



2005 COJET BROADCAST

Will history repeat itself? From the Japanese Internment to Post 9/11 America: Are our civil liberties in danger?

**Sponsored by: The Committee on Judicial Education and Training
The Commission on Minorities**



Japanese-Americans leaving Los Angeles for Manzanar.



Terror suspects

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States was gripped by war hysteria, especially along the Pacific coast of the U.S., where residents feared more Japanese attacks on their cities, homes, and businesses. Leaders in California, Oregon, and Washington, demanded that the residents of Japanese ancestry be removed from their homes along the coast and isolated inland areas.

As a result, on February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, causing the forcible internment of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry. More than two-thirds of those interned were citizens of the United States, and none had ever shown any disloyalty.

The War Relocation Authority was created to administer the assembly centers, relocation centers, and internment camps, and relocation of Japanese-Americans began in April 1942. Camps were scattered all over the interior West in isolated, mostly desert areas, where Japanese-Americans were forced to carry on their lives under harsh conditions.

Relocation to Redress

In 1942, almost 120,000 Japanese-Americans were forced from their homes in California, western Oregon and

Our civil liberties are primarily those provided by constitutional amendment, giving Americans the right to freedom of religion and of speech, to peaceably assemble, to carry arms, to be free from discrimination, and the right to be free of search or seizures without probable cause.

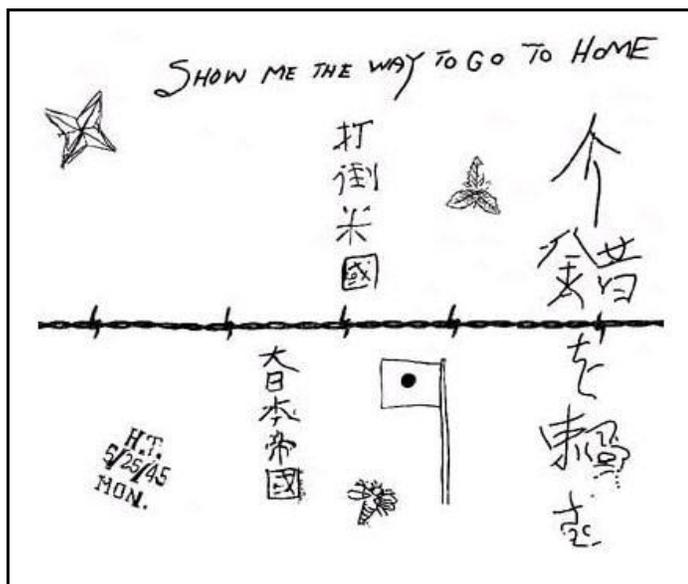
We are hearing now, across the country, debate about the issues of national security versus civil liberties and racial profiling; parallels are being drawn between the Japanese-American internment, post 12/7/41 and what's happening now with the Arab-American community, post 9/11, and we must begin to ask, "Will history repeat itself? Are our civil liberties in danger?"

Arizona Camps

Gila River Relocation Center (Rivers)

Washington, and southern Arizona in the single largest forced relocation in U.S. history. Many would spend the next three years in one of ten "relocation centers" across the country, run by the newly-formed War Relocation Authority (WRA). Others would be held in facilities run by the Department of Justice and the U.S. Army. The Japanese-Americans were first sent to one of 17 temporary "assembly centers," where they awaited transportation to a more permanent relocation center. Most of those relocated were American citizens by birth or were long-term U.S. residents, ineligible for citizenship due to discriminatory naturalization laws.

Since all Japanese-Americans on the west coast were affected including the elderly, women and children, Federal officials attempted to conduct the massive incarceration in a humane manner. However, by the time the last internees were released in 1946, they collectively lost homes and businesses estimated to be worth 4 to 5 billion dollars. Deleterious effects on Japanese-American individuals, their families, and their communities were immeasurable.

