

Japanese Internment Camps: Japanese Americans Conflict During  
War II, and How They Finally Got Justice

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Imagine if your a ten year old Japanese American living in San Francisco, and its World War II. You and your family are sitting around the radio when you hear an incoming message explaining the horrific bombing of Pearl Harbor. The next day you go to school, people think your a traitor. Two months of torture have passed and you see your mother is in tears. You walk up to her and you see her holding a letter. In big bold letters it says **Removal Notice: All Japanese Americans in the West Coast will be relocated.** Your hands are shaking. You are on your knees, sobbing. About a week later your family is at a train station with hundreds of other people. You all squeeze onto the train, which you will be on for the next several hours. The whole time your scared; finally you get to this huge area that's fenced in with barbed wire, and has thousands of small buildings within the fencing.

All of the Japanese Americans in the West Coast were accused of being spies and of assisting Japan's plan to bomb Pearl Harbor; they were all discriminated against and looked down upon. Every Japanese person in the West Coast was force to sell most of their belongings and relocate into an internment camp. The internment camps were more like prisons, being surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. They were stuck in these prisons for three years. This lead to the discrimination and racism of Japanese Americans on the West Coast.

“The Japanese,” San Francisco’s mayor James Phelan declared, “Are starting the same tide of immigration which we thought we had checked [with the Chinese]...Japanese are not bona fide citizens. They are not the stuff Americans citizens are made of.”<sup>1</sup> Chinese people started immigrating during the Gold Rush. When Chinese immigrated, they had nothing, they needed to get jobs in order to support their families. During this time Asians couldn’t become citizens, this allowed companies to pay Chinese people a fraction of American citizen, because of this companies hired Chinese people more than Americans. This made Americans and congress furious. Congress passed a law that banned the immigration of Chinese people in America. Americans thought they had solved the problem, but eventually Japanese started immigrating to America.

For anyone moving to a new country it is extremely challenging. Immigrants have to learn a new language, they have no money, and possibly have to deal with racism. Japanese immigrants came to this country with nothing; they took any job they could, but they weren’t citizens either so companies paid them less. This led to companies hiring more Japanese people, and less American. Americans lashed out at Japanese immigrants; calling them names and throwing barriers at them. But Japanese immigrants were determined to have a good life in America. They quickly learned English, and got jobs. Japanese people were huge assets to the United States because of their experience in agriculture<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately for Japanese farmers, in 1914 California had passed an Alien Land Law, which meant that any one who wasn’t a citizen couldn’t own land. Other states around California

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<sup>1</sup> Martin W. Sandler

<sup>2</sup> In Bainbridge Island in Washington they had huge strawberry farms, they grew about 70% of the strawberries in the West Coast. - Michael L. Cooper

had the same law. However, by this time most the Japanese already had grown children who were born in U.S., and therefore American citizens. Farmers bought their land in their children's name in order to keep the land they had already owned.<sup>3</sup>

December 7 1941, was a horrible day for anyone in America. Japanese aircrafts started dropping bombs on the navy and Air Force base Pearl Harbor at 7:55 am, and ended at 10:00am. Within those two hours more than 2,300 men had died and about 1,200 were wounded. "It was awful, for greatships were dying before my eyes! Strangely enough, at first I didn't realize that men were dying too," said one eye witness.<sup>4</sup> About 350 American planes were ruined, along with 21 stationed ships.<sup>5</sup>

Rumors had spread saying that months before the attack Japanese people were sending radio signals to Japanese submarines; the night before the attack all Japanese people were celebrating or the work they did. "Right after December 7, 1941, wherever I went I felt self-conscious and embarrassed. I went to the library once and this pretty women about fifty, in a nice dress, gray hair, tall-looked at me and stuck out her tongue out. I couldn't believe it! Then, on the bus in Los Angeles, I heard two women in front of me; they knew I could hear, saying: 'One thing is certain, we should get all the Japs, line them along the Pacific Ocean and shoot them,'" said Lili Sasaki.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "They pioneered the rice industry, and planted the first citrus orchards in [land the had long been thought of as wasteland]. They played a vital part in establishing the present system of marketing fruits and vegetables...and dominated in the field of commercial truck crops. From the perspective of history, it's evident that the contributions of the Issei...were undeniably a significant factor in making California one of the greatest farming states in the nation." - Martin W Sandler

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<sup>5</sup> Presidents Roosevelt climbed December 7, 1941 as "a date which will live in infamy."

<sup>6</sup> Martin W. Sandler

It's bad enough that Japanese Americans had to deal with people spreading rumors about them, but the media participated as well. Newspapers printed anti-Japanese stories because they were aware that many of their readers were anti-Japanese. One writer wrote the most used racial slur of this time in America. He wrote it in the "Sacramento Bee". Within the paper it stated "The Jap is a wily [and] crafty individuals where there are nothing but white folks. The Jap will always be undesirable."<sup>7</sup> Newspapers were the reason why so many accusations spread around the West Coast. They were also one of the many reasons why people had prejudice towards Japanese Americans.<sup>8</sup>

February 19, 1942 was a day affected all the lives of Japanese American citizens. President Roosevelt signed the "Executive Order 9066; it ordered all Japanese Americans to relocate out of the West Coast. Although this order applied to everybody in the West Coast, the order did not apply to a single person in Hawaii. Japanese people made up one-third of Hawaii's population. The government claimed that the reason why Japanese Americans in Hawaii didn't have to relocate into camps was due to the fact that there would be a huge gap in the workforce. After Japanese Americans got the notice to relocate they had a week to sell almost everything they owned; they held garage sales to sell everything they weren't going to bring with them. Everyone knew how desperate Japanese Americans were to sell their things, they targeted these garage sales in hopes of getting a huge bargain for what they bought. Japanese Americans sold items at any price. "We sold most of our own property to junk men. Tables, chairs, bureau, a

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<sup>7</sup> Martin W. Sandler

<sup>8</sup> "Alert, keen - eyed civilians [who could be] of yeoman service in cooperating with military authorities against [Japanese Americans] spies, [and] saboteurs...We have thousands of Japanese here...Some, perhaps many, are...good Americans. What the rest may be we do not know, nor we take a chance in the light of yesterday's demonstration that treachery and double - dealing are major Japanese weapons." - Martin W. Sandler, quote from The Los Angeles Times

couple of beds, a stove, and a radio. We got fifty dollars for what we did. If we had bought it at a second hand store, it would have cost three hundred dollars. If we had bought it new, it would have cost seven to eight hundred dollars”<sup>9</sup>.

One of the worst times for Japanese Americans was the last couple of days they had left to stay in their homes. A Nisei had described her last two nights as “the most precious forty-eight hours.” She wasn't the only one who had felt this. Many people had used their last two days to reflect on their life, and take a final glance at their home.

That was the more peaceful part of moving. Most of it was extremely chaotic. No one knew what exactly to bring. They didn't know which camp they were going to, there were ten camps and the camps were scattered across the country. There were camps in California, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, Utah, and Arkansas. They didn't know if they should pack for the cold, or if they should pack for the heat. They also didn't know the conditions of the camps. There were allegations that the camps had rattlesnakes, or huge mosquitos, or rats the size of dogs. They didn't know what to believe, so they tried packing for everything.

When people arrived at the camps the first thing they did was stand in a enormous line. People had to wait for authorities to give them their ID number, and the room their family would be living in. “It was cold, dark, and very quiet except for the shuffling of feet on the uneven ground; very difficult to see anything without light.”<sup>10</sup> “My brother had already filled the trucking with hay for our beds, which were canvas army cots. There was eight of them, and one light bulb

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<sup>9</sup> Michael L. Cooper

<sup>10</sup> Michael L. Cooper

hanging from the ceiling.... We heard voices from next door.... Can't remember what we slept in, it was very cold and bleak.”<sup>11</sup>

“One-room apartments measuring twenty-by-twenty-five, and were shared by two families. Voices carried from one apartment to the next; folks could listen to the heavy snoring of strange bedfellows.”<sup>12</sup> In the camps everybody shared everything. To get food they had to wait in lines that were miles long. “It was nothing like a meal at home,” said a man describing his first time eating in the mess hall, “The bread was rock hard. None of the dishes were dried. They were very greasy. To wash them they just dunked them in the dirty water, which was also the same water we drank.”<sup>13</sup> There was almost no privacy in the camps, and there was extremely bad hygiene; do to everything being communal. This lead to many people, especially the elderly and young children, getting sick and dying. The barracks were also not insulated, so it was always too hot or too cold. The barracks were made with wood that was cracked, letting lots of dust and silt into their “homes”. “You’d see a black cloud in the distance and that meant you take cover...when it was over, probably in about 40 minutes, your bed, all your clothing was just covered with silt,” said Lawrence Sasano.<sup>14</sup>

Students who were forced to move with their families to the camps could not finish their high school year because they didn't have a school. However, once they finally opened schools kids started to develop extreme behavior problems. They would scream, kick doors, and threaten teachers. One young boy got extremely frustrated and screamed at his teacher: “I hate you. I hate

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<sup>11</sup> Michael L. Cooper

<sup>12</sup> Manzanar newspaper, *Manzanar Free Press*.

