Japanese American Internment Camps

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World War II Brief History

The following article is a brief synopsis about the Japanese American Internment Camps during World War II. Interestingly enough, few people realize that there was a Japanese Internment camp right here in Colorado.

World War II began in 1939 and ended in 1945, during this time there were two major conflicts happening around the world. The conflicts involved the following Axis powers: Imperialist Japan, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany. The Axis powers recognized each other’s right to dominate over China, the Mediterranean Sea, and Continental Europe. Directly opposing them were the Ally Powers: Great Brittan, the United States, and Russia.

Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, this prompted France and Brittan to declare war on Germany. This was said to be the official start of World War II. The United States remained on the sidelines of the world conflict until December 7, 1941, when the Japanese military bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. This event left the United States no choice but to officially enter the war.

American and Japanese Conflict

In a move to prevent Japanese expansion and war efforts in China, the U.S. government engaged in severe sanctions against Japan. These sanctions included an embargo on: tools, iron, steel, tin, copper, bronze, petroleum, rubber, bauxite and oil. The embargo forced Japan to choose between giving up on their plans to expand into China or to actively pursue securing the resources they needed. Their choice was to bomb Pearl Harbor in order to secure their embargo. This act of aggression created the tension that fully engaged the U.S. in World War II. The U.S. entered into the war efforts as one of the Ally powers along with: Russia, Great Brittan, China and others who were able to begin recovering from the numerous setbacks they had suffered at the hands of the Axis powers.

Effect on the Japanese Americans

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, numerous people in America were suspicious of the Japanese Americans. Many saw them as threats and assumed they had to of been involved in the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This paranoia led to the establishment of the Japanese American Internment Camps.

There were over 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of whom were American citizens that were relocated to Japanese Internment Camps which were located outside restricted military
zones during World War II. The evacuation of the Japanese Americans started on February 25, 1942, located in the Terminal Island of Los Angeles Harbor, where they only had forty eight hours to gather their belongings. Half of the Japanese Americans that were evacuated were children. They had to live in the camps for up to four years without due process of law.

President Roosevelt established ten “concentration” or internment camps around the United States. The camps were located in: Poston and Gila River (Arizona), Jerome and Rohwer (Arkansas), Manzanar and Tule Lake (California), Granada/Amache (Colorado), Minidoka (Idaho), Topaz (Central Utah) and Heart Mountain (Wyoming). It was stated that, the purpose of the internment camps was to “protect” the Japanese American’s from the American public and their intense anti-Japanese attitudes and fears.

The internment camps were prison-like and dehumanized the Japanese Americans. This unjust incarceration made them feel humiliated and vulnerable. Many experienced mental health issues, depression, and other psychological problems. Their physical health suffered due to a lack of medical attention and as a result there was a high rate of suicide and premature death. Some of the guards were known for their masochistic tendencies of killing Japanese internees that tried to escape. In addition, the Japanese Americans lived in horrible conditions that included: leaky/group barracks with no privacy, poor lighting, inadequate windows, beds with thin mattresses, coal-fired stoves, no running water or adequate food. In the process of evacuating, the Japanese American internees were forced to sell their homes, quit their jobs,

**Colorado Amache Camp**

The Amache Relocation Center was located in Granada, Colorado which housed, 7,318 Japanese Americans. They were part of over 110,000 Japanese Americans relocated from the West Coast. People of Japanese ancestry living in the county of Colusa, all counties of Yuba and Sutter, State of California, and all areas lying west of the U.S. Highway No. 99E were evacuated by 12pm on Monday May 18, 1942. The evacuation of the Japanese Americans was most known to be in: California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, and Arizona.

When the Japanese Americans were forced to evacuate their homes they did not have enough notice and were forced to sell their homes, farms, and businesses very quickly. As a result, most of them received low offers in exchange for their businesses and properties. The Colorado Amache Camp had prison-like conditions that were hard to live in for the Japanese Americans. Similar to the other camps mentioned previously, they were not provided with adequate sleeping courters or other living accommodations. However, believing in the spirit of, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” helped to give the Japanese Americans faith. They elected a council within the camp, built schools, churches, grocery stores, a hospital, barber shops, and other businesses in order to try and build a better future for themselves and their families.

In their limited number of suitcases, most of them carried: photos, keepsakes, clothing, valuables from family members, musical instruments, sewing kits, cookware, and typewriters. Cameras at first were not allowed into the camps but as time passed, the guards overlooked this rule. This resulted in Japanese Americans having the opportunity to record their experiences in the camps. Japanese American residents could retain their humanity by being able to express
how they felt, while being held in the camp through the art of “gaman”. Gaman was created by artists who were not trained, while using poorly made tools and other materials they found. The word “gaman” got its name from a Japanese word meaning, “to bear the unbearable with patience and dignity.” There was a woman in the camp that taught the Amache residents how to make small nature scenes from soil, plants, and stones. Other residents at the camp were known to have created paintings, carvings, and ceramics. Gaman influenced the Japanese American residents to believe that good things were coming.