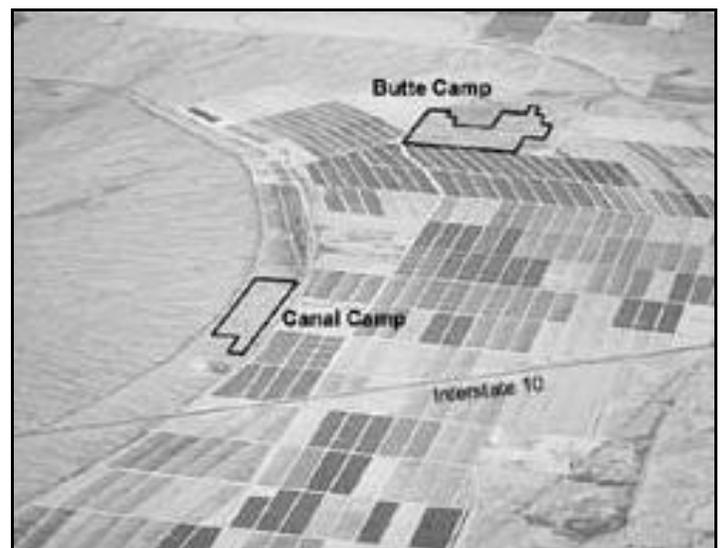


Inscriptions at Tule Lake, CA.

Fred Korematsu refused to go to an internment camp and in 1942 was arrested and forcibly sent to Topaz camp in Utah. Mr. Korematsu initiated a lawsuit stating that his civil rights had been violated, and that he had suffered racial discrimination. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld his conviction in 1944 on the grounds of "military necessity." In 1983, a federal court in San Francisco overturned the conviction, stating that the government's case at the time had been based on false, misleading, and racially-biased information, and not on actual threat to national security. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which apologized for the internments and awarded each survivor \$20,000. The formal letter of apology was issued by President George Bush on behalf of the U.S. government.

The Gila River Relocation Center was located about 50 miles south of Phoenix and 9 miles west of Sacaton in Pinal County, Arizona. The site is on the Gila River Indian Reservation, and access to the site today is restricted. The post office designation for the center was Rivers, named after Jim Rivers, the first Pima Indian killed in action during World War I. The relocation center included two separate camps located 3-1/2 miles apart, Canal Camp (originally called Camp No. 1) in the eastern half of the Relocation Center reserve, and Butte Camp (Camp No. 2) in the western half. When the Gila River Relocation Center was in operation, it was the fourth largest city in Arizona.

The Gila Relocation Center was located between two canals within the broad Gila River Valley. The site opened for operation on March 18, 1942, despite objections from the Gila River Indian tribe. Construction of the relocation center began on May 1, 1942 with 125 workers; on July 10, the first advance group of 500 Japanese-Americans arrived. Groups of 500 started to arrive each day the following week. The maximum population of 13,348 was reached by November.



Aerial view of Gila River Relocation Center area today, crosscut by Interstate 10.

The barracks at the two camps were constructed wood frame and sheathed with lightweight white "beaverboard." Roofs were doubled with the top roofs sheathed with red fireproof shingles. Another feature designed to help deal with the heat was the use of evaporative coolers. However, there were chronic water shortages, and for a time parts of Butte Camp ran out of water by nightfall. Use of evaporative coolers was curtailed and other water conservation measures were enforced. Heating was supplied by a combination of natural gas and fuel oil.

Initially, supplies for the relocation center were shipped by train and truck. In 1943 a loading and warehouse facility for the center was built at a railroad siding at Serape, only 11 miles away.

Canal Camp covered a narrow 210-acre area in the eastern part of the reserve at the southern boundary. The camp was separated by firebreaks into three groups of nine blocks which housed mostly rural people from the Turlock Assembly Center and Military Area 2.

The 360 buildings at Canal Camp included 232 barracks, 16 mess halls, ironing rooms, laundry rooms, latrine and shower buildings, school buildings, and community service/recreation buildings. The recreation buildings and some of the barracks were used for churches, meeting rooms, classrooms and libraries.

