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# Japanese Internment Camps

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Japanese internment camps were established during World War II by President Franklin Roosevelt through his Executive Order 9066. From 1942 to 1945, it was the policy of the U.S. government that people of Japanese descent would be interred in isolated camps. Enacted in reaction to Pearl Harbor and the ensuing war, the Japanese internment camps are now considered one of the most atrocious violations of American civil rights in the 20th century.

## Executive Order 9066

On February 19, 1942, shortly after the bombing of [Pearl Harbor](#) by Japanese forces, President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) signed [Executive Order](#) 9066 with the intention of preventing espionage on American shores.

Military zones were created in [California](#), [Washington](#) and [Oregon](#)—states with a large population of Japanese Americans—and Roosevelt’s executive order commanded the relocation of Americans of Japanese ancestry.

Executive Order 9066 affected the lives about 117,000 people—the majority of whom were American citizens.

Canada soon followed suit, relocating 21,000 of its Japanese residents from its west coast. [Mexico](#) enacted its own version, and eventually 2,264 more people of Japanese descent were removed from Peru, Brazil, Chile and Argentina to the United States.

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## Anti-Japanese Activity

Weeks before the order, the Navy removed citizens of Japanese descent from Terminal Island near the Port of Los Angeles.

On December 7, 1941, just hours after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the [FBI](#) rounded-up 1,291 Japanese community and religious leaders, arresting them without evidence and freezing their assets.

In January, the arrestees were transferred to facilities in [Montana](#), [New Mexico](#) and [North Dakota](#), many unable to inform their families and most remaining for the duration of the war.

Concurrently, the FBI searched the private homes of thousands of Japanese residents on the West Coast, seizing items considered contraband.

One-third of Hawaii's population was of Japanese descent. In a panic, some politicians called for their mass incarceration. Japanese-owned fishing boats were impounded.

Some Japanese residents were arrested and 1,500 people—one percent of the Japanese population in Hawaii—were sent to camps on the U.S. mainland.

## John DeWitt

Lt. General John L. DeWitt, leader of the Western Defense Command, believed that the civilian population needed to be taken control of to prevent a repeat of Pearl Harbor.

To argue his case, DeWitt prepared a report filled with known falsehoods, such as examples of sabotage that were later revealed to be the result of cattle-damaging power lines.

DeWitt suggested the creation of the military zones and Japanese detainment to Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Attorney General Francis Biddle. His original plan included Italians and Germans, though the

idea of rounding-up Americans of European descent was not as popular.

At Congressional hearings in February 1942, a majority of the testimonies, including those from California Governor Culbert L. Olson and State Attorney General [Earl Warren](#), declared that all Japanese should be removed.

Biddle pleaded with the president that mass evacuation of citizens was not required, preferring smaller, more targeted security measures. Regardless, Roosevelt signed the order.

## **War Relocation Authority**

After much organizational chaos, about 15,000 Japanese Americans willingly moved out of prohibited areas. Inland state citizens were not keen for new Japanese residents, and they were met with racist resistance.

Ten state governors voiced opposition, fearing the Japanese might never leave, and demanded they be locked up if the states were forced to accept them.

A civilian organization called the [War Relocation Authority](#) was set up in March 1942 to administer the plan, with Milton S. Eisenhower from the Department of Agriculture to lead it. Eisenhower only lasted until June 1942, resigning in protest over what he characterized as incarcerating innocent citizens.

## **Relocation to Assembly Centers**

Army-directed evacuations began on March 24. People had six days notice to dispose of their belongings other than what they could carry.

Anyone who was at least 1/16th Japanese was evacuated, including 17,000 children under 10, as well as several thousand elderly and handicapped.

Japanese Americans reported to centers near their homes. From there they were transported to a relocation center where they might live for months before transfer to a permanent wartime residence.

These centers were located in remote areas, often reconfigured fairgrounds and racetracks featuring buildings not meant for human habitation, like horse stalls or cow sheds, that had been converted for that purpose. In Portland, [Oregon](#), 3,000 people stayed in the livestock pavilion of the Pacific International Livestock Exposition Facilities.

