

Section V: The Japanese American Experience: Internment in the United States

[This section is excerpted from the Sonoma County Japanese American Curriculum Guide Committee.]

Background Materials

The California State Board of Education in its model curriculum guide for human rights has stated that “there is no more urgent task for educators in the field of history and social science than to teach students about the importance of human rights,” and that we must “acknowledge unflinchingly the instances in the U.S. history when our own best ideals were betrayed by the systematic mistreatment of group members because of their race, religion, gender...” and other differences.

We developed this guide about Japanese Americans and wartime camps in the spirit of that mandate.

Since the beginning of recorded history, people the world over have suffered unjust treatment, even death, at the hands of their fellow human beings. Even in modern times, few governments can claim to be without blame in this regard.

When Japan dropped bombs on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government forced 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry—two thirds of them American citizens—into concentration camps, where many would be confined up to three years. Innocent people were imprisoned—some of who would not recover from the experience—without any pretense of legal due process. Of the imprisonment, Dr. Eugene Rostow, one of the foremost authorities on constitutional law, said, “One hundred, thousand persons were sent to concentration camps on a record which wouldn’t support a conviction for stealing a dog.”

Students need to know about this episode in American history, too long buried in one-paragraph accounts in history and social studies texts. They need to know that, although the strongest protection for human rights is to be found in a democratic system of government, abuses do occur.

The broad causes that led to the incarceration of Japanese Americans has been adjudged by the U.S. government’s own commission to be:

1. prejudice;
2. war hysteria, and;
3. the failure of political leadership.

These are critical defects in a democratic society. They erode its very foundation and thus should be the subject of sober study.

While studying this issue, students should be reminded that events initiated by certain governments, or violations committed by them, should not reflect on citizens who are descendants of nationalities of those governments. In recent world events, for example, Arab Americans experienced an eightfold increase in hate crimes and were eyed with

suspicion by the FBI. Japanese Americans were swift to issue a statement condemning those actions, painfully reminded by their own experience.

Students should learn to recognize the use of propaganda and emotional argument to justify violations of human rights in this study. On the other hand, it should help foster in them a respect for differences among people by encouraging understanding and empathy.

Important to note, too, is the fact that the U.S. government has since acknowledged its failure to protect the constitutional rights of Japanese Americans in this case and is now in the process of issuing apologies and monetary compensation to them. Students will thus be made aware that, in a democratic system, while offenses occur, redress is possible.

But the significance of the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II goes far beyond the treatment of Japanese Americans. When prejudice or special interests undermine the constitutional rights of any citizen, all Americans are affected. Students should be encouraged to reflect on this and on their shared responsibility to protect the rights of all its citizens at all times.

This guide, then, traces the background history of the Japanese in the United States from the period of immigration, through the wartime experience, focusing on the camps, to their successful campaign to obtain redress for their imprisonment forty years later. Concurrently, it notes the outer forces which effected the subjugation and, later, the successful survival of these citizens.

Only an informed, concerned society will prevent such a gross violation of human rights and civil liberties from happening again.

Chronology: Important Dates in the History of Japanese in the U.S.

Historically, relations between Japan and the United States have influenced the manner in which the Japanese in the U.S. have been treated. Thus, this chronology includes events that mark that relationship.

I. The Early Period

1841 On June 27, Captain Whitfield, commander of a New England sailing vessel, picks up five shipwrecked Japanese sailors and takes them to Honolulu. While four of the men leave the ship to return to Japan, Manjiro Nakahama stays on board and sails with Captain Whitfield to Fairhaven, Massachusetts. Manjiro, renamed John Mung, attends school in New England. Later, he returns to Japan, where he serves as an interpreter for Commodore Perry, when the latter enters Tokyo Bay in 1853.

1851 Captain Jennings and his crew rescue shipwrecked Japanese and take them to San Francisco, among them Hikoza Hamada, young son of a wealthy landowner. Hamada learns English and other subjects and is baptized "Joseph Heco." In **1858**, Heco becomes the first Japanese to gain U.S. citizenship through naturalization.

