



THE WAR



A KEN BURNS FILM

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Japanese Americans and Internment

Subjects:

History, English, Social Studies

And when we went to the internment camp, guard towers, double security fence and all that, I really wondered what's going to happen to us. You know, that this is just the beginning and they may very well send us back to Japan. And that, to me, was horrible. I, in my heart, knew my loyalty belongs to America. I went to school, pledged allegiance every morning in grammar school. And for me to think that I may be sent to Japan was horrendous. And so that was sort of a nightmare.

—Susumu Satow, *THE WAR*

On February 19, 1942, just two months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. Its tone was carefully neutral: it authorized the War Department to designate “military areas” that excluded people considered to be a danger to the United States. But, the order actually had a specific target: 110,000 Japanese Americans living along the West Coast of the United States.

While approximately 10,000 Japanese Americans were able to relocate to other parts of the country, the remainder were sent to hastily constructed camps called “War Relocation Centers” in remote portions of the nation’s interior. Many would spend the next three years living under armed guard, behind barbed wire.

Thousands of German and Italian aliens were also locked up, but millions of German- and Italian-American citizens remained free to live their lives as they always had. Only Japanese Americans on the West Coast were singled out.

While they represented a tiny portion of the population, Japanese Americans on the West Coast had long been special targets of white hostility. Laws and customs shut out Japanese Americans from full participation in economic and civic life for decades. Japanese immigrants - known as Issei - could not own land or become naturalized citizens. But the American-born descendants of Japanese immigrants - called Nisei - were citizens by birthright, and many had become successful in business and farming. Pearl Harbor gave whites a chance to renew their hostility toward their Japanese neighbors - it also offered white growers and business interests an

opportunity to agitate anew for the elimination of unwanted competitors. All across the West Coast, relocation notices were posted on April 30, 1942. All people of Japanese ancestry - including those with only 1/16th Japanese blood - were given as little as one week to settle their affairs. Farmers desperately looked to neighbors to help take care of their crops, but along with many other Japanese-American business owners, they faced financial ruin. Families lost everything, forced to sell off homes, shops, furnishings, even the clothes they couldn’t carry with them, to buyers happy to snap them up for next to nothing. In 1944, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the exclusion, removal and detention, arguing that it is permissible to curtail the civil rights of a racial group when there is a “pressing public necessity.”

Nearly 45 years later through the efforts of leaders in the Japanese-American community, Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 which acknowledged that the internment camps had been a “grave injustice” and mandated Congress to pay each victim of internment \$20,000 in reparations.

Activity:

Provide students with some historical background on the Japanese-American experience pre-World War II, including how Japanese Americans and other Asian groups were treated at the time and the consequences of the Immigration Act of 1924.

Then show students the clip below, which contains personal reflections from Japanese Americans interviewed in *THE WAR*. (http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_details.php?id=5380&type=3)

After viewing as a class, ask the students to respond to and discuss the following questions:

- Why do you think only the Japanese Americans on the West Coast were affected by Executive Order 9066?
- Why didn’t fellow Americans object to the internment of Japanese Americans in 1942?
- What was the social, economic and personal impact of the internment - for those sent to camps and those left behind?
- Was the government justified in sending Japanese Americans to relocation camps purely on the basis of ethnicity? Why or why not? What would other options have been?

Now have students imagine they are Japanese Americans living on the West Coast at the start of World War II who are protesting the internment order on legal grounds. Divide students into groups and have each group research potential legal conflicts with Executive Order 9066 including the government's role in national security, the writ of habeas corpus, citizen and civil rights and the role of presidential powers.

Sources for research include:

- Gordon Hirabayashi vs. The United States (http://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1949/1942/1942_870/)
- The Smithsonian's "A More Perfect Union" (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/non-flash/index.html>)
- The Japanese American National Museum (<http://www.janm.org>)
- PBS companion site to the film "Children of the Camps" (<http://www.pbs.org/childofcamp>)
- The National Archives Teaching with Documents (<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation/#documents>)
- Japanese American Online exhibit from Santa Clara University (<http://www.scu.edu/diversity/exhibit1.html>)

During the research process each group should prepare a list explaining which rights were violated by the relocation and why it was unconstitutional. Then have the groups compare lists and discuss as the class:

- How should a country at war balance its citizens' civil liberties with the need for national security?
- What are a citizen's responsibilities in an American democracy to ensure that their civil liberties and/or the civil liberties of others are not infringed upon during times of war?
- Could a government-mandated act such as the internment happen today? Why or why not?

