

UNIVERSITY  
of ALASKA  
ANCHORAGE



UAA  
University Honors College  
UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE

# Race and Internment: World War II from an Alaskan Perspective

Hannah Cox

hlcox@alaska.edu

ENGL A476:  
ENGLISH IN ALASKA  
ARTIFACT ANALYSIS  
FALL 2018

## OVERVIEW

This telegram was sent by Edward Lewis Bartlett, or Bob Bartlett, the acting territorial governor of Alaska at the time, on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1942. It was sent to Governor Ernest Gruening, then the territorial governor of Alaska, who was temporarily outside the state. Its message concerns Bartlett's request for advice regarding a plea from Alice Stuart against the evacuation, or removal, of the boy Henry Hope during the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans and Japanese immigrants. Hope is half Native Alaskan and half Japanese, but was raised exclusively by Native Alaskans, making his situation unique and thus warranting the telegram.

There are a great many things of linguistic interest occurring in this telegram, but I chose to focus specifically on the language of race used as quoted from Stuart and the implications of the negative construction surrounding it. I suggest through my historical inquiry into Japanese internment that this telegram illustrates the racial tension that existed in the US during World War II, including US territories, and that it implicates the negative consequences that accompanied the consequences of this tension. As the telegram is situated in the Alaskan context I also consider it in terms of the experience of World War II and race in Alaska.