When the war ended, many Americans did not want the Japanese Americans returning to the United States. Numerous Americans preferred for them to return to Japan. A few of the Japanese Americans decided to stay in the United States and tried to get hired as servants but, were rejected. Internees of the Amache camp were nervous and afraid to leave the camp, as they did not know what lied ahead for them after leaving. Just before evacuating the camp, the Denver Post had called them “Japanese enemies.” The Colorado House of Representatives at the time had passed a law which kept all Japanese Americans from having the opportunity to own land in the state. Even with this, American merchants were still posting signs reading, “No Japs Allowed.” Two months after the war ended in the Pacific, on October 15, 1945 the last few internees left camp Amache. After Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima/Nagasaki, every American should be asking themselves the following question, “What does America mean to you?” asked by a student at Amache High School in 1943, this student was, Marion Konoshi.

Soon after the Amache camp closed its doors, the buildings were removed by the government. Now all that remains of the camp is concrete foundations, roads, a cemetery, and discarded belongings. Decades after the war ended, Japanese Americans came from the Denver Optimist Club, took care of the cemetery and planned excursions to the site of the camp. There were a few Granada High School students that explored and attempted to rebuild the grounds of the camp in the 1990’s. These students filmed documentaries, displayed signs, and opened up a small museum in order to retell the story of the Amache camp and its history. The Amache museums purpose is to inform tourists about one of the darkest times experienced in American history and to represent liberty for the Japanese Americans.
Japanese American Internment Camp Questions

Multiple Choice:

1. What was the name of the Japanese American Internment camp in CO?
   a. Gila River
   b. Heart Mountain
   c. Manzanar
   d. The Granada Relocation Center (aka. Amache)

2. From which states in the U.S. were people of Japanese ancestry evacuated and taken to the internment camps?
   a. State of Arizona
   b. County of Colusa
   c. Counties of Yuba and Sutter
   d. State of California
   e. b,c,d

3. The word gaman means:
   a. To bear the unbearable with patience and dignity
   b. Works of art made from makeshift tools and other materials
   c. To create works of art that depicts flowers and hummingbirds
   d. None of the above
   e. A,B

4. When were the Japanese Americans first demanded to evacuate their homes?
   a. Within 48 hours
   b. August 12, 1942
   c. February 25, 1942
   d. September 11, 1942
Fill in the Blank:

5. Despite the prison-like conditions at Amache, most of these Americans stayed true to the spirit of, __________________________. “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”

6. In the camp the Amache residents lived in leaky barracks with no privacy, poor lighting, inadequate windows, beds with thin mattresses,_________________________ , and no running water or adequate food. Coal-fired stoves

7. Most of the Japanese Americans took: __________________________________________ with them to the Amache camp. Answer: Photos, keepsakes, and clothing with them. Others brought sewing kits, typewriters, and cookware and/or musical instruments

8. In the 1900’s ________________________________ started the knowledge gain of the Japanese Internment camps today. In the 1900’s some Granada H. School students started to explore and restore the grounds. They filmed documentaries, put up signs, and opened a small museum to bring the Amache’s story back to life.

True/False:

9. Before being evacuated to the Amache camp, the Japanese were forced to sell their homes, farms, and businesses they had previously owned.
   a. True
   b. False

10. The Japanese problem was most acute in CA, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, and Arizona.
   a. True
   b. False
Real Life Photos from the Colorado Amache Internment Camp:

The Hommas look for landmarks at Amache, Where they were held as children in the 1940s. (Helen H. Richardson, The Denver Post)

How the Colorado Amache Camp Looks Today:
Maps of the Amache Camp in Granada, CO:

Figure 1. Map of Western United States showing Relocation and Assembly Centers.
Source: Spier, Impounded People, p. 67
Additional Information if Interested:

Images of Japanese American Children in the Internment Camps

Dr. Suess’es Prejudice Japanese American Cartoons during World War II
Ansel Adams Captures Life at the Manzanar, CA Internment Camp:

"The purpose of my work was to show how these people, suffering under a great injustice, and loss of property, businesses and professions, had overcome the sense of defeat and despair (sic) by building for themselves a vital community in an arid (but magnificent) environment," he said.

Dennis Shimizu lying on his bed reading (during recreational time).

Ryie Yoshizawa (center) teaches a class on dressmaking.

Nurse at the camp
Important Dates in World War II:

. September 1, 1939: Germany invades Poland

. September 3, 1939: Britain and France declare war on Germany for invading Poland and this begins World War II.

. December 7, 1941: The Japanese military bomb Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

. January 30, 1944: The first Japanese American Internment Camp closes


. May 7, 1945: Germany surrenders on the Western Front

. May 8, 1945: The war in Europe officially ends

. September 2, 1945: The U.S. military flies over Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki dropping atomic bombs from the sky killing over 120,000 civilians. Soon after September 2, the conflict between Japan and the U.S. is ended.
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The National World War II Museum,  

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**Colorado Amache Internment Camp Photos:**

- 9th Photo:
  www.amache.org/photo-archives/?nggpage=2

**Maps of the Amache Camp in Granada, CO:**


2nd image: “The Underground Photographer of Amache”

3rd image: “Where were the Camps Located”
http://my.ilstu.edu/~jabraun/students/furlong/page6.htm

**Images of Japanese American Children in the Internment Camps:**


**Dr. Suess’es Prejudice Japanese American Cartoons during World War II:**


**Ansel Adams Captures Life at the Manzanar, CA Internment Camp:**


**Timeline:**

Excerpt from: Japanese American National Museum online:
http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/janm/

“World War II: The Fall of Nazi Germany,” Alan Taylor: