

Japanese Internment Camps during WWII

After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941 and the U.S. declaration of war, 80,000 thousand American citizens of Japanese ancestry, and 40,000 Japanese nationals, who were barred from naturalization by race, were imprisoned under the authority of Executive Order 9066 in War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps. There were approximately 11,000 people of Japanese descent, who were actually interned following a recognized legal procedure and the forms of law. They were citizens of a nation against which the United States was at war, seized for reasons supposedly based on their behavior, and entitled to an individual hearing before a board. Whereas, the 120,000 Japanese and Japanese American men, women, and children in the WRA camps had no due process of law and this violation of civil and human rights was justified on the grounds of military necessity.

There were many different types of camps in the United States used for the incarceration of different nationalities and categories of people involved in WWII—from American citizens to prisoners of war. Some benefitted from the protections of the Geneva Conventions and some did not.

Explore the Densho Encyclopedia to learn about the various sites of WWII incarceration in the U.S.	http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Sites_of_incarceration/
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Within four months of the Executive Order, all persons of Japanese descent had been removed from the western portions of California, Oregon, and Washington to supposedly protect against sabotage and espionage. While some Italians and Germans were imprisoned in the U.S., they posed no threat on the west coast and faced nothing like the racial animosity borne by the Japanese. Without any due process, Japanese families were forced to leave their homes and sent first to Temporary Assembly Centers and then routed to any of ten hastily constructed War Relocation Authority camps located on large tracks of federal land in remote areas of the western United States far from strategic areas. The camps were built from scratch of wooden barracks with tarpaper walls surrounded by barbed wire fences and guard towers. The unsatisfactory living and working conditions were communal with little privacy and minimum comforts in extreme climates.

Appendix A
Background Reading Assignment

STATE	WRA CAMP	SEGREGATION CENTER
Arizona	Gila River	
	Poston (Colorado River)	
Arkansas	Jerome	
	Rohwer	
California	Manzanar	
	Tule Lake	Tule Lake
Colorado	Granada (Camp Amache)	
Idaho	Minidoka	
Utah	Topaz	
Wyoming	Heart Mountain	

Summary Table of War Relocation Camp Locations & Types



*Foundation of a Tule Lake Bathhouse with Latrine
[Maureen Burns photograph, July 9, 2016]*



*Tule Lake Barracks now at Tulelake-Butte Fairground Museum
[Maureen Burns photograph, July 9, 2016]*

By October of 1942, the WRA began to develop leave clearance procedures to enable about 17,000 Japanese American citizens (majority 18-30 years-old) to re-enter civilian life as students or workers (about 7% of the total number of Japanese American incarcerated). The WRA reviewed their loyalty, prospects for self-support, and the reception of the community where they intended to move, the majority went to Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake City, or New York, far from their west coast birthplaces. Then in early 1943, the War Department developed a questionnaire to identify possible military volunteers and the War Relocation Authority decided to use it to identify incarcerated who might be released from the camps. Called the "Application for Leave Clearance," it was distributed to all the WRA camps to determine the loyalty of the incarcerated. The "loyalty questionnaire" was given to all Japanese Americans age 17 and over in the War Relocation Authority camps. Two clumsily worded questions caused confusion and consternation. Refusal to complete the questionnaire, qualified answers, or "no" answers to a question about serving in the armed forces (number 27) and forswearing allegiance to the Japanese emperor/foreign governments (number 28) were treated as evidence of disloyalty.

Appendix A

Background Reading Assignment

TERMINOLOGY	DEFINITION
Nikkei	Overall term for to describe Japanese emigrants from Japan and their descendants who reside in a foreign country.
Issei	1 st generation Japanese immigrants to the U.S. most of whom were prohibited from obtaining citizenship due to naturalization laws.
Nisei	The generation of people of Japanese descent born outside of Japan to at least one Issei or one Non-Immigrant Japanese Parent.
Kibei	2 nd generation Japanese Americans and American-born children of Issei educated in Japan (often stigmatized as un-American because of this).
Sansei	3 rd generation, American-born sons/daughters of Nisei
Renunciants	Nikkei who gave up their U.S. citizenship and were defined as “enemy aliens.”