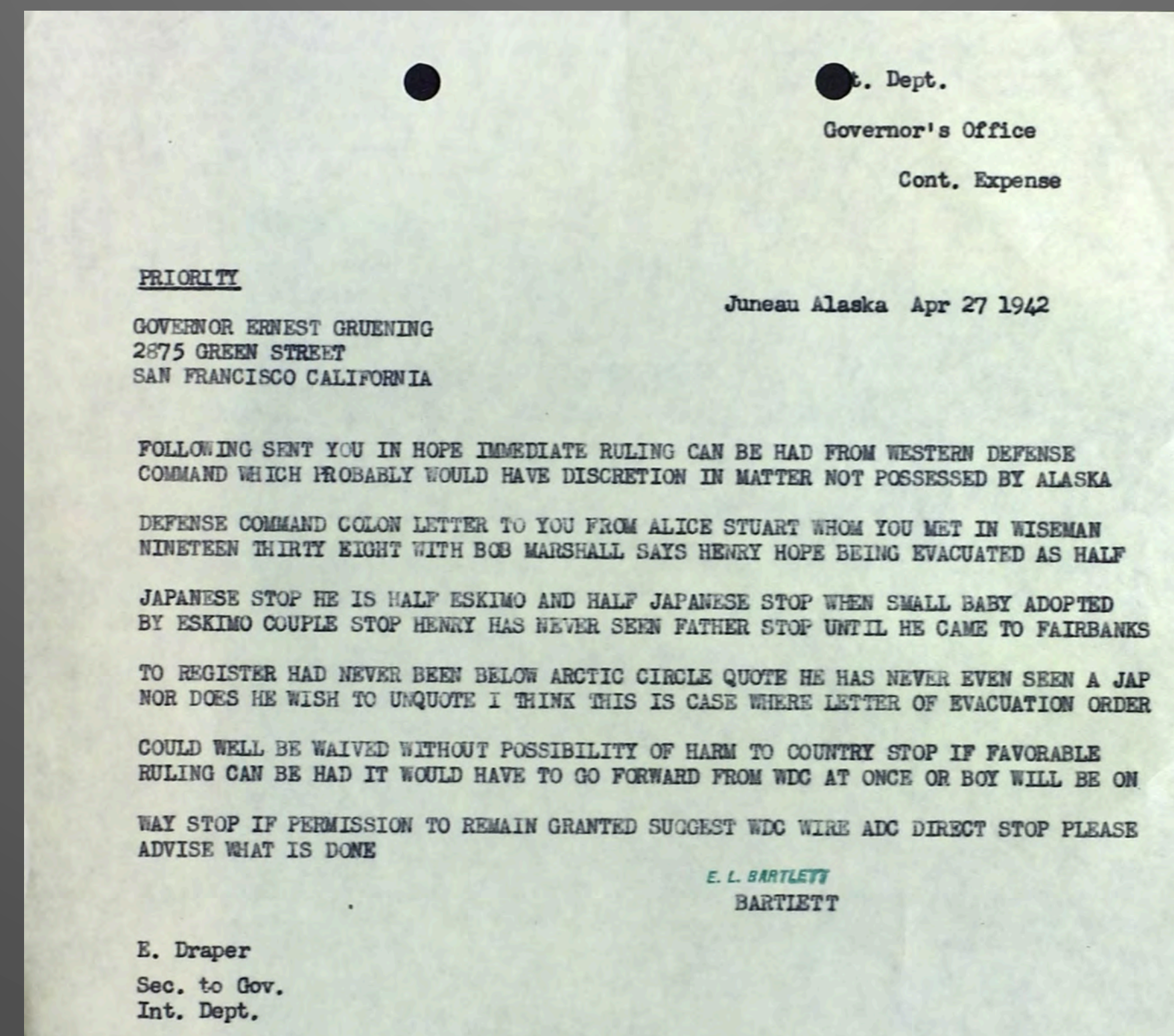
## 1942 IN ALASKA

- Ernest Gruening was the territorial governor in Alaska during WWII. He had an established cooperation with Bob Bartlett (Gruening 286), which it likely Bartlett was acting governor during Gruening's periodical trips outside Alaska.
- There were relatively few Japanese immigrants to Alaska, but most that did come were men; it was common for them to marry Native women (Inouye 259) and to have had little to no contact with others of Japanese heritage (Inouye 261).
- Racial discrimination against Alaska Native peoples was rampant. Some places refused to serve them (Gruening 318).
- About 230 Japanese Alaskans were interned following Executive Order 9066 (Garfield 82). Around the same time Aleut peoples were being evacuated from their villages in the Aleutian Islands to internment camps in other parts of Alaska. The operation was carried out with little planning (Estlack 130), and was part of the narrative of hierarchy of whites over native populations (Estlack 135).
- June 3 1942 the Japanese attacked Dutch Harbor, beginning the campaign in the Aleutians (Garfield 3), often called the "forgotten war" (Estlack 77). June 7 the Japanese took Kiska (Estlack 100) and then Attu shortly thereafter (Estlack 102).

## JAPANESE INTERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

The internment of Japanese-Americans and Japanese immigrants began the spring following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. There was and had for some time been a prevalent view in the US that saw people of Japanese heritage as unable to assimilate to US culture (Murray 50; Robinson 41). As this idea was based purely on racial assessment, linked to social Darwinist theories (Robinson 16), it laid the foundation for discrimination against people of Japanese descent well before World War II.

- In 1913 the first Alien Land Act passed in California; this essentially prevented any more acquisition of land by people "ineligible for nationalization." A later supreme court case, *Ozawa v. U.S.* confirmed this ineligibility for Japanese immigrants (Daniels xv). In 1924 the Immigration Act largely banned Japanese immigration and heightened tensions with Japan (Robinson 33).
- The US was wary of conflict with Japan as Japan became an imperial force, especially when Japan took Manchuria in 1931 (Robinson 47). This did not bode well for Japanese immigrants to the US. Because they could not allegedly become fully "American," it was assumed that they would side with Japan in an all-out conflict (Robinson 22).
- On December 7, 1941, Japanese bombers struck Pearl Harbor. In the US this was followed by a mass of arrests, mainly of Issei, or first generation Japanese immigrants (Murray 3). Later Roberts Report on the attack suggested that Japanese-Americans had aided Japanese bombers (Murray 41).
- Greg Robinson offers several factors to consider leading up to the removal of Japanese-Americans from the West coast: public hysteria and strong pressure from the military on the West Coast (112); poorly founded political advice (115); the racist views of the time, as elaborated above (119); and inability to empathize as a result of these views (123).
- February 19, 1942 the president signed Executive Order 9066, which gave the military the ability to exclude Japanese-Americans from West Coast locations (Daniels xvii). Following the creation of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) in March 1942, internment camps became operational, and the systematic removal of Japanese-Americans from the West coast began. Japanese-Americans were forced to abandon their livelihoods and properties on very short notice (Murray 9).
- On August 7, 1942 around 110,000 Japanese-Americans had been confined in internment camps, according to authorities on the West coast (Daniels xix).