1861 While visiting England, Thomas Lake Harris, minister of a utopian group in the U.S., The Brotherhood of the New Life, makes new converts, including Kanaye

Nagasawa, son of wealthy family in Japan. Harris returns to the U.S. with Nagasawa, and in the 1880s, moves to Santa Rosa with his followers to start life anew on a large parcel of land they call Fountaingrove. (see year 1892)

1868 Japanese government authorizes emigration of laborers to Hawaii as plantation workers, but revokes its permission in one year when it hears of mistreatment of the immigrants. Immigration treaty between Japan and Hawaii was not restored until 1885.

1869 First group of Japanese immigrants to the American mainland arrive and establish the Wakamatsu Colony at Gold Hill in California.

1870 Twelve Japanese admitted to U.S. Naval Academy by special act of Congress. Fifty-six Japanese counted in mainland U.S. Several Japanese students enrolled in prestigious colleges like Harvard and Rutgers.

1882 Congress, under pressure, passes Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Along with barring further Chinese immigration, the Act stipulates that “no state court or U.S. court shall admit Chinese to citizenship.” Enforced from 1882 to 1892, it creates labor demand, seen as major reason for increased immigration of Japanese to the Pacific Coast.

1892 Thomas Harris (see date 1861) sells his interest in commune in Santa Rosa, leaves California. Kanaye Nagasawa takes leadership role and develops Fountaingrove property into highly successful commercial venture. Becomes first Japanese wine grower in California. Fountaingrove to become popular center for many Sonoma County social events, visited by international statesman, foreign dignitaries and other notables.

(In **1915**, Nagasawa received the Order of the Rising Sun from the Emperor of Japan in Recognition of his work in handling the Japanese exhibit at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. He was known as “Prince Nagasawa” in Santa Rosa, where he remained a popular and respected figure until his death in 1932)

1893 San Francisco Board of Education introduces regulation providing for segregation of all Japanese children to a Chinese school. Japanese government protests. Regulation withdrawn.

1898 Hawaii annexed by the U.S., enabling about 60, 000 Japanese residing in Hawaii to proceed to mainland U.S. without passports.

II. Immigration and Anti Japanese Activities

1900 Under pressure from U.S., the Japanese government agrees not to issue any more passports to laborers desiring to enter U.S. Since territory of Hawaii is not mentioned in agreement, Japanese continue to immigrate there.

1904 The National Convention of the American Federation of Labor, meeting in San Francisco, resolves to exclude Japanese, Chinese and Koreans from membership.

1904 Japan declares war on Russia. Russia badly defeated. American sentiment, initially with Japan, short-lived.

1905 Japan and Russia sign Portsmouth Treaty, with U.S. as mediator. Provisions of treaty cause outbursts of anti-government and anti-American feelings in Japan. Renewed anti-Japanese feelings swell in U.S.

San Francisco Chronicle runs anti-Japanese series for a year and a half. California legislature urges U.S. Congress to limit Japanese immigration.

Sixty-seven organizations meet in San Francisco to form Asiatic Exclusion League of San Francisco.

1906 San Francisco School Board orders segregation of 93 Japanese American students. Emissary sent by President Theodore Roosevelt to investigate, finds the charges against Japanese contradictory and exaggerated. President sends message to Congress, berating S.F. School Board; calls for legislation to allow Japanese the right of naturalization.

1907 S.F. School Board rescinds segregation order, but strong anti-Japanese feelings expressed. Anti-Japanese riots break out in San Francisco in May, again in October, much to the embarrassment of the U.S. government.

Congress passes immigration bill forbidding Japanese laborers from entering the U.S. via Hawaii, Mexico, or Canada.

1908 The Asiatic Exclusion League reports that 231 organizations affiliated now, 195 of them labor unions.

U.S. Secretary of State, Elihu Root and Foreign Minister Hayashi of Japan formalize a Gentlemen's Agreement whereby Japan agrees not to issue visas to laborers wanting to emigrate to the U.S.