<sup>13</sup> Michael L. Cooper

<sup>14</sup> Listverse.com

all Caucasians!” after this he burst into tears.<sup>15</sup> “One man was describing all the changes that he noticed in this sixteen year old brother. “Even if he threatened with in F, he won't hand in a notebook... He didn't care about marks anymore.”<sup>16</sup>

Even though things were tough, everyone still wanted to look on the bright side. Teachers tried to set up clubs at school, have prom, traditional celebrations, religious groups, sports groups, art clubs, and organizations where you could plant gardens. But when the fun had was done, people had to come home to a dirty barracks and remember they are still stuck in this prison.

After the holidays camp officials made a loyalty quiz. It was called Application for Leave Clearance, people who were seventeen and over had to take the test. If they answered all the questions right they could leave the camp, but they couldn't go back home. They had to go anywhere but the West Coast. Whoever failed the survey would be moved to Tule Lake Relocation Center in North California. Some questions were hard for some of the Japanese Americans to answer. Twenty-seven asked if they were willing to go to war for the U.S. This question made Nisei<sup>17</sup> men extremely frustrated because they were being asked if they would risk their lives for a country that took away their freedom. Twenty-eight insulted the Issei<sup>18</sup> because it asked for them to forget the Japanese emperor. Asking the Issei to forget about the emperor was like asking a priest to forget about God. People had no clue how to answer these questions; they didn't want to be separated from their family and friends. Most agreed, but some didn't .<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> Michael L. Cooper

<sup>16</sup> Michael L. Cooper

<sup>17</sup> First generation to be born in American

<sup>18</sup> The generation that immigrated

<sup>19</sup> The people who said no were called No-No's.



summer of 1943 about 2,200 “No-No’s” were sent to Tule Lake Relocation Center. They deported about 4,500 people back to Japan. At the end of 1943 half of the camp had left Manzanar. Many had gone to Tule Lake, but many had also moved to Midwestern and Eastern cities to rebuild their lives.

All camps ended when Japan surrendered. When Japanese Americans were allowed to leave the camp they were given a train ticket home and twenty-five dollars. Some moved to cities in the Midwest in order to avoid discrimination at home. For people who went back to their homes realized that everything they owned was destroyed and abandoned. “We had to start all over again...When we moved into this apartment...we didn’t even have a refrigerator....We didn’t have an oven, we didn’t have a sofa, we didn’t have anything...We were starting from absolute scratch....It was hard; it was very, very hard.”<sup>20</sup> it was hard to find jobs; people were lucky if they would get a job as a janitor or gardener.

When Japanese Americans came back they still faced lots of racism; farmers suffered the worst. They were gone for such a long time that their farms or orchards were completely destroyed. For kids at school it was just as terrible. Niseis were bullied or ignored by their classmates. No one wanted to play with them after school, and they were excluded from any school sport or extracurricular activity.

Eventually Japanese Americans were able to get job, and did good financially, but mentally they were still suffering. Lots of internees suffered from social amnesia; which is when a group of people hide their feelings about a traumatic experience. Another reason they didn’t speak of their experience in the camp was because they were scared of all the anti-Japanese

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<sup>20</sup> Martian D. Sandler

groups. They often told their children “Don’t make waves. Don’t stand out, your different enough.”<sup>21</sup> “It was something you buried under the carpet and hoped the dust would never show up again” a Issei commented<sup>22</sup>. Nisei parents tried to hide anything bad about the internment camps from their children; the Sansei.<sup>23</sup>

The Sansei wanted justice for the Nisei, but Nisei didn’t want them to do anything; they were scared of it causing backlash. This meant so much to the Sansei. However, it was going to be difficult to get the government to notice them. They had to spread the news, and lots of people didn’t know about the internment camps. One Sansei put it simply “[The redress movement] is a rejection of [Japanese American] stereotypes and symbolizes the birth of a new [Japanese Americans]-one who will recognize and deal with injustice.”<sup>24</sup> Japanese Americans didn’t want to support the redress because they were scared of backlash from Americans. “They must no longer be ashamed of what had happened to them. It was the government that should be ashamed...” This was a message the Sansei told their grandparents and parents.<sup>25</sup>

