

Japanese Internment Lecture Notes

- Pearl Harbor attack caused growing bitterness toward Japanese-Americans.
- Concerned with national security, the U.S. government responded with harsh measures against Japanese-Americans.
- President Roosevelt authorized Executive Order 9066 - the evacuation from designated military areas of potential enemy aliens.
- In March 1942, the evacuation of all Japanese-Americans in western parts of California, Oregon, and Washington began.
- Non-acceptance of evacuees further inland resulted in the decision for obligatory internment.
- President Roosevelt: "Go ahead and do anything you think necessary (to protect the West Coast from potential Japanese spies and sabotage) ... if it involves citizens, we will take care of them too. There will be some repercussions, but it has got to be dictated by military necessity ... be as reasonable as you can."

- Although "military necessity" was stated as the official reason, there was much suspicion that the actual reason was one of prejudice and racism.
- America's discriminatory history toward the Japanese included:
 - prohibiting intermarriage with whites
 - legal exclusion from swimming pools and dance halls
 - systematic banning from certain jobs and middle- class housing districts.
 - Additionally, the Immigration Act of 1924 barred any further immigration from Japan, and left 47,000 Japanese-born already in the U.S. ineligible for naturalization.
- No attempt was made to distinguish between loyal and disloyal, citizen or alien.
 - Two-thirds of those evacuated were American-born.
- No similar action was taken against those of German or Italian descent.
- No evidence was ever found to support the government's claims of potential sabotage.

- No such activities ever occurred.
- The government assumed no liability for Japanese-American property, instead encouraging them to sell what they had.
- Preparation time to leave for the camps was short, sometimes as little as 48 hours.
 - Property, businesses and belongings were sold far below fair values.
 - Losses ranged from moderate to great.
- En route to permanent camps, evacuees were held over in Army-run centers such as fair grounds, racetracks, and public arenas.
- Ten total camps were built in remote, desolate areas of the Western states.
 - Due to their barren, arid locations, self-sufficiency was virtually impossible.
- Camps were fenced in, with wooden barracks that consisted of several one-room apartments, minimally furnished, and often only partial walls.
 - Toilets, bathing, dining, and laundry facilities were all communal.
 - Facilities for recreation and education were minimal.

- Medical care was only enough to prevent epidemics.
- Most complied with EO 9066 either to prove their loyalty or protect themselves from the outside world.
 - Some challenged internment in court, but the government actions were always upheld as a justifiable wartime measure.
 - Other Japanese-Americans relinquished their citizenship as a symbolic act of distaste for the action.
- Animosity toward Japan and paranoia about sabotage by Japanese-Americans made hopes of the camps as a temporary solution futile, thus large-scale releases were not feasible.
- To get out, one had to prove:
 - loyalty to the U.S.
 - that employment was awaiting them
 - that the job was in a community willing to accept them.
- Of the 100,000-plus interned, only 17,000 were able to obtain leaves in 1943.

- With the victory at Midway - thus removing further threat of attack - journals began to speak out against the need for further internment, exposing the outrages Japanese-Americans had been subjected to.
- In 1943, a resolution to separate the loyal from the disloyal was passed.
 - Men had to promise to serve in the military, swear allegiance to the United States, and denounce allegiance to the Japanese emperor.
 - Women had to promise to volunteer for the Army Nurse Corps or the WAAC.
- Many, however, chose to stay preferring the routines inside rather than confronting prejudices outside.
- More than 17,000 went into the Army, serving in segregated regiments serving in the European theater.
 - One of these, the 442nd, became the most decorated unit of the war.
- By the end of 1945, the camps were all closed.

- In 1988, President Reagan signed legislation awarding \$20,000 to every Japanese-American who was interned. The first of these payments were issued in October of 1990 to those 80 years and older.