1909 Anti-Japanese riots in Berkeley. U.S. leaders alarmed at tone and intensity of anti-Japanese legislation introduced in California legislature. President Roosevelt and Governor Gillett exchange twelve telegrams over the matter.

1910 Twenty-seven anti-Japanese proposals introduced in the California legislature. White House urges Governor Hiram Johnson to seek moderation.

1913 California legislature passes Alien Land Law (Webb-Haney Act), which denies Japanese right to buy and own land in California Leasing of land limited to 3 years. Similar laws eventually adopted in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, and Minnesota.

1915 The Hearst newspapers, historically anti-Japanese, intensifies its "Yellow Peril" campaign with lurid headlines and editorials, fueling anti-Japanese hostility.

1918 California's Alien Land Law amended to close all loopholes forbids issei to buy land in the names of their nisei children (see date 1913).

1921 Under pressure from U.S., Japan ceases issuing passports to so-called "picture brides," who had been emigrating to the U.S. from about 1910 to join husbands they had married by proxy. These arranged marriages conformed to traditional Japanese practices.

1922 Supreme court rules in *Takeo Ozawa v. U.S.* that naturalization is limited to “free white persons and aliens of African nativity.” This means that all Asians, including issei, are “aliens ineligible for citizenship.”

Congress passes Cable Act, which provides that “any woman who marries an alien ineligible for citizenship shall cease to be an American citizen.” In practice, the Act decrees that anyone marrying an issei would lose their citizenship; also that if marriage is terminate by reason of divorce or death of the issei partner, the surviving Nisei partner could not reapply for citizenship, while a Caucasian could. Act amended in 1931, allowing nisei women married to issei men to retain citizenship.

1924 Congress passes Immigration Exclusion Act, barring all immigration from Japan. Protests held throughout Japan. July 1 declared “Day of Humiliation.”

III. World War II and Incarceration of Japanese Aliens and Citizens

1939 Britain and France declare war on Germany, signaling the beginning of World War II.

1940 President Roosevelt places embargo on most essential raw materials to Japan.

1941 July-Japan seized bases in South Indochina in collaboration with Vichy government.

July- U.S. government imposes oil embargo on Japan (as do British and Dutch), followed by freezing Japanese assets in U.S.

October 16- Civilian government under Prince Konoye falls in Japan, replaced by military cabinet headed by General Hideki Tojo.

November 7-Report prepared by presidential investigator Curtis Munson and submitted to the President, State Department and Secretary of War certifies that Japanese Americans possess extraordinary degree of loyalty to U.S. Corroborates years of surveillance by FBI and Naval Intelligence.

1941 December 7-Japan bombs U.S. fleet and military base at Pearl Harbor.

December 8- U.S. Congress declares war on Japan. Within hours, FBI arrests 736 Japanese resident aliens as security risks in Hawaii and mainland.

December 11- U.S. declares war on Germany and Italy. Shortly afterwards, over 2000 issei in Hawaii and mainland-teachers, priests, officers of organizations, newspaper editors and other prominent people in the Japanese community-imprisoned by the U.S. government.

1942 Confusion and rumors of subversion abound. U.S. and allied forces suffer catastrophic defeats for four months, heightening the threat of a West Coast invasion.

January 5- War Department classifies Japanese American men of draft age as 4-C “enemy aliens.” Status not changed until June 16, 1946.

January 26-Ringle Report and Naval Intelligence secret reports argue against mass internment. Urges encouragement of Japanese American loyalty.

February 19-President Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066, giving Secretary of War authority to designate "military areas" from which to exclude certain people. This sets into motion incarceration of 120,000 Japanese, aliens and citizens.

February 21- Tolan committee begins public hearings in San Francisco on question of disposition of Japanese Americans (decision to intern had already been made). California Atty. General, Earl Warren, testifies that very absence of fifth column activities by Japanese was "confirmation that such actions were planned for the future."

