

By the *Justice For All* Conference Committee

A brief timeline of the milestones of Japanese American history: Systemic Racism, Incarceration, Redress, Resettlement, and Beyond.

History of Japanese Americans

Most devastating to Japanese Americans (JAs) was being forced into internment camps during World War II. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942 permitting mass removal and detention of JAs without trials or hearings. Through this action, he ignored the Munson Report findings completed in November 1941, which concluded Japanese Americans posed “little threat to security” and that the Nisei, US born children of immigrants, showed “pathetic eagerness to be American.”

Perry Opens Japan, Early Years in America

Under the Tokugawa Shogunate, Japan maintained a strict isolationist foreign policy since the 1600's. Japan wanted to remain isolated in 1852 but the United States used its large, aggressive military to force it open and to sign the unfair Treaty of Peace and Amity on March 31, 1854. It then wanted the Japanese to come to the United States to work as cheap labor on farms, railroads, and in mines, canneries, and the logging industry. The first generation of immigrants, the Issei, came to America with high hopes and dreams of making their fortunes.

From the beginning Japanese were not thought of as Americans nor could they ever be. The Naturalization Act of 1790 indicated that any alien who was a free white person could be a naturalized American citizen after residing in the United States for two years. Then in 1870 the act was expanded to include indentured servants and slaves so “persons of African nativity or descent” could be American citizens. Japanese were not white or African and therefore ineligible for citizenship. The Chinese, the previous group to come, were excluded from immigration for 60 years by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. They were also ineligible for citizenship.

Racism and economic exploitation greeted the Japanese as “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” Ineligibility for citizenship prevented land ownership and restricted cropping leases to three years. Alien Land Laws were passed to force Japanese out of farming in Arizona, Texas, Washington, Florida, Louisiana, New Mexico, Montana and Oregon and even more states during World War II. Laws also bared leasing land or ownership by American-born children of Asian immigrant parents or by corporations controlled by Asian immigrants.

Anti-Japanese Movement

Japanese Americans endured many hardships, segregation, and difficulty securing good jobs. They were excluded from domestic work, gardening as well as from all unions. American citizens marrying aliens lost their citizenships.

An anti-Japanese movement began in San Francisco with the Asiatic Exclusion League in 1905. Within a year they encouraged the Cooks and Waiters Union to boycott Japanese owned "American food restaurants."

Harassment and expulsion of Japanese took place in rural communities. In Toledo, Mr. C. Dean Johnson brought in Japanese laborers to work only on the "green chain" which involved sorting lumber as it left the mill on a revolving chain. White workers refused to do this task. Within two days of the Japanese workers arrival 300 to 500 people gathered and a mob formed to beat and load Issei on trucks back to Portland. No criminal charges were filed. In Phoenix, white farmers formed an Anti-Asian Committee and staged a 150-car parade through the city and set an August deadline for the Japanese to leave. In September they set off a series of bombings of Japanese farmers without any arrests. There were forceful expulsions of Japanese laborers from Turlock, Delano (1922) Los Angeles (1922 and 1924), Porterville (1922), Hopland (1924), Woodlake (1926), Toledo Oregon (1925), and Salt River Valley (1934). In Hawaii Katsu Goto moved from a laborer to the owner of a store that was located near a grocery shop owned by Joseph R. Mills. Incensed and filled with hatred, a group of men lynched Goto in 1889 and no significant punishment resulted to the perpetrators.

In 1906, San Francisco passed a resolution to segregate 93 Japanese children. President Theodore Roosevelt denounced this order and advocated a congressional act allowing Issei to become naturalized citizens. He decided segregation was not necessary attracting harsh criticism from California politicians and newspapers. To appease them, Roosevelt passed The Immigration Act of 1907. The Gentlemen's Agreement which stipulated those Japanese children would not be segregated in schools and that the issuance of passports to the United States would be severely restricted.

Pearl Harbor

The attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7, 1941 was a shock. That same day the FBI gathered Issei leadership and by 6:30 am the following day, 736 Issei were in custody. Within 48 hours 1291 were in custody. The Department of Justice employed repressive policies they knew to be unconstitutional and enforced them illegally. They blamed the Issei for living in the United States for so many years without becoming citizens ignoring the fact that American laws forbade them from becoming citizens. No charges were filed against these Issei men, and family members were not permitted to see them. The FBI raids were the last time many Nisei saw their fathers who spent their war years in enemy alien camps run by the Department of Justice. In contrast, Italian and German aliens were charged and found guilty before they were imprisoned.

