



The Mochida family was one of thousands to be interned during World War II.

Behind Barbed Wire

Why were so many Japanese-Americans imprisoned during World War II?

CHARACTERS

Mary Kageyama } Japanese-American teens
Fumi Kageyama }
Henry McLemore, newspaper columnist
Lt Gen John L. DeWitt, West Coast military commander
***Tom Endo**, Japanese-American teenager
***Kyle Anderson**, bargain hunter
Miné Okubo, 29, Topaz, Utah, camp resident
Toku Okubo, Miné's younger brother
***Mary Ota**, teenager at the Poston, Arizona, camp
***Paul Ota**, her brother

Sue Kunitomi, resident at the Manzanar, California, camp
Tetsuo Kunitomi, 12, her brother
Minoru Hara, a young Japanese-American
***John Nomura**, Hara's friend
Helen Murao, teenage resident at the Minidoka, Idaho, camp
***Alice Johnson**, Murao's friend
Milton Eisenhower, relocation director
Narrators A-D

** Starred characters are fictitious*

After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, the United States forced Japanese-Americans on the West Coast to leave their homes to live in internment camps

By Sean Price

Introduction

On December 7, 1941, Japanese planes destroyed the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The surprise attack killed more than 2,300 Americans and pushed the United States into World War II.

In the weeks that followed, panic gripped the West Coast. People in California, Oregon, and Washington feared that Japan might invade any day. They also feared the nearly 120,000 Japanese-Americans living in the region. Almost everyone saw these individuals as possible spies who would help Japan.

Japanese-Americans had long faced discrimination in seeking citizenship as well as jobs and housing. By 1941, they had overcome these obstacles and proved themselves to be loyal Americans. But after Pearl Harbor, a new wave of fear and prejudice threatened them.

SCENE 1

Narrator A: Japanese-Americans tried to disprove suspicions about their loyalty by displaying American flags and patriotic posters. Many also dumped or destroyed family heirlooms—including samurai swords and tea sets—that tied them to Japan.



Internees at the relocation center in Santa Anita, California, 1942.

Mary Kageyama: Fumi, what are you doing? That's Mom's Japanese opera music. She left it to us when she died. Why are you burning it?

Fumi Kageyama: If the police come, they might think it's a secret code. We can't take that chance.

Narrator A: At the time, almost all Japanese-Americans lived on the West Coast or in Hawaii (which was not yet a state). President Franklin D. Roosevelt faced great pressure from California politicians, newspapers, and the military to move them farther inland.

Henry McLemore: I'm for the removal of every Japanese on the West Coast. Herd 'em up, pack 'em off. Let 'em

