

Name _____

Date _____

Japanese Internment

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. Japanese people began immigrating to the United States in the mid-1800s. They mostly settled on the west coast. Almost immediately, there were racial tensions between white Americans and Japanese immigrants. Around the turn of the century in California, laws were passed that prevented Issei — Japanese immigrants born in Japan — from becoming US citizens or owning property. Later, laws made it illegal for Japanese immigrants to marry American citizens. Many people believed that Japanese immigrants were too different to assimilate into American society the way European immigrants had.

Notes

2. World War II began in 1939, with the Allies — England, France, the USSR and other countries — fighting against the Axis powers — Germany, Italy, Japan and others. The US was involved in selling weapons and equipment to Allied countries, but it had not yet joined the war itself. Tensions between the US and Japan had been growing for years. On December 7, 1941, Japanese forces launched a surprise attack on the naval base of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. One day later, the US declared war against Japan.

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After Pearl Harbor, there was a widespread public belief that Japanese immigrants living in Hawaii had helped plan the attack. This belief was encouraged by both private organizations and the US government, who began to release anti-Japanese propaganda full of racist stereotypes. Posters, movies and songs compared Japanese people to rats, apes, demons and other creatures. They encouraged Americans to hate all Japanese people.

3. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. This order gave the War Department the authority to declare any part of the country a restricted military area “from which any or all persons may be excluded.” Japanese Americans were never specifically mentioned, but the order was written with them in mind. California, Oregon, Washington and southern Arizona were all designated as restricted military areas. Japanese Americans living in those states were forced to leave their homes and report to internment camps around the Southwest US.

Eventually, over 110,000 Japanese Americans were interned, or kept in camps. Almost 60 percent were Nisei, Japanese Americans who were born in the US. Of the rest, who were born in Japan, many had lived in the United States for 20 to 40 years.

4. When families were evacuated from their homes, they could only bring what they could carry. They had to leave their homes without pets, land, businesses, furniture and most of their belongings. The internment camps were located in isolated places. They were fenced with barbed wire and guarded by armed soldiers. Families shared a single room, often without plumbing, and ate in communal dining halls.

Internees tried to make life as normal as possible with limited resources. They created schools, organized baseball teams, planted vegetable gardens and held religious services. Many internees also supported the war effort. They made uniforms and prepared food to send to the troops. Some joined the Japanese American Citizens League to prove their loyalty to the US. In addition, over 33,000 Nisei soldiers served in the war, even though many of their families were being detained in the camps.

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5. Fred Korematsu, a US-born Japanese American, decided to ignore Executive Order 9066 and stay in his home in California. He even got plastic surgery to try to conceal his identity. He was soon arrested and convicted of violating the order. Korematsu argued that the order was unconstitutional and violated his Fifth Amendment rights. The Fifth Amendment states that no citizen can be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law. In *Korematsu v. United States* in 1944, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in favor of the government. The majority ruled that during wartime, the necessity to protect against foreign espionage overruled the individual civil rights of Japanese Americans. However, none of the interned Japanese Americans had ever been convicted of espionage. In his dissenting opinion, Justice Frank Murphy wrote that the internment of Japanese Americans “falls into the ugly abyss of racism.”

Notes

6. The last internment camp closed in 1946, after the war ended. The government gave interned Japanese Americans \$50 per family or \$25 per individual, plus train fare to go home. It was not until 1988 that the government finally issued a formal apology to the internees. The government acknowledged that the internment order had been based on “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.” Each surviving internee was granted \$20,000.

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