

University of San Diego

Digital USD

---

Petitions and Briefs

Hirabayashi v. United States

---

2-7-1942

**Japanese Menace on Terminal Island, San Pedro, California -  
Report on subject prepared by Counter Intelligence Section, ONI  
(Kenneth Ringle)**

K. D. Ringle  
*United States Navy*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digital.sandiego.edu/hirabayashi\\_petitions](https://digital.sandiego.edu/hirabayashi_petitions)

---

**Digital USD Citation**

Ringle, K. D., "Japanese Menace on Terminal Island, San Pedro, California - Report on subject prepared by Counter Intelligence Section, ONI (Kenneth Ringle)" (1942). *Petitions and Briefs*. 14.  
[https://digital.sandiego.edu/hirabayashi\\_petitions/14](https://digital.sandiego.edu/hirabayashi_petitions/14)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Hirabayashi v. United States at Digital USD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Petitions and Briefs by an authorized administrator of Digital USD. For more information, please contact [digital@sandiego.edu](mailto:digital@sandiego.edu).

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

BIO/ND11/EP37/A8-5

**SUBJECT:** Japanese Menace on Terminal Island, San Pedro, California.

**REFERENCE:** (a) Report on subject prepared by Counter Intelligence Section, ONI, January 18, 1942.

**PREPARED BY:** Lieut. Comdr. K. D. RINGLE, USN.

**DATE:** February 7, 1942.

-----

### I Ownership of Land and Establishment of Colony.

1. The land on which the Japanese colony on Terminal Island is established is owned by the City of Los Angeles and administered under the Harbor Department. This land, including the sites of the various fish canneries and the waterfront and moorings at Fish Harbor, has been leased by the City of Los Angeles to the fish canneries for many years. The canneries in turn built the houses and barracks now occupied by the Japanese and sub-leased them to the cannery employees.

This was done so that at any hour of the day or night when fish were brought in, cannery employees could be quickly called to work and the fresh fish processed before any deterioration or spoilage set in. Also, the cannery employees engaged in the actual taking of fish at sea were likewise leased dwellings here. These sub-leases are very short-term leases, subject to quick cancellation if the lessors should cease to be employed by the canneries. It should therefore be self-evident that this entire colony has existed since its inception due to the tolerance, knowing or unknowing, of the Los Angeles city government and the fish packing industry.

### II Japanese Population.

1. The total Japanese population, including both alien and American born, is at present about 2500. It is interesting to note in this connection that there are only about 800 aliens, the balance being entirely American born. Of these 800 about 375 male alien fishermen were taken into custody by the Department of Justice on 2 February 1942, leaving an alien population of about 425 at present, largely women.

2. It will be noted that this is a decrease in Japanese population from that reported in reference (a). Causes for this decrease are as follows:

(a) Due to the unsettled political situation between the United States and Japan during the last two years, a great many of the alien families have returned to Japan.

(b) There have been no replacements arriving from Japan for those who have died or who have moved away.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

SUBJECT: Japanese Menace on Terminal Island, San Pedro, California.

-----

(c) The American-born children as they came of age have turned to other means of livelihood and have moved away from Terminal Island. This is considered to be a result of the Americanizing influence of their education in the American public schools.

(d) The fish canneries themselves have been gradually replacing a great many of the former Japanese employees, both afloat and ashore by non-Japanese, such as Jugo-Slavs, Filipinos, Negroes, and the like.

3. There does exist in the present population a large element of what is considered to be the most dangerous class of persons of the Japanese race in the United States. This class is composed of those persons born in the United States, sent to Japan in infancy, raised and trained there, and who have returned to the United States within the last four or five years as adults, and who have been permitted entry as American citizens because of their American birth. There are several hundred of this type of person presently residing on Terminal Island and engaged either in the taking or processing of fish. It is felt that these persons constitute the greatest menace of the whole colony to the security of the United States.

### III The Fishing Fleet.

1. The menace of the so-called Japanese fish boats has been decreased greatly in the last few years, due to the action of the United States authorities in such cases as that of the fish boat Nancy Hanks. It is quite true that formerly there were a number of actual alien-owned and alien-documented vessels operating out of the Port of Los Angeles, paying so-called "light money" for the privilege of so operating. However, largely due to the rigid enforcement of the customs laws, these vessels have either been withdrawn or have changed their documentation to American ownership. In the case referred to of the Nancy Hanks, the customs instituted a suit against the owners for non-payment of duty on fish brought into the United States and sold in the domestic market, by a foreign-owned vessel.