The evacuees ameliorated the harshness of their surroundings by planting gardens, building fish ponds, and planting trees for shade. Small canals were excavated to provide irrigation. The evacuees constructed an auditorium/gym, a science laboratory, a home economics building, and a vocational arts (shop/crafts) building. Athletic fields were located in the remaining vacant blocks and in firebreaks.

The larger of the two camps at the Gila River Relocation Center, **Butte Camp**, covered 790 acres at the base of Sacaton Butte, 3-1/2 miles west of Canal Camp. There were 821 buildings in all at Butte Camp housing mostly urban people from the Tulare and Santa Anita Assembly Centers. All buildings except the gas station and four of the apartments were built by the evacuees.

The Butte Camp hospital, which served both Butte and Canal Camp included a dental clinic and a convalescent hostel.

At its peak during the 1943-1944 harvest season, agricultural production at the Gila Relocation Center employed nearly 1,000 men and women. In the first nine months of operation, 84 train carloads of food were shipped from Gila to the other relocation centers. Twenty percent of the food used at all of the relocation centers across the county was produced at the Gila River Relocation Center. Evacuees also produced 150 acres of flax, cotton, and castor beans as war crop production.



Harvesting cucumbers at the Gila River Relocation Center.
(Francis Stewart photograph, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley)



Feeding calves at the Gila River Relocation Center dairy farm.
(WRA photograph, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley)

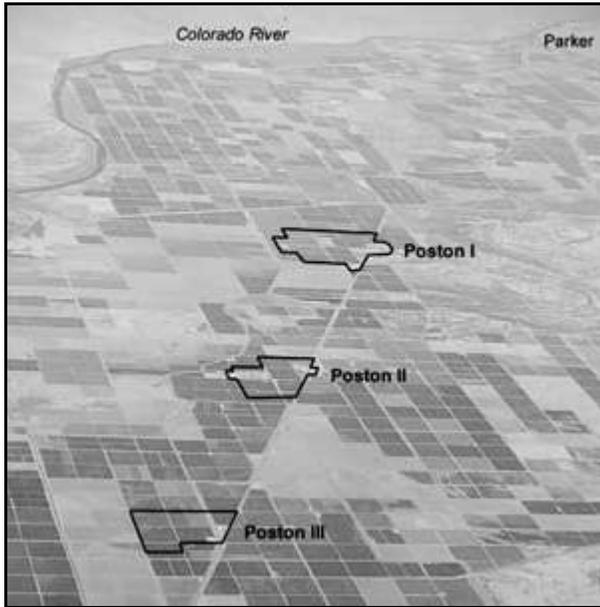
Canal Camp was closed on September 28, 1945, and Butte Camp on November 10, 1945. The last to leave the Gila River Center were 155 Hawaiian-Japanese. In December many of the buildings at the relocation center were allocated and moved to educational institutions throughout the state. The WRA auctioned off the barracks and remaining property in August 1946. (Weik 1992).

Colorado River Relocation Center (Poston)

The Poston or Colorado River Relocation Center was located in La Paz County, Arizona, 12 miles south of the town of Parker. Poston was named after Charles Debrille Poston, the first Superintendent for Indian Affairs in Arizona. Poston was directly responsible for the establishment, in 1865, of the Colorado River Reservation, where the center is located. The Colorado River is about 2-1/2 miles west of the relocation center. At only 320 feet elevation, the area lies within the lower Sonoran desert. Summers there are hot and humid due to the proximity of the river; the winter days are cool and nights cold.

