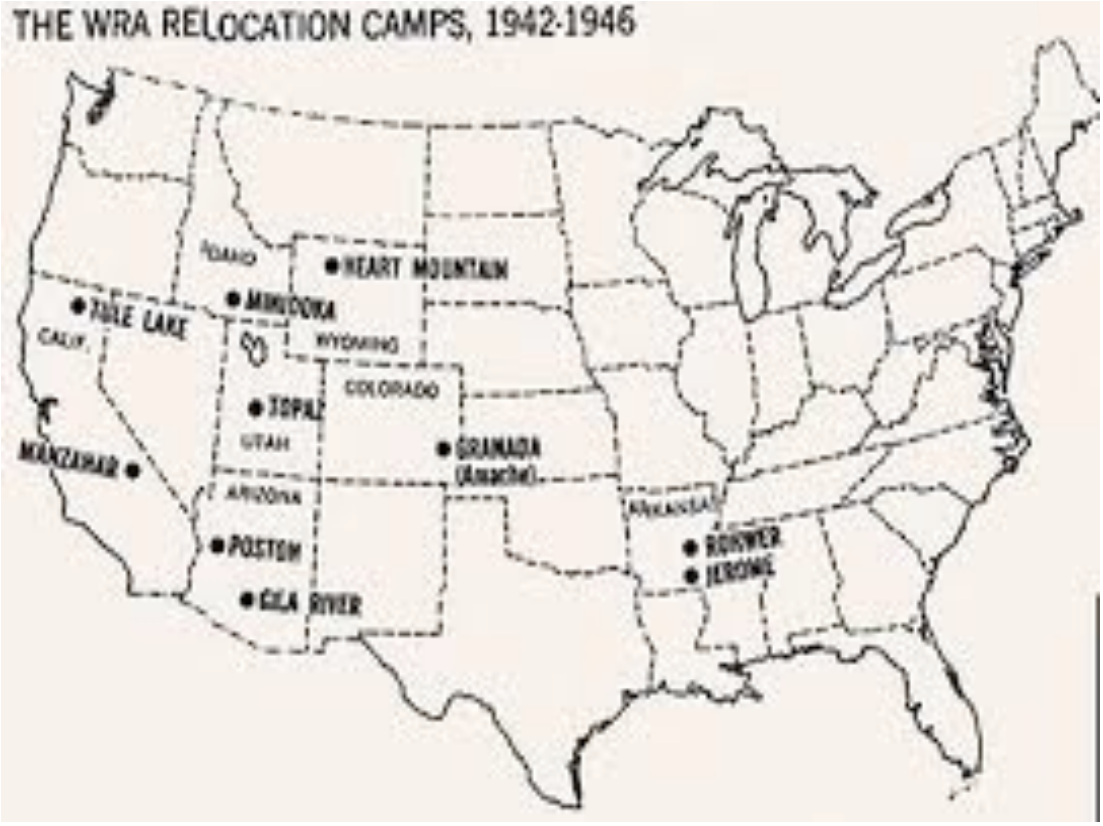
Japanese-American Internment Camps

During World War II, over 100,000 Japanese-American individuals, the vast majority of which were actually American citizens, were rounded up and shipped eventually to internment camps. These consisted of poorly-constructed barracks surrounded by barbed wire, sentry posts and armed guards.

They were put in these camps because either they or their parents or ancestors were from Japan and, as such, they were deemed a "threat" to national security. They were also easily identifiable due to their race. There was no similar large-scale roundups of German or Italian-Americans, even though we were also fighting them during World War II.



Name	State	Opened	Max. Pop'n
Manzanar	California	March 1942	10,046
Tule Lake	California	May 1942	18,789
Poston	Arizona	May 1942	17,814
Gila River	Arizona	July 1942	13,348
Granada	Colorado	August 1942	7,318
Heart Mountain	Wyoming	August 1942	10,767
Minidoka	Idaho	August 1942	9,397
Topaz	Utah	September 1942	8,130
Rohwer	Arkansas	September 1942	8,475
Jerome	Arkansas	October 1942	8,497

People were forced to abandon their businesses, their homes and, in many cases, their families as some individuals were taken elsewhere and held, again without trial, for years. The Japanese-Americans suffered severe economic losses, personal humiliation and, in a some cases, death, due to this relocation.

The relocation itself was ordered by the then President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and by an act of Congress.

Somewhere between 110,000 and 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry were subject to this mass exclusion program, of whom approximately two-thirds were U.S. citizens.