Racism and hatred toward Japanese Americans were intense. Politics, not truth, mattered. Political leaders and newspapers painted Japanese Americans as spies and saboteurs even though no proof existed. General De Witt, the head of the Western Defense Command, believed no matter how long second and third generation had been citizens their racial blood made them untrustworthy. "The very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication such action will be taken." California's Attorney General Earl Warren held this same belief, in addition, he held that Japanese born in this country were potentially more dangerous than alien Japanese born in Japan.

Executive Order 9066

Executive Order 9066, signed on February 19, 1942 permitted the exclusion of anyone from anywhere without trial or hearing with criminal sanctions for violations of this order. It was intended for the mass removal and detention of Japanese Americans and 120,000 were removed from the west coast. Of these 73% were American citizens taken without regard for their constitutional rights or civil liberties. The Nisei couldn't believe their loyalty was being questioned. They felt betrayed by their government

Life was difficult for Japanese Americans on the West Coast. Their bank accounts were frozen. They were under strict curfew and unable to travel. Some thought of moving to interior parts of the country, but then change of residences was not allowed. Then on February 25, 1942 the Navy served eviction notices to 100 Japanese Americans on Terminal Island giving them 48 hours to leave. In March 1942, Japanese Americans on Bainbridge Island, Washington was given a week notice before departure. By October, 108 exclusion orders to evict Japanese Americans were issued.

With little time decisions had to be made about their homes, farms, businesses, and possessions. What should they do about their crops, their pets, so many things? What should they take? They did not know where they were going or for how long. They were easy targets. Whites were able to gain many things that did not rightfully belong to them for little or no money.

Internment Camps

Families were identified by numbers. They could take only what they could carry, one suitcase per person. Ten concentration camps were quickly constructed in isolated desert or swampland. Topaz in Utah, Poston and Gila River in Arizona, Granada in Colorado, Heart Mountain in Wyoming, Jerome and Rowher in Arkansas, Manzanar and Tule Lake in California and Minidoka in Idaho. Camp life was tough. The only reason they were there was their ethnicity, they were Japanese Americans. Caucasians created so much hatred and anti-Japanese feelings among the general population, that they were able to profit from the hard work completed and economic success achieved by Japanese Americans.

In camp each family was given one poorly insulated room. Everything was communal-eating, restroom and laundry facilities, work and play. The food was not suitable, pay for work inadequate, restrooms lacked privacy, and medical care was inadequate. Nevertheless, the

incarcerated Japanese Americans made gardens and raised suitable foods to improve the quality of their meals. Those with more knowledge became teachers but children knew they were not real teachers. Many teenagers chose not to attend school. The Issei were dismissed from leadership roles as young Nisei took over. Family structures disappeared.

Military Service

In 1941 there were 5,000 Japanese Americans in military service. After Pearl Harbor many were discharged as unsuitable for service and reclassified as enemy nationals, ineligible for duty. On January 30, 1942, 169 dismissed Nisei formed the Varsity Victory Volunteers and performed non-combat labor for eleven months. Subsequently, many of them volunteered for the segregated 100th Infantry Battalion in May 1942, which eventually was deployed to the European theatre.

Japanese Americans served in the Pacific utilizing their language skills. In November 1941, the Fourth Army Intelligence School opened in the Presidio, San Francisco with 60 students and 8 Japanese language instructors. The school produced its first graduates in May 1942. Because California's atmosphere was filled with anti-Japanese sentiment and preparations for mass removal to concentration camps, and because the school needed more space, the newly named Military Intelligence Language School was moved to Minnesota on June 1, 1942. By August 1944, there were 1600 graduates, 6000 linguists, 142 officer candidates and 53 officers who served in the Pacific. One officer credited the linguists with shortening the war in the Pacific by two years.