They created a group called The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). Everyday the redress activists gave stories of people’s lives in the camp to papers and magazines. Soon the was media sharing stories about what happened in the camps.<sup>26</sup> They were able to spread the story’s of internees to the whole country. Seeing everyone's reactions helped more internees come out and tell their stories. “I first talked about [my internment] in the winter of 1974, when I

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<sup>21</sup> Martian D. Sandler

<sup>22</sup> Martian D. Sandler

<sup>23</sup> The Sansei’s are the second generation to be born in America. Sansei were born after the internees were released, and didn’t about the camps until they got to college.

<sup>24</sup> Martin D. Sandler

<sup>25</sup> Martian D. Sandler

<sup>26</sup> They often spoke about how the redress isn’t just about Japanese American Rights, it’s about all American rights.

was asked...to talk about it at a program.” Hiroshima Kashiwagi recalled, “So that’s how I started, and people were very interested...Many if these were Japanese American students...and I realized that I should tell about it because... people were so eager to hear about it. That’s when I decided I would talk about it. But it was the young students who drew us out.”<sup>27</sup>

Now that they had a huge following they wanted to go to congress and share some of the internees stories. By 1980 congress didn’t know much about the internment to make a commission on wartime relocation and internment of citizens, but they agreed to investigate the cause, facts, and consequences of the internment. In 1981 commission members studied thousands of documents involving the removal of Japanese Americans. Finally in 1982 the commission had investigated all of the hearings. They came out with a statement in a report “Among the members findings was the unanimous conviction that military necessity did not warrant the removal and detention of Japanese Americans.”<sup>28</sup>

This was amazing for the redress, but they weren’t sure if the congress would actually follow through on this statement. “Evidence the congress studied provided that the internment was race prejudice, war hysteria and failure of political leadership.”<sup>29</sup>

September 17, 1987 Congress passed an act called the Civil Liberties Act. The act apologizes for making Japanese Americans evacuate, and apologized for personal property being destroyed or taken by citizens and government officials. The act stated that the government will give 20,000 dollar to all people who survived the camp. Many people didn’t want to accept the payment because they thought the government was putting a price on their trauma. “Nothing can

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<sup>27</sup> Martin D. Sandler

<sup>28</sup> Martian D. Sandler

<sup>29</sup> Martian D. Sandler

really repay three years of people's lives." Janet Daijogo telling how she remembered calling her mom when the payment was announced. "I called...and I asked her how [she felt about it] and she said, 'Nothing can pay for the humiliation that we endured,' she began to cry over the phone."<sup>30</sup> "It isn't the amount of money...it's a principle," another internee proclaimed.<sup>31</sup>

August 17 1988 President Ronald Reagan signed the the Civil Liberties Act. Two years later the first four oldest internees finally got their payment. There was a huge ceremony in Fresno, California; the checks were presented by U.S. Assistant Attorney General John Donne. He gave a speech: "The root meaning today, is to remedy or rectify, to make amends for wrong done or injury inflicted. While we know we cannot rearrange our past and we cannot redo the harm and injustice of the internment and relocation, we can make amends."<sup>32</sup>

A writer named Dale Ikeda wrote about the redress: "[Redress] is truly an American story that reaffirms some of our core values of justice, equality, and fundamental fairness."<sup>33</sup> Ikeda's statement was exactly what the redress was about, and what it was successfully accomplished. The redress was an amazing group of people, who helped internees get justice for the all the years of suffering and trauma they didn't deserve to go through. They restored pride in a group of people who before the war had done an amazing job in contributing to California's economy.

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<sup>30</sup> *Martian D. Sandler*

<sup>31</sup> *Martian D. Sandler*

<sup>32</sup> *Martian D. Sandler*

<sup>33</sup> *Martian D. Sandler*

Primary Source:

Japanese - Americans Internment : Bill of Rights in Crisis Broadsheet 1 1800 To Pearl Harbor.

This was background information on the internment camps. It told me most gave me information about the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Japanese American Internment: The Bill of Rights Is in Crisis Board Sheet 2 from Pearl Harbor to Executive Order 9066.

This pamphlet went in detail about the Executive order 9066. It talked about the panic that Japanese Americans went through.

