

High School Lesson on Japanese American Incarceration By Noreen Naseem Rodriguez

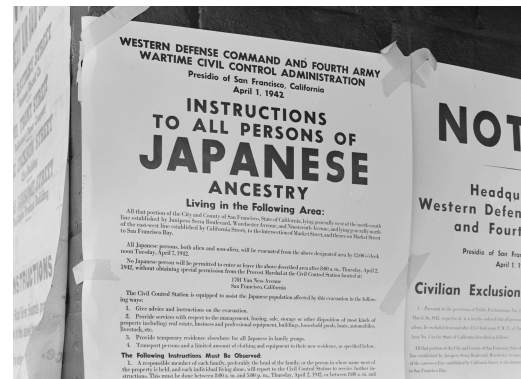
GA Social Studies Standards:

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.

Background Information:

Two months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order (EO) 9066 in February 1942. EO 9066 gave the military authority to create areas where people who were deemed to be threats to national security could be forcibly moved and detained under the direction of the Secretary of War. While the language of EO 9066 did not specify any particular group of people, it was overwhelmingly applied to Japanese Americans who lived on the West Coast, but not to German or Italian Americans. However, in the weeks prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, President Roosevelt received an intelligence report from Curtis B. Munson which found that Japanese Americans on the West Coast had “a remarkable, even extraordinary degree of loyalty” to the U.S. Roosevelt applied EO 9066 to Japanese and Japanese Americans in spite of Munson’s report.



Therefore, Japanese and Japanese Americans were targeted by EO 9066 not solely due to their ancestral homeland’s identification with an Axis nation with which the U.S. was at war - if that were the case, then German and Italian Americans would also have been impacted in much larger numbers. In fact, West Coast Japanese Americans made up only 4% of the 1,100,000 enemy nationals living in the U.S. in 1942. But EO 9066 revived the idea of East Asians as a threatening “yellow peril,” which first emerged as part of anti-Chinese rhetoric in the 1800s. Adding to the confusing application of EO 9066 was the fact that babies, the elderly, and the disabled were all subjected to military removal from their homes and imprisonment.



After the release of EO 9066, Japanese Americans living on the West Coast had a number of days to sell their property and belongings before reporting to one of 16 assembly centers, bringing only what they could carry with them. Between May and October 1942, they were transferred to ten hastily-built prison camps, with no sense of what the future held for them. The camps were located in isolated and inhospitable areas of Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming, each holding between 7,000-18,000 Japanese Americans.* Camp barracks were crowded with little privacy, but families were innovative and salvaged what they could to make their miserable

conditions feel more like home. They worked together and with support from nearby communities and friends to create schools, print newspapers, develop irrigation systems, plant gardens, and organize sports teams to make their lives in the camps have some semblance of normalcy until they were able to return home.

There are a wealth of resources that allow learners to take deep dives into life in the camps. Each camp had a unique physical environment in addition to its own character and resources. For example, the Amache camp in Colorado was the only one built on private land, had a silkscreen printing shop, and the camp director allowed prisoners to take day trips to the nearby town of Granada. In contrast, the Tule Lake camp in California had maximum security confinement and imposed martial law; it was the largest of the camps and considered the most repressive of them all. Some prisoners were able to leave the camps for work, college, or to serve in the military, and others moved from one camp to another. Each individual who was imprisoned in the camp had a unique experience, and offering students an opportunity to do a deep dive into some individual stories is an ideal way to teach about the camps. Historians and community members have recorded oral histories, primary sources, and collected artifacts to share these stories with the public; here are some of the richest collections available:

- Densho: <https://densho.org/>
- National Japanese American Historical Society: <https://www.njahs.org/for-educators/>
- Campu Podcast: <https://densho.org/campu/>
- Korematsu Institute: <https://korematsuinstitute.org/>
- Ansel Adams Manzanar collection at the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/manz/>
- Dorothea Lange Manzanar gallery housed at the National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery.htm?pg=58272&id=CA29BB4E-155D-4519-3E5456896E1C2E6C>
- Go For Broke National Education Center: <https://goforbroke.org/>
- Japanese American National Museum Camps Map: <https://eacc.janm.org/campsmap/>
- Bancroft Library at Berkeley Japanese American Confinement Sites: <https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/visit/bancroft/oral-history-center/projects/japanese-american-confinement>