Terminology Differentiating People of Japanese Ancestry

These questions resulted in a great deal of outrage and controversy. Japanese American citizens (Nisei) resented being asked to renounce loyalty to someone who had never been their Emperor. First generation Japanese Americans (Issei) could not gain U.S. citizenship, thus renouncing their Japanese citizenship would leave them stateless. Asking people to assume stateless status is a violation of the Geneva Conventions governing the treatment of enemy aliens. Those who answered “no” to one or both of the questions were designated as “disloyal” to the U.S. The spurious nature of these two survey items, led to these questions being hastily rewritten, but the damage was done.

This loyalty review program was the most divisive crisis of the incarceration and led to the transformation of the Tule Lake camp into a high-security Segregation Center to house those who refused to register or answered the loyalty questions “no-no.” This meant that about 12,000 “disloyals” and their families were transferred to Tule Lake, which required that 6,500 people already living in the Tule Lake WRA Camp were to sent to other WRA camps to make room for them. About 6,000 pre-segregation people decided to stay in the transformed Tule Lake Segregation Center so as to not be separated from their families or for other practical reasons. Tule Lake became a trouble spot with this mixture of “disloyals” from various WRA Camps and there were conflicts, not only with the camp keepers, but within the community.

Security at Tule Lake was increased with military police, a jail, a stockade (prison before jail built in 1944), and fencing to turn it into a maximum security facility, all of which

contributed to the turmoil. The segregation turned Tule Lake into a very complicated place with factions forming such as Hoshi Dan, a Japanese nationalist group. A work stoppage after a farm truck accident in which 29 people were injured (5 seriously and 1 died), escalated into a strike and a series of events that led to the Army declaring martial law and taking over the camp. Repression, imprisonment, shortages, and other hardships were endured while disillusionment grew as draft notices began arriving. Only a total of 1,256 people volunteered for service from all the WRA camps, whereas over 10,000 volunteered from Hawaii alone (where people of Japanese descent were not incarcerated).

Those segregated at Tule Lake were caught in a situation where Japanese nationalism offered a positive alternative, further dividing the camp population. Many immigrants and citizens determined that it was possibly safer to be “repatriated” to Japan rather than stay in the U.S. The concept of giving up United States citizenship, though shocking to some, was a choice of serious consideration and implications. Many feared for their safety in hostile white communities if they were released from the camps before the war was over and so thought Japan would be safer than the U.S. Others were outraged with their imprisonment and disillusioned. Renunciation was made easier by an Act of Congress, the so-called Denaturalization Act of 1944. Initially, fewer than two-dozen Tule Lake incarcerated applied to renounce their citizenship, but when the WRA announced that the camp would close in a year, panic and confusion ensued resulting in 7,222 (1/3 of the Tule Lake camp population) Nisei and Kibei renouncing, 65 percent of whom were American-born. In contrast, only 128 people from the nine other WRA camps renounced their American citizenship. Ultimately, many were repatriated to Japan, while others who signed up to go to Japan realized it was a mistake. Wayne Mortimer Collins, a Civil Liberties Attorney, prevented the Department of Justice from deporting en masse the people of Japanese descent who renounced their U.S. citizenship. But the effort to restore citizenship took 22 years—eventually nearly all, except about 40-50 people had their citizenship restored.

Tule Lake became the largest of the WRA camps with 18,700 incarcerated, although it was built for 15,000. Within the microcosm of Tule Lake, the complexity and consequences of the Japanese American WWII incarceration was played out on the most dramatic of stages. The Tule Lake Segregation Center was the last of the WRA camps to close on March 20, 1946.