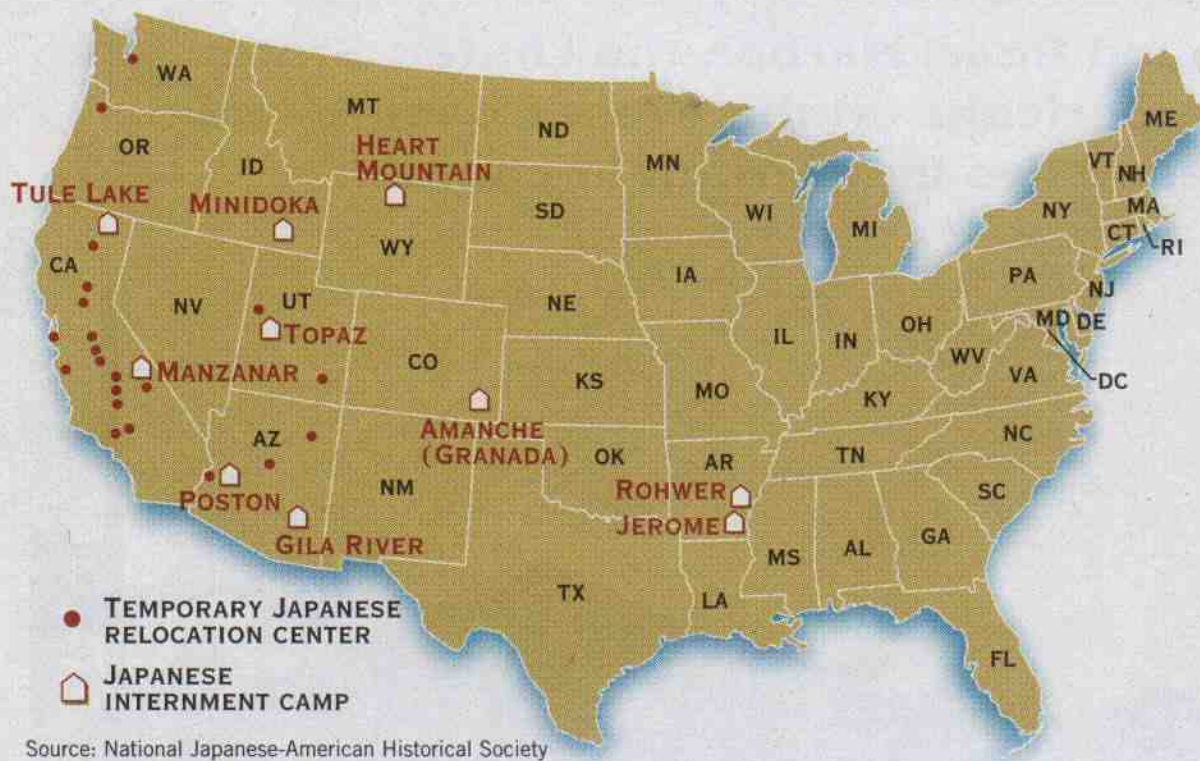
be pinched, hurt, and hungry!

Lt Gen John L. DeWitt: I agree. The Japanese race is an enemy race.

Narrator A: On February 19, 1942, Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 9066. It gave the U.S. military the **authority** [legal power] to remove anyone considered disloyal. That included people from Germany and Italy—the Axis countries that sided with Japan. But only a handful of German or Italian immigrants were ever detained during the war.

SCENE 2

Narrator B: Instead, the order was used almost entirely against Japanese-Americans. They were



SCENE 4

Narrator D: By January 1943, Japanese-Americans were allowed to volunteer for the U.S. military for the first time since Pearl Harbor. Some refused. However, most were eager to show their loyalty by enlisting.

Minoru Hara: Well, I did it. I joined the Army.

John Nomura: Are you nuts? The guards here nearly shot you several times. Why fight for a country that threw you in prison and nearly killed you?

Hara: It's the only country I have.

Narrator D: Japanese-American units won more medals—and suffered more dead and wounded—than any other group in the U.S. Army. Their bravery became well known and helped soften the opinion of other Americans toward them. By 1944, U.S. officials allowed Japanese-Americans to leave camp as long as they could find a job or a family to sponsor them.

Helen Murao: The first thing I did when I left camp was buy a nickel Coke.

Alice Johnson: Why? What was so special about that?

Murao: I was free to buy it.

Narrator D: Soon, some people began to have second thoughts about the relocation camps. The first director of the War Relocation Administration wrote a letter expressing his shame over the matter.

Milton Eisenhower (in a letter): When this war is over, we will have to consider calmly this **unprecedented** [never done before] migration of 120,000 people. I feel most deeply that we as Americans are going to regret the unavoidable injustices that may have been done.

given just a few days to sell or get rid of their belongings. People swooped down on Japanese-American neighborhoods in search of bargains.

Kyle Anderson: I'll give you \$25 for that truck.

Tom Endo: My dad just spent \$75 for the tires and battery alone.

Anderson: Take it or leave it.

Endo: Fine. Pay me, and get out!

Narrator B: For the next few months, Japanese-Americans lived at temporary "assembly centers." These were usually converted fairgrounds and racetracks. The living quarters were often horse stalls.

Miné Okubo: What a dump! They just painted over the cobwebs, horsehair, and anything else on the walls.

Toku Okubo: Yeah, and the linoleum is nailed down right over the manure on the floorboards.