The exclusion and detention orders were rescinded in December 1944, and in January 1945 Japanese Americans were finally allowed to return to the West Coast. However, as many of them had sold their belongings and property immediately after EO 9066 was executed, some had little to nothing to return to, and neighbors and friends who had promised to return items sometimes reneged on their deals after personally profiting from Japanese American incarceration. Additionally, anti-Japanese American sentiment remained in many parts of the country, even toward those who had served in the U.S. military. Consequently, some Japanese Americans opted to settle in the states where they were imprisoned, or moved elsewhere in the United States.



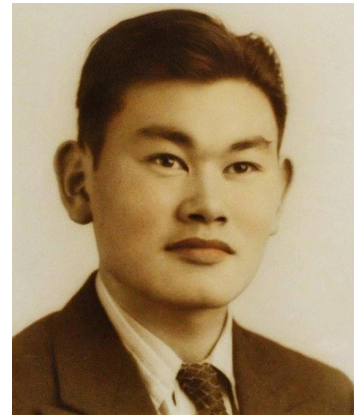
Many Japanese Americans who lived in the camps as children or adults felt too much shame about their ordeals to share them with their children, but their children and grandchildren created what became known as the redress movement, which aimed to seek financial compensation for their family's losses and a public recognition and apology for incarceration. President Gerald Ford finally rescinded EO 9066 in February 1976 and the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) was

assembled in 1980 to conduct an official governmental study of Japanese American incarceration during WWII. The CWRIC found that there was no actual justification for what transpired. In fact, their report entitled *Personal Justice Denied* (1983, full document available at the National Archives website) clearly states that EO 9066 “was not justified by military necessity,” and that the “broad historical causes that shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership” (*Recommendations*, p. 5). The CWRIC made several recommendations, including an official government policy and redress payments, which came to bear with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 signed by President Ronald Reagan. This act paid reparations of \$20,000 to more than 82,200 Japanese Americans who survived unjust imprisonment.

Camp survivors and their relatives have shown tremendous solidarity with other groups who have been targeted for imprisonment similar to their own experiences, from communities impacted by President Donald Trump’s Muslim Ban to the caging of young immigrant and refugee children at the U.S.-Mexico border. They have organized and participated in protests, demanding that what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II never be repeated again.

Individual Stories to Highlight:

While most Japanese Americans complied with the evacuation orders, some refused. Twenty-three year old Fred Korematsu was one of those Japanese Americans. Exclusion Order Number 34 directed Japanese Americans in Central California to report to the Tanforan Assembly Center on May 9, 1942. Korematsu’s family obeyed, but he did not. Instead, he 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. On May 30, 1942, he was stopped by the police, who turned him over to the FBI for violating the exclusion order. Korematsu spent two and a half months in prison before the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California paid his bail. The moment he stepped outside of the courthouse, Korematsu was arrested by military authorities and taken to Tanforan, where he lived in a horse stall that he described as worse than jail. Rather than plead guilty for not abiding by the exclusion order, Korematsu decided to challenge it but was found guilty and sentenced to five years probation. ACLU attorneys appealed the decision, and Korematsu’s family was moved to a prison camp in Topaz, Utah. Eventually, his appeal reached the Supreme Court in 1945, but it upheld the lower court’s ruling in favor of the military and U.S. government.



Decades later, in the late 1970s, Japanese American activist Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga spent hundreds of hours carefully examining the records related to Japanese American incarceration at the National Archives. She meticulously cataloged and indexed what she found, and was later hired by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians as its lead researcher. One day, she found a truly stunning piece of evidence. In 1943, General DeWitt issued a final report on Japanese evacuation from the West Coast 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*. The Assistant Secretary of War demanded the report be amended and the military attempted to destroy all copies of the original

report. But the tenth copy from the original printing remained, and Herzig-Yoshinaga found it. With this copy of the original final report, a team of lawyers reopened Korematsu's case, alongside those of Minoru Yasui and Gordon Hirabayashi.