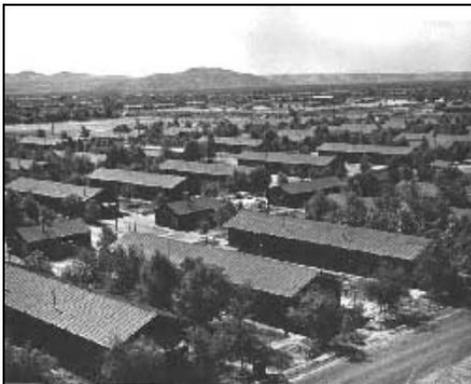
The Colorado River Indian Reservation Tribal Council opposed the use of their land for a relocation center. Their argument centered on the similarities between the relocation of Native American peoples to tribal reservations and the current practices toward Japanese-Americans. They did not want to be party to inflicting this type of injustice. However, the tribe's objections were overruled by the Army and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Poston Relocation Center consisted of three separate camps at three-mile intervals. Known officially as Poston I, II, and III, the internees nicknamed them Roasten, Toasten, and Dustin. Construction on Poston I began March 27, 1942, with the contractor Del Webb, later of Sun City fame. With equipment brought up from Blythe, the initial ground clearing was done in one day; Poston I was completed in less than three weeks. The pine specified for construction was in short supply, so heart redwood was substituted. When the redwood shrank much more than expected, millions of feet of thin wood strips had to be ordered to fill the cracks. A second contract was awarded to Webb to build Poston II and III within 120 days. There were no guard towers at Poston; they were considered unnecessary because of the isolated location – in the desert at the end of a road.



Aerial view of the Poston area today.

Poston I, the largest of the three units, was the farthest north. It included administration offices, three staff housing areas, warehouses, 36 residential blocks for evacuees and the hospital and military police compound for the entire center. Residential were made up of barracks, a mess hall, a recreation building, latrines, a laundry and ironing building, and a fuel oil shed. Like the Gila River sites, recreation halls were used for various purposes including a sewing school, churches, service organizations, beauty and barber shops, and internal police offices.



Poston I.
(WRA photograph,
National Archives)

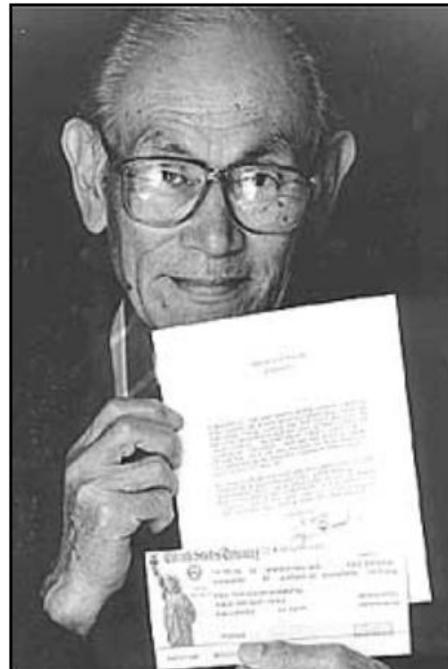
Internees added ponds, gardens, and trees and other vegetation to the residential area to cut down on the dust and heat. Three swimming pools and a fire station were constructed. Since no arrangements were made for schools, evacuees built their own classrooms and school auditoriums. Sufficient lumber was not available, so walls were constructed of adobe, a material foreign to most evacuees. Many considered the material inferior and labor-intensive. The difficult work was exacerbated by the 115-degree temperatures and the fact that the adobe ruined their clothes.

In addition to chicken farms at each of the sites, there was a hog farm located between Poston I and II.

The last evacuees left Poston November 28, 1945. A few Hopi Indian families moved in before the last Japanese-Americans left to keep the farms going. After the relocation center was closed, the barracks and other buildings were sold, moved and reused and fields were converted to Reservation use.



Memorial at site of
Poston Camp #1
on Mohave Road
(Poston
Restoration
Project)



Mr. Korematsu
holding his letter
of apology and
redress check.

It has been said, "During war, the laws are silent." If we have learned from the experience of the Japanese internment, we will continue to struggle to uphold the rights of our citizens, even as we fight terrorism and tyranny.

In Memoriam

Fred Korematsu 1919 – 2005
Landmark redress plaintiff
Medal of Freedom Recipient

Balbir Singh Sodhi, murdered 9/15/2001
Member of Arizona Sikh Community
Victim of first hate crime in 9/11 backlash

