redress and reparation to Japanese Americans imprisoned during World War II in, so-called by the government itself, "internment or relocation camps". Japanese Brazilians, on the other hand,

victims of incarceration and compulsory removals during wartime, did not receive any official apology, or any type of compensation for the moral, physical, and financial damages caused by the Federal Government. The hearings of the National Truth Commission, which was created by the government of Brazil in 2011 and ended in 2014 with the objective of investigating the serious violations of human rights committed between 1946 and 1988, unfortunately, did not contemplate cases of torture, arrest, imprisonment and compulsory removals of Japanese in Brazil during the Second World War. The only case analyzed in the public hearings of the Truth Commission was that of the Japanese persecuted in Brazil after the end of the Second World War (between 1946 and 1948), more specifically, Tokuichi Hidaka, a former member of *Shindo Renmei* and confessed murderer of a defeatist, a fact that polarized the opinions of academics and the Japanese community.

The history of the Japanese in times of war remains little known in Brazilian historiography, not only because of the censorship imposed by two long dictatorships, but also because of the efforts of the post-war Japanese Brazilian community itself, which tried to erase its history, hiding, minimizing, or dismissing evidence of humiliation, persecution, and oppression that they suffered in the 1930s and 1940s. These measures, it seems, were taken in an attempt by the Nikkei to integrate into Brazilian society. For Gustavo Taniguchi (2018), postwar Nikkei intellectuals saw integration as their only possibility for social ascension. For them, the biological-racial issue was no longer an impediment for the children of immigrants to achieve social mobility. This approach, despite later criticism from sociologists at the University of São Paulo, guided and dominated the work of a good part of the postwar Nikkei intellectuals, as well as the ideology of many Japanese Brazilian newspapers.

For decades, the Japanese community in Brazil maintained this anachronistic cultural vision and, at the same time, made an effort to hide and even erase parts of its own history for reasons related to the appeasement of the “victorious” radicals, the culture of shame (cited by the documentary filmmaker Mario Okuhara), and moral constraints. Finally, it was perhaps because they believed that concealment would bring more benefits to the integration and social ascension of Nikkei in later generations than the memories of this troubled period.

## Bibliography

Agnelli, Henrique Pons. 2021. Vestindo a Wehrmacht: as exportações brasileiras de algodão para a Alemanha, 1934-1940. *XIV Congresso Brasileiro de História Econômica & 15ª Conferência Internacional de História de Empresas. Varginha, 15 a 17 de Novembro de 2021*: 1-24

“Ambassador Jefferson Caffrey (1996-1974). Latin American Posts. Brazil (1937-44) <https://cafferycollection.wordpress.com/brazil-1937-44/>

Andrade, Mário de; Sachs, Sonia. *Vida literária*. São Paulo, SP, 1993: HUCITEC, EDUSP.

Arata, Sumu. *O Martírio do Imigrante Japonês Durante a Guerra do Pacífico*. São Paulo: Editora Gráfica Topan Press Ltda, 2011.

Barreto, Thais. 2013. "Estado deve pedir desculpas aos japoneses perseguidos após a II Guerra Mundial" Accessed April 28, 2023. <http://cnv.memoriasreveladas.gov.br/outros-destaques/357-estado-deve-pedir-desculpas-aos-japoneses-perseguidos-apos-a-ii-guerra-mundial.html>

Bauer, Caroline S.; Gertz, René E. "Arquivo de Regimes Repressivos. Fontes Sensíveis da História RecenteV. In Pinsky, Carla Bassanezi; De Luca, Tania Regina (editors). *O Historiador e suas Fontes*. São Paulo, SP, 2012: Contexto: 173-194

Bezerra, Juliana. “Política da Boa Vizinhança.” <https://www.todamateria.com.br/politica-da-boa-vizinhanca/> Access 18 April 2023.

“Brasil segue os EUA e rompe com o Eixo.” Memorial da Democracia <http://memorialdademocracia.com.br/card/brasil-rompe-com-o-eixo>. Accessed April 06, 2023.

Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. *Brazil: Five Hundred Years of Settlement*, Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2000.