In the camps, Japanese Americans were asked to volunteer for the newly formed segregated 442nd Regimental Combat team. Known as the Go for Broke unit, it was considered expendable and suffered major losses. They entered Europe from Italy and saw action from Rome to Pisa and Florence. They suffered 1,272 casualties to gain 40 miles and even more losses in the rescue of the Lost Battalion. The 1st Battalion of the 141st Regiment of 275 Texans had overextended themselves and were surrounded by Germans in eastern France. After two battalions failed to rescue this group, the 442nd was sent. They were successful in freeing the Texans but suffered 814 casualties to save 211 men. The 442nd also participated in the assault which broke the Gothic Line and freed Jews from the Dachau concentration death camp¹. This unit of 18,000 men is the most decorated unit for their size with 4000 purple hearts, 4000 Bronze medals, 560 Silver Star Medals, 21 Medal of Honors, and 7 Presidential unit citations. There were approximately 800 Japanese American soldiers killed in action.

Fair Play Resisters

There were draft resisters at Heart Mountain Camp who refused to serve in the military until their rights of citizenship were restored. They would not serve as long as their families remained in camps. Eighty-five members of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee were tried, convicted, and sentenced in 1943 to three years in federal prisons. All appeals failed. They stood on principle and in 1947 were pardoned by President Truman. Many of these men served in the Korean War.

Legal Opposition

Mitsuye Endo challenged the government's legality of detaining people solely on the basis of race on July 12, 1942. She was born in the United States, was an American citizen, never visited Japan, could not read or write Japanese, was Methodist, and had a brother serving in the United States Army. She worked for the State of California Motor Vehicles. Her case was dismissed on July 3, 1943 without any reason given. This decision was appealed to the Supreme Court which decided she should be given liberty in October 1944. "It has no authority to subject citizens who are concededly loyal to its leave regulations." Because of politics and the election, announcement of this decision was delayed until December 18, 1944. This meant everyone could not be held in camps and on January 2, 1945 closing of the camps begin.

Minoru Yasui decided to challenge the curfew order after the Army denied him on racial basis and his father was placed in a Department of Justice Camp in Missoula Montana. Unsuccessful in being arrested for breaking curfew, he walked into the police station and asked to be detained for breaking curfew. The judge ruled that curfew against American citizens was illegal but with Yasui's past employment with the Japanese Consulate he forfeited his American citizenship. Not being a citizen, he was found guilty of breaking curfew and sentenced to a year in prison and \$5,000 fine.

Gordon Hirabayashi went to the FBI Office in Seattle on May 16, 1942 with his lawyer to challenge the exclusion order. He refused to register for evacuation citing lack of due process. He was also charged with curfew violations. Found guilty he appealed the case which was referred to the Supreme Court.

Fred Korematsu was arrested for violating exclusion orders. He was fired from his job at a shipyard after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He wanted to marry a Caucasian woman and move to a midwestern state but he was not permitted to change residence without permission from the army. He was found guilty and jailed. After bond was posted, he was taken to Tanforan Assembly Center to join his family.

The Korematsu, Yasui, and Hirabayashi cases were combined and heard by the Supreme Court on December 18, 1944. By a 6 to 3 vote, the verdicts were upheld due to military necessity. In 1981 researcher, Peter Irons found proof that evidence was suppressed in the previous cases and coram nobis cases were opened for Korematsu, Yasui and Hirabayashi in January 1983. All three cases were finally vacated

Resettlement

Japanese Americans were encouraged to leave camps and go north or east and join the general population to get Americanized. Cheap labor was needed in these areas during the war and jobs were more plentiful. They were not allowed to return to the west coast until exclusion orders were rescinded. Fearing racism and the difficult process to leave camp many remained until forced out in 1945. On the west coast Japanese Americans were not wanted. They faced hostility and prejudice after leaving camp. They were shot at and their houses were burned. Wherever Japanese Americans resettled after camp, most had to start over from nothing.

Redress

It is generally agreed that forcing 120,000 Japanese Americans into concentration camps during World War II was a mistake. The government knew it was not a military necessity but for political reasons and to appease the hatred and racist feelings harbored by many citizens, it did so. This wound remained hidden for many years until 1970 when the Japanese American community requested an apology and compensation from the United States government for their sufferings. Congress formed the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians on July 12, 1980. Hearings were held in ten cities including Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, San Francisco and Washington DC. to study facts and circumstances surrounding Executive Order 9066. The 750 testimonies were published in the book, *Personal Justice Denied* and were the basis for Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which recommended an apology and \$20,000 payment to each internee. President Ronald Reagan signed HR 442 August 10, 1988 and the first redress check was issued on October 9, 1990.