The remaining one-third were non-citizens subject to internment under the Alien Enemies Act; many of these "resident aliens" had long been inhabitants of the United States, but had been deprived the opportunity to attain citizenship by laws that blocked Asian-born nationals from ever achieving citizenship.

Internees of Japanese descent were first sent to one of 17 temporary "Civilian Assembly Centers," where most awaited transfer to more permanent relocation centers being constructed.

Some of those who did report to the civilian assembly centers were not sent to relocation centers, but were released under the condition that they remain outside the prohibited zone until the military orders were modified or lifted.

Almost 120,000 Japanese Americans and resident Japanese aliens would eventually be removed from their homes in California, the western halves of Oregon and Washington and southern Arizona as part of the single largest forced relocation in U.S. history.

Most of these camps/residences were on Native American reservations, for which the Native Americans were formally compensated.

Conditions in the camps

Internees were housed in "tar paper-covered barracks of simple frame construction without plumbing or cooking facilities of any kind." The spartan facilities met international laws, but still left much to be desired. Many camps were built quickly by civilian contractors during the summer of 1942 based on designs for military barracks, making the buildings poorly equipped for cramped family living.

The Heart Mountain War Relocation Center in northwestern Wyoming was a barbed-wire-surrounded enclave with unpartitioned toilets, cots for beds, and a budget of 45 cents daily per capita for food rations.

Because most internees were evacuated from their West Coast homes on short notice and not told of their assigned destinations, many failed to pack appropriate clothing for Wyoming winters which often reached temperatures below zero Fahrenheit. Many families were forced to simply take the "clothes on their backs."

Armed guards were posted at the camps, which were all in remote, desolate areas far from population centers. Internees were typically allowed to stay with their families and were treated well unless they violated the rules.

There are documented instances of guards shooting internees who reportedly attempted to walk outside the fences. One such shooting, that of James Wakasa at Topaz, led to a re-evaluation of the security measures in the camps. Some camp administrations eventually allowed relatively free movement outside the marked boundaries of the camps.

Nearly a quarter of the internees left the camps to live and work elsewhere in the United States, outside the exclusion zone. Eventually, some were authorized to return to their hometowns in the exclusion zone under supervision of a sponsoring American family or agency whose loyalty had been assured.

The phrase "shikata ga nai" (loosely translated as "it cannot be helped") was commonly used to summarize the interned families' resignation to their helplessness throughout these conditions. This was even noticed by the children, as mentioned in the well-known memoir *Farewell to Manzanar.*

Prejudice and discrimination played major roles in the internment as did economics and jealousy, as many Californians were jealous of the economic success that the Japanese-American farmers and store owners enjoyed.

Thus arose a lot of the anti-Japanese-American feeling in the same way that some people despise Jewish people, largely due to their economic successes. The hard work, self-sacrifice, and strong efforts by the Japanese-Americans and Jewish people are overlooked and ignored when people of prejudice proclaim their judgments against Japanese-Americans and Jewish people.

The fact that the internment did happen here in the U.S. is something to never forget since what has happened once could very well happen again, especially in these days of growing anti-immigrant, anti-foreigner feelings in the U.S.

WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY
WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION
Presidio of San Francisco, California
April 1, 1942

INSTRUCTIONS TO ALL PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY

Living in the Following Area:

All that portion of the City and County of San Francisco, State of California, lying generally west of the north-south line established by Junipero Serra Boulevard, Worchester Avenue, and Nineteenth Avenue, to...

All Japanese persons, both aliens and non-aliens, will be evacuated from the above designated area by 12:00 o'clock noon Tuesday, April 7, 1942.

No Japanese person will be permitted to enter or leave the above-described area after 8:00 a. m., Thursday, April 2, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the Provost Marshal or this Civil Control Station located at:

1701 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, California

The Civil Control Station is equipped to assist the Japanese population affected by this evacuation in the following ways:

1. Give advice and instructions on the evacuation.
2. Provide services with respect to the management, leasing, sale, storage or other disposition of most kinds of property, including real estate, business and professional equipment, buildings, household goods, boats, automobiles, livestock, etc.
3. Provide temporary residence elsewhere for all Japanese in family groups.
4. Transport persons and a limited amount of clothing and equipment to their new residence, as specified below.

The Following Instructions Must Be Observed:

1. A responsible member of each family, preferably the head of the family, or the person in whose name most of the property is held, and each individual living alone, will report to the Civil Control Station to receive further instructions. This must be done between 8:00 a. m. and 5:00 p. m., Thursday, April 2, 1942, or between 8:00 a. m. and 5:00 p. m., Friday, April 3, 1942.