Back in 1943, young lawyer Minoru "Min" Yasui challenged the curfew order in Portland, Oregon while Gordon Hirabayashi ignored the curfew order as a senior at the University of Washington in Seattle. Both young men were arrested, tried, and convicted for defying curfew orders. Forty years later, with the help of the original final report found by Herzig-Yoshinaga, Korematsu's conviction was overturned and Yasui and Hirabayashi's convictions were dismissed. This 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.

Instructional Resources and Suggestions:

Depending on the available class time and students' familiarity with court cases and primary sources, this lesson could take 1-2 days of small group work or a week of intensive analysis and discussion. Several options and extensions are noted.

1. **Introduction:** Share a printed or digital copy of the Exclusion Order issued on April 30, 1942 (a high quality worksheet is available on p. 7 of the Japanese American National Museum's [Instructions to All Persons lesson plans](#)). Have students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to annotate the Exclusion Order and prepare to respond to the following questions:
 - a. Who is this order targeting?
 - b. Why are they being targeted?
 - c. What are they being asked to do?
 - d. When must they do it by?
 - e. Where are they supposed to go?

Alternatively, you may show students [this "Japanese Relocation" propaganda video](#) in lieu of the primary source annotation or after students complete the annotation. The middle of the video has some grainy scenes of the assembly centers to which Japanese Americans had to report.

2. Prepare for the inquiry, "Was Japanese American incarceration necessary for the safety of the United States republic?" by summarizing the Munson Report and sharing the following quotes (https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Munson_Report/):
 - a. "We do not want to throw a lot of American citizens into a concentration camp of course, and especially as the almost unanimous verdict is that in case of war they will be quiet, very quiet," Munson wrote. "There will probably be some sabotage by paid Japanese agents and the odd fanatical Jap, but the bulk of these people will be quiet because in addition to being quite contented with the American Way of life, they know they are 'in a spot.'"
 - b. When John Franklin Carter passed the report to President Roosevelt, he added, "The essence of what [Munson] has to report is that, to date, he has found no evidence which would indicate that there is danger of widespread anti-American activities among this population group. He feels that the Japanese are more in danger from the whites than the other way around."
 - c. If time allows, you may want to share some of the details around phrasing from the Densho site that illustrate how one person's interpretation/summarization can have catastrophic consequences. Carter's summary of Munson's report did not accurately represent Munson's most important points, and it is possible that the President only read Carter's notes and not the full report created by Munson.

- d. Ask students, “Based on the Munson report, was the exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast necessary for public safety?” They should support their answers with evidence from the text/excerpts.
3. Divide students into three groups (or six, depending on size) and assign them to Korematsu, Yasui, or Hirabayashi. Several videos are available for each man and their court case. Students should complete a notecatcher like the one provided as they research each man and their Supreme Court case.
4. Using whatever format you prefer, have students present their findings and respond to the question, “Was Japanese American incarceration necessary for the safety of the United States republic?” using evidence from their case study to support their claims.
5. Extension: *Trump v. Hawaii* is said to have repudiated the 1944 *Korematsu v. US* decision. Do students agree or disagree with this statement? Research the case and look at the comments from members of the Supreme Court in support and opposition.

Supreme Court Cases Against Japanese American Curfews and Exclusion

Name of Plaintiff:		Group Members:	
Description of the Plaintiff:		Summary of Exclusion Order:	
How did the plaintiff violate curfew/exclusion?		What was the plaintiff’s defense for their actions?	
How did the Supreme Court respond initially?		When the case was revisited, how did the Court respond?	
Why?		Why?	
What evidence supported the plaintiff’s claim? What made the claim weak?		What evidence supported the plaintiff’s claim? What made the claim weak?	

Images Used:

1. Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry, Public domain
2. Dorothea Lange Collection, Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration (Public domain via Densho)
3. Map of WWII incarceration sites - Public domain
4. Fred Korematsu via National Park Service
5. Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga via Densho Digital Repository (Creative Commons)