The Santa Anita Assembly Center, just several miles northeast of Los Angeles, was a de-facto city with 18,000 interred, 8,500 of whom lived in stables. Food shortages and substandard sanitation were prevalent in these facilities.

## Life in Assembly Centers

Assembly centers offered work to detainees with the policy that they should not be paid more than an Army private. Jobs ranged from doctors to teachers to laborers and mechanics. A couple of assembly centers were the sites of camouflage net factories, which provided work.

There were opportunities for farm work during a labor shortage, and over 1,000 internees were sent to other states to do seasonal farm work. Over 4,000 internees were allowed to leave to attend college.

## Conditions in Relocation Centers

There were a total of 10 permanent housing camps called Relocation Centers. Typically some form of barracks, several families were housed together, with communal eating areas. Residents that were designated as dissidents went to a special camp in Tule Lake, California.

Two relocation centers in [Arizona](#) were located on Indian reservations, despite the protests of tribal councils, who were overruled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Each relocation center was its own town, featuring schools, post offices and work facilities, as well as farmland for growing food and keeping livestock, all surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers.

Net factories offered work at several relocation centers. One housed a naval ship model factory. There were also factories in different centers that manufactured items for use in other centers, including garments, mattresses and cabinets. Several centers had agricultural processing plants.

## Violence in Relocation Centers

Violence occasionally occurred in centers. In Lordsburg, New Mexico, internees were delivered by trains and marched two miles at night to the camp.

An elderly man attempted to flee and was shot and killed. After settling in, at least two men were shot and killed while trying to escape.

On August 4, 1942, a riot broke out in the Santa Anita facility, the result of anger about insufficient rations and overcrowding. At Manzanar, California, tensions resulted in the beating of a Japanese American Citizens League member by six masked men. Fearing a riot, police tear-gassed crowds, and one man was killed by police.

At the Topaz Relocation Center, a man was shot and killed by military police for going too close to the perimeter. Two months later, a couple was shot at for the same reason.

In 1943, a riot broke out at Tule Lake following an accidental death. Tear gas was dispersed, and martial law declared until agreements were reached.

## Fred Korematsu

In 1942, 23-year-old Fred Korematsu was arrested for refusing to relocate to a Japanese internment camp. His case made it all the way to the Supreme Court, where his attorneys argued in *Korematsu v. United States* that Executive Order 9066 violated the Fifth Amendment. He lost the case, but he went on to become a civil rights activist and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998. With the creation of California's Fred Korematsu Day, the U.S. saw its first U.S. holiday named for an Asian American. But it would take another Supreme Court decision to halt the internment of Japanese Americans

## Mitsuye Endo

The internment camps ended in 1945 following a [Supreme Court](#) decision.

In *Endo v. the United States*, it was ruled that the War Relocation Authority “has no authority to subject citizens who are concededly loyal to its leave procedure.”

The case was brought on behalf of Mitsuye Endo, the daughter of Japanese immigrants from Sacramento, CA. After filing a habeas corpus petition, the government offered to free her, but Endo refused, wanting her case to address the entire issue of Japanese internment.

Two years later, the Supreme Court made the decision, but gave Roosevelt the chance to begin camp closures before the announcement. One day after Roosevelt made his announcement, the Supreme Court revealed its decision.

## Reparations

The last Japanese internment camp closed in March 1946. President Gerald Ford officially repealed Executive Order 9066 in 1976, and in 1988 Congress issued a formal apology and passed the Civil Liberties Act awarding \$20,000 each to over 80,000 Japanese Americans as [reparations](#) for their treatment.

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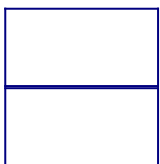
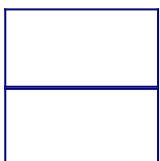
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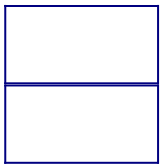
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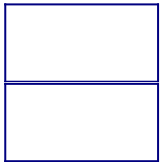
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