March 2- Public Proclamation #1 issued by Lt. General John L. DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command, specifies military zones 1 and 2. Zone 1 includes western halves of California, Washington and Oregon and southern third of Arizona.

March 24- Gen. DeWitt issues first of a series of exclusion orders which would force complete removal of entire Japanese population from Military Zone 1.

March 27- Gen DeWitt orders curfew of all persons of Japanese ancestry and of aliens only of German and Italian ancestries.

March 28- Attorney Minoru Yasui turns himself in at Portland, Oregon police station to test discriminatory curfew regulations.

April 2- California fires all Japanese Americans in state civil service based on ethnic affiliation.

May 5- University student Gordon Hirabayashi (Seattle) refuses to follow curfew and exclusion orders in order to test constitutionality of military orders.

May- Fred Korematsu arrested in Oakland, California for violating orders to report for detention.

June 4-7-Battle of Midway mangles Japanese navy, a turning point in the war in Pacific.

1942 June 5- Incarceration of persons of Japanese ancestry from designated military zones now complete.

October 30-U.S. Army completes transfer on inmates from Army transit camps to ten permanent War Relocation Authority (WRA) detention camps.

1943 Formation of Japanese American combat units.

In camps, resistance put down, conditional leaves granted.

Immigration bars against Chinese lifted to degree that 100 entries per year permitted.

January 28- War Department announces plans to organize all-Japanese American combat unit.

February 5- Wyoming State legislature passes law denying American citizens at Heart Mountain camp the right to vote, Similar laws passed by other interior state where camps located.

February 8-Loyalty questionnaire administered in all ten camps to men and women over the age of seventeen. Paradoxical nature of questions causes conflicts in families.

April- 442nd Regimental Combat Team activated.

April 20- 9507 Hawaiian Japanese volunteer for special combat unit.

July 15- Tule Lake (CA) designated as segregated center for those whose response to "loyalty oath" proved unacceptable to authorities.

1944 January 20- Reinstatement of draft of Japanese Americans.

March 1- 400 nisei at Heart Mountain camp vote to resist draft until constitutional rights restored.

June 26- 63 men from Heart Mountain convicted for refusing induction. Sentenced to three years in prison. (267 from all ten camps are eventually convicted for draft resistance.)

October 30- 100th/4442nd combat teams rescue Texas "lost battalion" after five days of battle. Suffer 800 casualties, including 184 killed in action to rescue 211 Texans.

December 17- U.S. War Department announces revocation of the West Coast exclusion order against Japanese Americans (effective on January 2, 1945, in anticipation of possible negative ruling of Supreme Court the following day).

December 18- Supreme Court rules detention orders are valid use of "war powers" in the Korematsu case. In Endo case, it declares WRA cannot detain loyal citizens against will, opening way for Japanese Americans to return to West Coast. Nearly 5000 remain interned at Tule Lake under "individual exclusion" law.

1945 March 9- Sixteen square miles of Tokyo destroyed in napalm firestorm.

August 6- U.S. drops atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan.

August 9-U.S. drops atomic bomb on Nagasaki. Total of 3 million Japanese left homeless.

September 2-formal surrender by Japan.

September 4- Western Defense Command issues Public Proclamation No. 24, revoking all West Coast exclusion orders against persons of Japanese ancestry.

1946 Japanese Americans returning to West Coast often met with hostility and acute housing shortage. Begin manual labor as crop pickers, cannery workers and gardeners.

March 20- Tule Lake, last of ten major concentration camps, closes.

IV. Post-War Period

1947 December 12- President Harry Truman grants pardon to all 257 Japanese American draft resisters.

1948 January 19- U.S. Supreme Court invalidates California alien land law which denies gifts of land by immigrant Japanese to citizen children.

May 3-U.S. Supreme Court rules racially restrictive housing covenants unenforceable.

July 12- President Truman signs "Evacuation Claims Act" which would pay less than ten cents on dollar for lost property only. Many former internees are unable to produce required documentary proof of losses.