SCENE 3

Narrator C: After several months, all of the detainees were sent to one of 10 permanent **internment** [confinement] camps. Life in these remote camps was crude. Plumbing often broke down, and the

food was poor—at least at first. The drafty wood and tar-paper barracks let in cold, dust, mosquitoes, rats, and other unwelcome guests. Privacy was impossible.

Mary Ota (whispers): Why can't Mr. Yamashita snore more quietly? I can't sleep.

Paul Ota (whispers): Just be glad Mr. and Mrs. Wanto have finally quieted down.

Mary: I know. Their fighting drives me crazy.

Narrator C: Over time, the internment camps began to resemble small towns. The detainees created their own churches, schools, stores, clubs, newspapers, scout troops, parks, theaters, and even baseball leagues. The largest camp—Tule Lake in California—housed as many as 18,800 people. But the feeling of being a prisoner never left the internees.

Sue Kunitomi: How is your school?

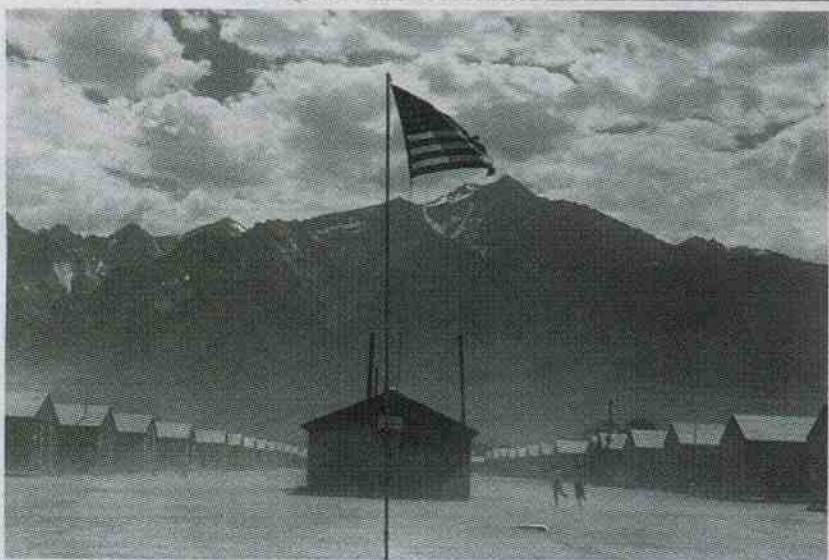
Tetsuo Kunitomi: Well, there are no chairs, desks, or supplies.

Sue: Are you able to learn anything?

Tetsuo: Yeah. They teach us American history. But who wants to study that when we're behind barbed wire?

A police officer searches the luggage of a family arriving in Santa Anita, California.

Below:
A dust storm at the Manzanar, California, camp, July 1942.



AFTERWORD

By the war's end on August 14, 1945, the camps were filled mostly with older people and school-age children. The last camp closed on March 20, 1946.

Japanese-Americans lost more than \$2 billion in property and business damages because of the evacuations. Efforts to win **compensation** (payment for a loss) finally paid off in 1988 when Congress issued an apology and paid \$20,000 to each of the 60,000 surviving victims.

loyalty. While most rebuilt their lives, they never forgot their imprisonment.

"The overriding feeling that I had, without even being conscious of it at the time, was the [loss] of freedom," said Helen Murao, who was 15 when her internment began. "And that is a very **traumatic** [disturbing] thing. You don't appreciate it until you don't have it." **JS**



CHILDREN OF THE CAMPS
www.pbs.org/childofcamp

write it! 

Imagine you are a young Japanese-American in an internment camp in 1942. Write a diary entry describing your thoughts.

Your Turn

WORD MATCH

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1. internment | A. disturbing |
| 2. authority | B. payment for loss |
| 3. compensation | C. legal power |
| 4. traumatic | D. confinement |

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Why did President Roosevelt authorize the removal of Japanese-Americans from the West Coast in 1942?
2. Compare the treatment of Japanese-Americans in 1942 with that of Arab-Americans after September 11, 2001.