

HISTORY OF THE INTERNMENT

"Most of the 110,000 persons removed for reasons of 'national security' were school-age children, infants and young adults not yet of voting age."

- "Years of Infamy", Michi Weglyn

When the U.S. entered the Pacific war in December 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. This order let the military ignore the constitutional rights of American citizens in the name of national defense.

The order set into motion the **exclusion** from certain areas, and the **evacuation** and mass **incarceration** of 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast, most of whom were U.S. citizens or legal permanent resident aliens.

These Japanese Americans, half of whom were children, were incarcerated for up to 4 years, without due process of law or any factual basis, in bleak, remote camps surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards.

They were forced to evacuate their homes and leave their jobs; in some cases family members were separated and put into different camps. President Roosevelt himself called the 10 facilities "concentration camps."

Some Japanese Americans died in the camps due to inadequate medical care and the emotional stresses they encountered. Several were killed by military guards posted for allegedly resisting orders.

At the time, Executive Order 9066 was justified as a "military necessity" to protect against domestic **espionage** and **sabotage**. However, it was later documented that "our government had in its possession proof that not one Japanese American, citizen or not, had engaged in espionage, not one had committed any act of sabotage." (Michi Weglyn, 1976).

Rather, the causes for this unprecedented action in American history, according to the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, "were motivated largely by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

Almost 50 years later, through the efforts of leaders and advocates of the Japanese American community, Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. Popularly known as the Japanese American Redress Bill, this act acknowledged that "a grave injustice was done" and mandated Congress to pay each victim of internment \$20,000 in **reparations**.

The reparations were sent with a signed apology from the President of the United States on behalf of the American people. The period for reparations ended in August of 1998.

Despite this redress, the mental and physical health impacts of the trauma of the internment experience continue to affect tens of thousands of Japanese Americans. Health studies have shown a 2 times greater incidence of heart disease and premature death among former internees, compared to noninterned Japanese Americans.

Adapted from: www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history/index.html

Vocabulary

evacuation = moving people from a dangerous place to a safer place

incarceration = putting someone in prison or somewhere they cannot escape

espionage = using spies to secretly get important information from one country to give to another

sabotage = the act of doing damage to equipment, modes of transportation, etc.

reparations = money that a government pays for the damage or injuries that it has caused

WWII INTERNMENT TIMELINE

Source: www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history/timeline.html

December 7, 1941

The United States and Japan go to war.

February 19, 1942

President Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066 which allows military authorities to exclude anyone from anywhere without trial or hearings. Though the subject of only limited interest at the time, this order set the stage for the entire forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans.

March 21, 1942

The first advance groups of Japanese American "volunteers" arrive at Manzanar, CA. The facility is transformed into a "relocation center."

August 10, 1942 The first inmates arrive at Minidoka, Idaho.

October 20, 1942

President Roosevelt calls the "relocation centers" "concentration camps" at a press conference. The WRA had consistently denied that the term "concentration camps" accurately described the camps.

February 1, 1943

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team is activated, made up entirely of Japanese Americans.

January 2, 1945

Restrictions preventing resettlement on the West Coast are removed, although many exceptions continue to exist. A few carefully screened Japanese Americans had returned to the coast in late 1944.

May 7, 1945

The surrender of Germany ends the war in Europe.

August 14, 1945

The war in the Pacific ends.

March 20, 1946

Tule Lake closes, culminating "an incredible mass evacuation in reverse." In the month prior to the closing, some 5,000 internees had to be moved, many of whom were elderly, impoverished, or mentally ill and with no place to go.

August 10, 1988

H.R. 442 is signed into law by President Ronald Reagan. It provides for [a letter of apology and] individual payments of \$20,000 to each surviving internee and a \$1.25 billion education fund among other provisions.

October 9, 1990

The first nine redress payments are made at a Washington, D.C. ceremony. One-hundred-seven-year-old Rev. Mamoru Eto of Los Angeles is the first to receive his check.

Homework: Write a guest speaker report. Write about what you learned (2 paragraphs) and what your impressions were (one paragraph). Each paragraph should be about one-third of a page. The report must be at least one page, typed, double-spaced, and about 300 words long. Due Monday. Pass in a hard copy of your report in class. Note: when writing, do not copy the information on the handout. Use your original words.