

ARTICLE: THE INTERNMENT OF JAPANESE AMERICANS DURING WORLD WAR II

<p>On December 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on the naval base located at Honolulu's Pearl Harbor. In total, 2,403 Americans were killed and another 1,178 were wounded. Citizens of the United States were in complete shock. During a joint session of Congress, the following day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt described December 7, 1941 as ". . . a date which will live in infamy." Not long after he uttered those famous words, the United States was officially at war with Japan.</p>	<p>Why did the United States join World War II?</p>
<p>Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, many Americans of Japanese ancestry felt a mix of emotions. While they were stunned and saddened by the attack, they worried that some Americans would view them as the enemy simply because of their ethnicity. As activist Yuri Kochiyama explained in an oral history interview, her neighbors ". . . all had heard over the radio that Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. So we said, 'Oh my God, I'll bet we're all going to be in trouble, 'cause we're Japanese, and people won't think of us as being American even if we are.'"</p>	<p>Why were Japanese Americans anxious after the attack on Pearl Harbor?</p>
<p>On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 into law. This piece of legislation led to the creation of a federal agency known as the War Relocation Authority (WRA). The WRA was authorized with removing and detaining any people who were believed to pose a threat to the security of the United States. In the weeks following</p>	<p>What did Executive Order 9066 do, and how did it impact Japanese Americans?</p>

the issuing of E.O. 9066, 75,000 citizens and 45,000 noncitizens of Japanese ancestry living in the United States were forced to surrender their homes and possessions, often with only a few days' notice. Then they were taken into custody by the military. Actor George Takei recalled, ". . . suddenly, we saw two soldiers marching up the driveway, carrying rifles with shiny bayonets. They stomped up the front porch, and with their fists began pounding on the door. . . . My father came out, answered the door. And we were ordered to leave the house. . . . There just wasn't time to sell everything. My father sold his car . . . for \$5."

Because E.O. 9066 authorized the immediate incarceration of Japanese Americans, a number of temporary detention centers known as "assembly centers" were quickly established at racetracks and fairgrounds in California, Oregon, Washington state, and Arizona. Through the process of forced removal, which was referred to as "evacuation" at the time, nearly 100,000 Japanese Americans were brought to these assembly centers. At these centers, they often slept on straw mattresses in cramped facilities, some of which were converted horse stables. In describing his incarceration at an assembly center, Rev. Ernest Uno explained, "The stables just reeked . . . of urine and horse manure. It was so degrading for people to live in those conditions."

What were conditions like in the assembly centers?

From the assembly centers, many Japanese Americans were brought to ten incarceration camps operated by the WRA and known as “relocation centers.” All of the relocation centers were located in rural areas west of the Mississippi River. Some Japanese Americans were imprisoned at these camps for up to four years. They lived in crowded barracks that were often covered with tar paper. The camps were surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers. Guards were given orders to shoot at anyone who tried to escape. Many of the camps were also located in harsh climates. Manzanar, for instance, was in the middle of a California desert and was often prone to dust storms.

In spite of the circumstances, people who were interned in the relocation centers did their best to maintain a sense of normalcy. Some of them took up hobbies, such as bird-carving and crocheting. Children were enrolled in schools, and some of them joined Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops that operated within the camps. Theatre troupes, singing groups, and baseball teams were also established. Kara Kondo remembered, “I was advisor to a high school girls’ group called Hijinks, and we went out caroling . . . to the guard towers where people were, the soldiers were stationed to guard us. . . . I can just picture how cold it was and the frost glistening on the barbed wire and our singing songs . . . Those are the kinds of memories you have about Christmas.”

Describe conditions in the relocation centers.

How did people that were in the camps make the best of their situation?

<p>Many Japanese Americans questioned if their incarceration was constitutional, and it was not long before some of them took legal action. One of the most famous legal efforts was started by Fred Korematsu, a 22-year-old California citizen who was fired from his job at a shipyard after the attack on Pearl Harbor. When he refused to report to the Tanforan Assembly Center, he was sent to prison. While in jail, the ACLU contacted Korematsu and convinced him to take his case before a federal district court. Korematsu recalled, “I didn’t feel guilty, because I didn’t do anything wrong. . . . I was an American citizen, and I had as many rights as anyone else.”</p>	<p>Why did Korematsu and other Japanese Americans decide to take legal action?</p>
<p>The federal court eventually convicted Korematsu of defying military orders, and he was sent to a relocation center in Utah. However, his case eventually made it to the Supreme Court. In the landmark case of <i>Korematsu v. United States</i>, the Supreme Court ruled that the government was justified in detaining Japanese Americans out of “military necessity.” In delivering the court’s decision, Justice Hugo Black explained, “Korematsu was not excluded from the military area because of hostility to him or his race. He was excluded because we are at war with the Japanese Empire. . . .”</p>	<p>Was Korematsu successful in his case against the US government? Explain the court’s reasoning.</p>
<p>Although Korematsu’s case was not successful, Mitsuye Endo’s case had a different outcome. Endo was a typist from Sacramento who was sent with her family to Tule Lake War Relocation Center in California.</p>	<p>Was Endo successful in her case against the US government? Explain the court’s reasoning.</p>

A lawyer had filed a petition to try to get Endo released from the camp. While the petition was not successful, the case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court. On December 18, 1944, the same day that the court had ruled against Korematsu, the court ruled in *Ex parte Endo* that the WRA “. . . has no authority to object citizens who are concededly loyal to leave its procedure.” In other words, it was unconstitutional for the WRA to detain Japanese American citizens. Shortly after this ruling, with World War II almost near its conclusion, Japanese Americans were gradually allowed to leave the camps, the last of which closed in 1946.

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