In order that these vessels could be documented under the laws of the United States, it was required that at least 51% of the vessel be owned by American citizens, and that an American citizen be master of the vessel. These laws were in the past evaded by having the ownership vested in the American-born children of aliens and by having the American-born master be merely a dummy, the real control of the vessel and her crew being vested in the head of the fishing crew who was known as the "fish boss," who directed all movements of the vessel at sea. The latter practice was common even on those vessels owned by the fish packers themselves. Hence, this evasion of the law was done with the tacit consent and connivance of the fish packing companies, although it is exceedingly doubtful if this can be proved in any court of law.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

SUBJECT: Japanese Menace on Terminal Island, San Pedro, California.

-----

In the last two or three years, this situation has gradually been rectified by a more rigid inspection and supervision of these vessels by the Customs and the Coast Guard, until at the present time it is doubtful if any of the documented vessels are actually alien-owned or alien-controlled.

Nevertheless, there are a large number of small undocumented vessels used in inshore fishing which are completely alien-owned and alien-controlled, since they do not come within the documentation laws of the United States. These as a rule are the small one and two-man vessels of less than five tons.

Since the outbreak of the war on December 7, 1941, there has been no Japanese, either alien or citizen, permitted to leave the harbor on any fishing vessel, large or small. This was done by the Department of Justice acting through the Immigration Service by telegram received on December 7th, which is quoted in part as follows: "It is important in addition to prevent departure persons of Japanese race claiming United States citizenship." This restriction is still in effect.

IV Analysis of the Hazard to the Security of the United States due to this Japanese Colony on Terminal Island.

1. As has been pointed out, it is very evident that a hazard definitely exists due to the location of this large Japanese colony in the heart of the Los Angeles harbor district. It is considered that this hazard can be broken down as follows:

- (a) Physical observation and espionage - 75%.
- (b) Sabotage - 20%.
- (c) Fifth column activity - 5%. By fifth column activity is meant preparation for and assistance to any attempted attack or invasion from outside sources.

2. An analysis of the above hazards is as follows:

(a) It is evident that observation and espionage has been going forward for a great many years. Therefore, it is evident that the physical location of all fixed defense works and harbor improvements and the like are already known to the Japanese. These fixed installations would include such items as the exact location and extent of Reeves Field, Naval Operating Base, Fort MacArthur, oil, gas, and power lines, tank farms, marine oil loading terminals, important docks, oil refineries, shipbuilding installations, railway lines and bridges, anti-submarine nets and buoys, harbor approaches, and aids to navigation, and the like.

The items which would be of value to the enemy and which these people are in an unexcelled position to observe and report on, are such items as arrival and departure of convoys, including size, strength of escort, and

SUBJECT: Japanese Menace on Terminal Island, San Pedro, California.  
-----

bulk of cargo; troop movements; arrival and departure of major units of the fleet; progress of shipbuilding, including launching and commissioning of men-of-war, as well as merchant marine; progress of construction of Naval Operating Base, including the new dry dock and the channel approaches thereto; delivery of new aircraft; the strength or lack of strength of the aerial defenses of the Naval Air Station and Naval Operating Base; and similar matters.

As long as this colony, which contains known alien sympathizers, even though of American citizenship, is allowed to exist in the heart of every activity in the Los Angeles Harbor, it must be assumed that items such as the above are known, observed, and transmitted to the enemy quickly and easily.

(b) Sabotage. The only reason that sabotage is considered to be no more than 20% of the total hazard, is because of the rather rigid and effective guards and protections which have been placed into effect within the last six months. These protective measures include the emptying of marine loading terminals of oil, gasoline, and other inflammables; lights and guards on ships and docks; constant patrol of the waters of the harbor by the Coast Guard and recently by the City Police of Los Angeles and Long Beach; the posting of guards on bridges leading to Terminal Island; the fencing and private guards required under the terms of the contracts by firms engaged in defense work, such as Bethlehem Shipbuilding Company, Los Angeles Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company, etc.; and the presence of troops in the immediate vicinity.

It should not be inferred from the above that full and adequate protective measures have been placed into effect—far from it. There still exists a great need for increased police and fire protection and the reduction of possible fire hazards due to the tremendous lumber yards, free-flowing oil wells, exposed water, gas, gasoline, oil and transmission lines, and installations, etc. These hazards are at the moment beyond the control of the naval and military authorities, but would serve as ideal objectives for saboteurs having as ready access to them as the Japanese colony on Terminal Island.

(c) Fifth Column Activity. This hazard is considered to be only 5% of the whole, for two reasons: First, this colony is quite concentrated and under constant observation, and can be quickly and immediately surrounded by troops on the spot. Second, because in spite of what has been said previously, there do exist in this colony a great many known and trusted nisei (American citizens of Japanese ancestry), who would immediately resent and combat any such attempt and who are at present acting as observers and informers for the Naval Intelligence Service and the F.B.I.