Alaska State Archives, Governor Ernest Gruening's file on Japanese Internment in Alaska during World War II, 1942-1945, ASA-SR727-VS571

## THE LANGUAGE OF RACE

My analysis is of the following phrase: "...QUOTE HE HAS NEVER EVEN SEEN A JAP NOR DOES HE WISH TO UNQUOTE..."

- The derogatory shortening of Japanese to "Jap" gained popularity during WWII as a method of dehumanization and "type-casting" (Fussell 115).
- When the word took on negative meaning it became a racial slur, such that its derogatory nature became a part of its semantic content (Hedger). It invokes racist ideology and associated practices by its nature (Hom 432).
- Its semantic content is intended to 1) affix an identity to a specific group (Weber 56) and 2) create a hierarchical distinction between the one using the term and the one receiving it (Weber 62; Greenberg et al. 76).
- When identity is challenged, slurs can be used to indicate in-group status and to contrast oneself with the out-group to gain status (Croom).
- Negation in the telegram is used based on the presupposition of intrinsic negativity of the slur "Jap" (Jordan 711), i.e. seeing a "Jap" is socially undesirable, and the use of the slur may be an attempt to gain enough status with the majority culture (Croom) to warrant the granting of the request.

## REFERENCES

- Croom, Adam M. "How to do Things with Slurs: Studies in the Way of Derogatory Words." *Language and Communication*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2013, pp. 177-204.
- Daniels, Roger, editor. *Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress*. University of Utah Press, 1986.
- Estlack, Russell W. *The Aleut Internments of World War II: Islanders Removed from their Homes by Japan and the United States*. McFarland and Company Publishers, 2014.
- Fussell, Paul. *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Garfield, Brian. *The Thousand Mile War: World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians*. University of Alaska Press, 1995.
- Greenberg et al. "Some Theoretical Notions and Preliminary Research Concerning Derogatory Ethnic Labels." *Discourse and Discrimination*, edited by Teun van Dijk et al., Wayne State University Press, 1988, pp. 74-92.
- Gruening, Ernest. *Many Battles: The Autobiography of Ernest Gruening*. Liveright, 1973.
- Hedger, Joseph A. "Meaning and Racial Slurs: Derogatory Epithets and the semantics/pragmatics Interface." *Language and Communication*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2013, pp. 205-213.
- Hom, Christopher. "The Semantics of Racial Epithets." *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 105, no. 8, 2008, pp. 416-440.
- Inouye, Ronald K. "For Immediate Sale: Tokyo Bathhouse - How World War II Affected Alaska's Japanese Civilians." *Alaska at War, 1941-1945: The Forgotten War Remembered*. Edited by Fern Chandonnet, Alaska at War Committee, 1995.
- Jordan, Michael P. "The Power of negation in English: Text, context and relevance." *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 29, no. 6, 1998, pp. 705-752.
- Murray, Alice Yang, editor. *What Did the Internment of Japanese-Americans Mean?* Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.
- Robinson, Greg. *By Order of the President*. Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Weber, Jean-Jacques. *Language Racism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the UAA/APU Consortium Library for providing access to its invaluable resources. Thank you also to Professor Jennifer Stone, who provided support and focus for my analysis.