Cancelli, Elizabeth. 1994. *O Mundo da Violência. A Polícia da Era Vargas*. 2ª edição. Brasília: UnB Editora.

Decree-Law No. 3,462 of July 25, 1941. Legislation. Câmara dos Deputados <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/declei/1940-1949/decreto-lei-3462-25-julho-1941-413450-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html> accessed Nov. 23, 2023.

Delangue, Henri. "The Origin of Significant Japanese-Brazilian Trade and Investment Relations: Origin, Content and Consequences of the 1935 Japanese Trade Mission to Brazil".

*Econometrics*. Center for Economics Studies. Bruxelles: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven: 1-39, 1999.

Fischer, Galen. "The Evacuation of the Japanese from the North American Pacific Coast." *Magazine of Immigration and Colonization* 4, No. 3 (1943): 521-534.

Florindo, Marcos Tarcisio. "O DEOPS/SP na Era Vargas. Crescimento Institucional, Administração Burocrática e Práticas Tradicionais de Atuação Policial." *Aurora*. 5 No. 7 (2011): 124-139.

Fukasawa, Masayuki. *Se o Grão de Arroz Não Morre*. Tradução Asucena Nakagomi. São Paulo: Editora Jornalística União Nikkei Ltda, 2018.

Handa, Tomoo. *O Imigrante Japonês: História de Sua Vida no Brasil*. São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiro, 1987.

Herman, Rebecca. *Cooperating with the Colossus: A Social and Political History of US Military Bases in World War II Latin America*. Oxford University Press, 2022.

Hilton, Stanley E. "Brazilian Diplomacy and the Washington-Rio de Janeiro "Axis" during the World War II Era". *Hispanic American Historical Review* 59, No 2. (1979): 201-231.

Kessler, Ronald *The FBI. Inside the World's Most Powerful Law Enforcement Agency*. Pocket Book, 1993.

Kishimoto, Koichi. *Isolados em um Território em Guerra na América do Sul*. São Paulo: Ateliê, 2022.

McCann, F. 1995. "Brazil and World War II The Forgotten Ally. What did you do in the war, Zé Carioca". *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y El Caribe*, 6, No. 2.(1995):35-70. Accessed April 28, 2023. <https://eial.tau.ac.il/index.php/eial/article/view/1193/1221>

Mowry, David P. German Clandestine Activities in South America in World War II. Office of Archives and History. Series IV World War II. Volume 3. National Security Agency/Central Security Service. United States Cryptologic History., 1989. [https://www.nsa.gov/portals/75/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/cryptologic-histories/german\\_clandestine\\_activities.pdf](https://www.nsa.gov/portals/75/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/cryptologic-histories/german_clandestine_activities.pdf)

Okamoto, Monica. *The French Influence on Brazilian Discourse in Japan: Immigration, Identity and Racial Prejudice*. São Paulo: Porto de Ideias Editora, 2016

Perazzo, Priscila Ferreira. *Prisioneiros da Guerra: os 'Súditos do Eixo' nos Campos de Concentração Brasileiros (1942-1945)*. São Paulo: Impr. Oficial, Humanitas, 2009.

Seitenfus, Ricardo Antônio Silva. *O Brasil vai à Guerra: O Processo do Envolvimento Brasileiro na Segunda Guerra Mundial*. 3. São Paulo: Ed. Barueri/ Manole, 2003.

Sterling, George E. "The U.S. Hunt for Axis. Agent Radios". *Cia Historical Review Program*, 1995. Accessed April 28, 2023.

<https://www.cia.gov/static/301e25b860e19554e0f89d3bef8a8721/Hunt-for-Axis-Radios.pdf>

Toyama, Osamu. *Cem Anos de Águas Corridas da Comunidade Japonesa*. São Paulo: AGWM, 2009.

Tsurumi, Kazuko. *Social Change and the Individual: Japan Before and After Defeat in World War II*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970.

Yoshida, Helen. "Redress and Reparations for Japanese American Incarceration". August 13, 2021. Accessed April 28, 2023.

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/redress-and-reparations-japanese-americanincarceration#:~:text=This%20law%20gave%20surviving%20Japanese,the%20redress%20movement%20into%20legislation.>