

Teaching history from

# DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES:

## High School Lesson on Japanese American Incarceration

GA Social Studies Standards

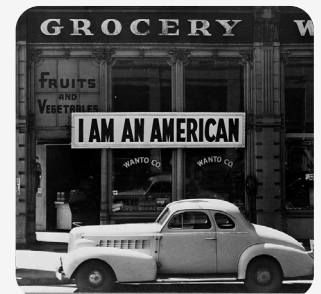
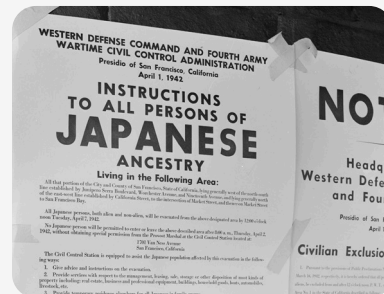
**SSUSH19 Examine the origins, major developments, and the domestic impact of World War II, including the growth of the federal government**  
**e.Examine Roosevelt’s use of executive powers including the integration of defense industries and the internment of Japanese-Americans.**

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order (EO) 9066 in February 1942, giving the military authority to create areas where people considered threats to national security could be forcibly moved and detained. While EO 9066 did not specify any group of people, it was overwhelmingly applied to Japanese Americans on the West Coast, but not to German or Italian Americans.

Beginning in March 1942, the U.S. Army moved nearly 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast into hastily constructed temporary assembly centers, where they would later be transported to permanent prison camps in isolated locations across the country. It did not matter if the Japanese Americans were infants or elderly, sick or disabled, citizen or foreign national. All were designated members of what General DeWitt called “an enemy race,” regardless of whether they actually posed a valid threat to national security.

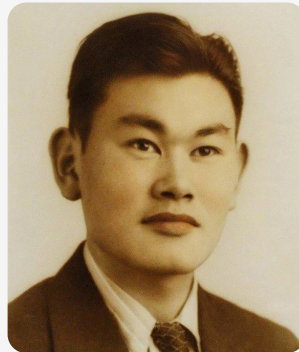
While most Japanese Americans complied with the evacuation orders, some refused. Twenty-three year old Fred Korematsu refused to follow orders to report to the Tanforan Assembly Center on May 9, 1942. Korematsu planned to move to Nevada with his white girlfriend, so he sold his car, threw away his California driver’s license, and had plastic surgery to change his physical appearance. Weeks later, he was stopped and arrested by the police, then taken to Tanforan, where he lived in a horse stall that he described as worse than jail. Korematsu decided to challenge the exclusion order but was found guilty and sentenced to five years probation.

Decades later, in the late 1970s, Japanese American activist Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga was carefully cataloging Japanese American incarceration records at the National Archives. One day, she found a document that would lead to the reopening of Korematsu’s case. In 1943, General DeWitt issued



a final report that claimed that it was “impossible to establish the identity of the loyal and the disloyal with any degree of safety,” reinforcing the false justification of incarceration as the result of military necessity. However, *no Japanese Americans were ever found guilty of sabotage or espionage*. DeWitt’s supervisor demanded the report be amended and that all copies of the original report be destroyed. But one copy remained, and Herzig-Yoshinaga found it! This piece of evidence ultimately led to Korematsu’s conviction being overturned, and was a major accomplishment for what is known as the Redress Movement: the efforts to restore the civil rights of Japanese Americans through a formal governmental apology and monetary reparations to individuals who were unjustly imprisoned. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, which appropriated \$20,000 for each survivor, and President George H. W. Bush issued a formal apology in 1990.

Today, issues of redress and reparations, both tangible and intangible, persist. What is owed to the descendants of enslaved Africans? How might programs like affirmative action compensate for historic societal inequities on the basis on race and class? How can people who have been wrongfully imprisoned be “paid back” for their time behind bars? Stories of resistance like that of Korematsu illustrate the potential for change in the face of injustice, even if it does not occur as fast as we might hope.



### Complete Article and Lesson Plan



Photo credit:

(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)

1. Map of WWII incarceration sites - Public Domain
2. Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry - Public Domain
3. Library of Congress Dorothea Lange
4. Dorothea Lange Collection, Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration (Public domain via Densho)
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6. Dorothea Lange Collection, Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration (Public Domain via Densho)
7. Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga via Densho Digital Repository (Creative Commons) <https://ddr.densho.org/narrators/18/Maggie>
8. Fred Korematsu via National Park Service

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