Japanese - American Internment: The Bill of Rights on Crisis Board Sheet 3 Life in the Camps.

This provided me with stories and information about Japanese Americans life in the camps. How people were abused by guards and how badly people wanted to leave the camp. This was a pamphlet that was in the huge folder that my teacher gave me.

Japanese Internment: Bill of Rights on Crisis Broadsheet 5: Affirming Loyalty.

This pamphlet talked about the impact of the internment camps how it violated the Bill of Rights. This helped because I could understand the political side of how the Sansei fought to have the government pass the Act.

Lippmann, Walter. Discovered in Our Time. International Labour Office, 1944.

This is a primary source that a teacher gave me, it came in a big folder and there was tons of them. This was a little newspaper hand out, and this helped give me information that newspapers printed about Japanese Americans, and how they were harassed had made fun of.

Public Law 10-383-Aug 10 1938.

This was a copy of the act that gave Japanese Americans their justice. It was an apology to Japanese who suffered in internment camps, and a promise that the government will keep educating the public about Japanese Internment camps to make sure something like it will never happened again. It's also was redress activities fought for.

Secondary Sources:

Cooper, Michael L. Remembering Manzanar: Life in a Japanese Relocation Camp. Clarion Books, 2002.

This book gave me the most information on internment camps because it's was all about the internment camp Manzanar. It helped me gather most of my topic information.

Discovery Education,

<https://app.discoveryeducation.com/learn/techbook/units/629ef8d5-9668-403d-b4be-3a46a62da651/concepts/dc26ee95-d5bd-46ca-9d35-4e04dbf7cb98/tabs/759da9a7-2edf-4cde-9515-7081ca990764/pages/1f974e2c-b75c-4315-bca0-4656082b1d97>

This website helped because it had stories of people's lives before and during the internment camps. Reading them really helped me understand everything that internees went through. This secondary source was also great because I didn't have to worry about the information being true or not because we use this website in class, nad my teachers tell me that it's extremely credible.

Frail, Paul Kitagaki Jr.T.A. "The Injustice of Japanese-American Internment Camps Resonates Strongly to This Day." Smithsonian.com, Smithsonian Institution, 1 Jan. 2017,

[www.smithsonianmag.com/history/injustice-japanese-americans-internment-camps-resonates-str](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/injustice-japanese-americans-internment-camps-resonates-str)

[ongly-180961422/](#).

This website had lots of stories of internees live in the camp, as well as some background and impact notes. This s a secondary source that was extremely useful.

History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 2009, [www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/japanese-american-relocation](http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/japanese-american-relocation).

The following website was a good started website. It gave about equal information in background, topic, and impact. This a is a secondary source that helped me get a good idea of what I wanted to focus on for my paper.

"Japanese-American Internment." Ushistory.org, Independence Hall Association, [www.ushistory.org/us/51e.asp](http://www.ushistory.org/us/51e.asp).

This secondary source helped my confirm some other sources that didn't seem to be true but really were

Relocation and Incarceration of Japanese Americans During World War II." Calisphere, <https://calisphere.org/exhibitions/essay/8/relocation/>

This website helped me know the basics of my research. It's a secondary source that didn't have a ton of information that was needed for the paper, but it was enough for the background.

Sandler , Martian W. Imprisoned: The Betrayal of Japanese Americans During World War LI.

This book helped me so much with background and impact notes. It had lots of stories, quotes, detail that helped me so much. I learned so much about Japanese Internment camps by reading thing book.

Santella, Andrew. Pearl Harbor. Compass Point Books, 2005.

This book is a secondary source, and I used this just to find some information about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. It was lots of information about when the attack started and even a quote that I used in my paper.

SIkeda, Tom. "Japanese American internment." World Book Student. World Book, 2013. Web. 9 Apr. 2013.

<http://www.sps186.org/downloads/basic/525824/Japanese%20American%20internment%C2%A0%7C%C2%A0Article%C2%A0%7C%C2%A0World%20Book%20Student.pdf>

This secondary source was helpful when I needed to find how much camps there was, and where they were. But other than that I didn't really use this source because the website was difficult to site.

10 Shameful Facts About Japanese-American Internment." Listverse, 25 Oct. 2014, listverse.com/2014/10/25/10-shameful-truths-about-japanese-american-internment/.

This website is secondary, and it helped me gather background, topic, and impact notes. I thought it was also extremely helpful because there were lots of stories and quotes that I was able to use in my paper.