Extension Activities:

- Research reparations that were given to Japanese Americans interned during World War II in 1988 and why and how the government made that decision.
- In order to determine whether or not Japanese Americans in the internment camps were "loyal" to the United State, Japanese Americans were forced to answer a loyalty questionnaire before they were allowed to leave the camps in order to resettle away from the West Coast. The questionnaire divided families and the community. Research the War Relocation Authority's loyalty questionnaire (<http://densho.org/learning/spice/lesson5/5reading5.asp>) – in particular Questions 27 and 28 — and have students discuss why the questionnaire was problematic and divisive. Ask students how they would respond if placed in a similar situation.

- Research the locations of internment camps in the U.S. Have students identify how many centers existed and in what states they were located. Ask students:
 1. Why might the particular locations of the internment camps be chosen?
 2. Explain the difference between the following: Assembly Centers, Internment Camps, Justice Department Camps, Isolation Centers, and Temporary Detention Facilities.
 3. What difficulties might Japanese American internees have faced while living in these camps? Students can then (use Google Maps to) create their own maps of internment locations citing the number of internees within each camp.
- Visit the online collection of Clara Breed, part of the Japanese American National Museum's holdings (http://www.janm.org/collections/online/clara_breed_collection). Miss Breed was the children's librarian at San Diego Public Library from 1929 to 1945. When her young Japanese-American patrons were forced into internment camps, Breed became their reliable penpal. The collection includes over 300 letters and cards received by Breed from Japanese-American children and young adults. Students can research the collection and then complete a creative writing exercise where they take the role of either Miss Breed or one of her patrons.

Visit the "SEARCH AND EXPLORE"

(http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_home.htm) section of THE WAR web site for more information about Japanese American internment.

Resources

Children of the Camps

PBS documentary captures the experiences of six Japanese Americans who were confined as children to internment camps by the U.S. government during World War II. The website features related historical documents, a timeline, list of internment camps and stories of the impact on Japanese Americans. (<http://www.children-of-the-camps.org/>)

Ansel Adams's Photographs of Japanese-American Internment at Manzanar

A revealing collection of over 200 photographs documenting Japanese Americans interned at Manzanar War Relocation Center in California. All original prints and negatives are displayed online. The online collection also includes digital images of the first edition of *Born Free and Equal*, the book Adams based on his work at Manzanar. (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/anseladams/>)

Exploring the Japanese American Internment through film and the Internet

Presented by Asian American Media, this website was created as a public education resource for educators, students and the broader public. It utilizes a rich collection of video clips as a starting point for examining the many aspects and implications of the Japanese American internment.

(<http://www.asianamericanmedia.org/jainternment>)

Landmark Cases of the Supreme Court - Korematsu v. United States (1944)

As part of a series exploring landmark cases of the Supreme Court, *Korematsu v. United States* provides a online resources on the case including background information on the events leading up to interment, primary documents of the internment order, analysis of the case, and classroom activities that look at similar circumstances related to the war against terrorism.

(<http://www.landmarkcases.org/korematsu/home.html>)

A More Perfect Union - Japanese Americans and the U.S. Constitution

This site explores what happens when racial prejudice and fear upset the delicate balance between the citizens' rights and the power of the state to protect itself. The site contains interactive galleries that combine images, music, text, and first-person accounts of the internment experience.

(<http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/experience>)

Standards

Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) at (<http://www.mcrel.org>)

United States History

Level III (Grades 7-8)

Standard 25: Understands the causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs

Benchmark 8: Understands how minority groups were affected by World War II (e.g., how minority groups organized to gain access to wartime jobs and discrimination they faced, factors that led to the internment of Japanese Americans)

Historical Understanding

Standard 1: Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns.

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

Civics

Level IV (Grades 9-12)

Standard 18: Understands the role and importance of law in the American constitutional system and issues regarding the judicial protection of individual rights

Benchmark: Knows historical and contemporary instances in which judicial protections have not been extended to all persons and instances in which judicial protections have been extended to those deprived of them in the past.

Language Arts

Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Life Skills: Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 1: Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument

Standard 3: Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences.

Standard 5: Applies decision-making techniques.

Greg Timmons has been a social studies teacher for more than 30 years. He has written lessons for and serves as an educational consultant to various PBS programs including Frontline, the NewsHour, and Washington Week. He resides in Washington state and Montana.