1952 April 17- California Supreme Court declares racially restrictive alien land laws unenforceable.

June 11- McCarran-Walter Immigration and Naturalization Act passes in Congress over President Truman's veto. Truman considers Act too restrictive in its quota system, which heavily favors northern European nations. However, Act allows Japanese and other Asian immigrants to become naturalized citizens for the first time.

1956 California voters repeal alien land laws by 2 to 1 margin

1959 August 20- Hawaii becomes fiftieth state. Daniel Inouye first Japanese American elected to the House of Representatives.

1962 Daniel Inouye becomes first Japanese American elected to the Senate.

1965 October 3- Immigration Law of 1965 eliminates "national origin" quota system. Equal quota (20,000 per nation) finally granted to Asian nations.

June- Anti-miscegenation laws ruled unconstitutional by U.S. Supreme Court.

1970 Edison Uno, Nisei civil rights activist, proposes demands for redress for Japanese Americans. Unanimously adopted by Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) National Council.

1971 Emergency Detention Action (Title II of McCarran-Walter Immigration Act) repealed by President Nixon, thereby nullifying power of mass preventive detention.

1974 Norman Mineta elected first mainland Japanese American to the House of Representatives.

1976 President Gerald Ford rescinds Executive Order 9066.

1978 July-JACL National Council passes resolution to seek \$25,000 for each camp detainee. Launches national redress campaign.

1979 May-National Council for Japanese American Redress (NCJAR) founded for "sole purpose of obtaining monetary redress for Japanese American victims of W.W.II concentration camps"

1980 July 12-National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCRR) established as grassroots drive for redress.

July 31-President Jimmy Carter signs bill to create Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) to determine whether any wrongs had been committed in internment of Japanese Americans, also of 1000 Aleutian and Pribilof Islanders.

1981 CWRIC holds hearings across the country.

1983 March 16-Class action lawsuit seeking \$200,000 in damages for ex-internees filed by NCJAR headed by William Hohri of Chicago.

June 23-Report of CWRIC contained in Personal Justice Denied concludes that exclusion, expulsion and incarceration of Japanese Americans not justified by "military necessity," that decision was based on "race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership." Recommends that Congress pass legislation which recognizes "grave injustice" done and offers the nation's apologies and compensation of \$20,000 to each of estimated 60,000 surviving persons.

November 11- In response to writ of error coram nobis by Fred Korematsu, the federal court of San Francisco vacates Korematsu's original conviction and rules that the government was not justified in issuing internment orders.

1984 California State Legislature proclaims February 19, 1984 and February 19 of each year be recognized as "A Day of Remembrance" of the concentration episode to encourage Californians to reflect upon their shared responsibility to uphold the Constitution and the rights of all individuals at all times.

1985 October-Federal District Court in Portland (OR) invalidates Minoru Yasui's conviction violating a curfew order during WW II.

1986 Federal District Court in Seattle (WA) invalidates Gordon Hirabayashi's 1942 conviction for violating wartime internment orders.

1987 September 17-Exhibit at Smithsonian, "A More Perfect Union" commemorates bicentennial of U.S. Constitution by featuring internment of Japanese Americans and contributions of 100th/442nd combat units and MIS detachment during WW II.

September 17-Congress passes Civil Liberties Act.

1988 August 10- President Ronald Reagan signs Civil Liberties Act of 1988, requiring payment of \$20,000 and apology to estimated 60,000 survivors of internment.

1989 August 10-California State legislature adopts ACR 37, introduced by Assemblywoman Jackie Speier, which urges adoption of history/social science textbooks that accurately portray wartime incarceration.

November 21-President George Bush signs appropriation bill, containing redress payment provision under entitlement program.

1990 June 26- San Francisco School Board unanimously adopts "Day of Remembrance" resolution introduced by board member Leland Yee.

October 9-First letters of apology signed by President George Bush presented to oldest survivors of Executive Order 9066 at Department of Justice ceremony along with redress payment of \$20,000.