

## Lesson 6: Arkansans React to the Camps

### OVERVIEW

This lesson examines the varying reactions of Arkansans to the incarceration of over 16,000 Japanese Americans at Rohwer and Jerome.

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand how various Arkansans reacted to the Japanese Americans imprisoned by the government at the camps at Rohwer and Jerome.
- Students will demonstrate their knowledge through completion of a practice ACTAAP writing prompt.

### GUIDING QUESTION

How did Arkansans react to Japanese American incarceration at Rohwer and Jerome?

### ARKANSAS HISTORY FRAMEWORKS

TCC 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.3

PPE 1.1, 1.2, 2.1

PAG 1.1, 1.2

SSPS 1.1, 1.2, 1.4

### MATERIALS

Lyrics to “You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught” (copy on to overhead transparency)

Newspaper Article from *Arkansas Gazette*: “Relocation Center for Japs Torn by Waste and Turmoil” by Eugene Rutland.

*Arkansas Gazette* letter to the editor “Irked by Complaints of ‘Coddling’ of Colonists at Rohwer”

Post-Itä notes (several for each student)

Concluding Activity: ACTAAP Writing Practice (1 copy per student)

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 effectively forcing more than 110,000 people of Japanese American descent from their homes to 10 relocation centers. Although no credible evidence existed that Japanese Americans posed a threat to national security, on the West Coast there was a long history of suspicion and prejudice against Japanese American residence that had incited fear and racism after Pearl Harbor. The War Relocation Authority confined the Japanese Americans to centers in California, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, and Arkansas.

It is not easy to generalize how Arkansans felt about their new neighbors at Rohwer and Jerome. If statements by Governor Homer Adkins are indicative, many felt a strong sense of racism towards their new neighbors. Yet few Arkansans had direct experience with people of Asian ancestry. Opinion overall varied. A group of ministers from Hendrix College believed

it was their Christian duty to welcome the new residents to their state. Opinion also changed over time. At first, suspicion and wartime hysteria led some to fear for their safety and speak out strongly against the camps. But over time, as residents of Arkansas had limited encounters with Japanese Americans, public opinion changed. By 1944 and 1945, local businesses in the Arkansas Delta even took out advertisements congratulating students in the high school yearbooks.

## OPENING

Share the lyrics from the song, “You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught” from the musical *South Pacific*, either by photocopying them onto a transparency and using on an overhead projector. (The lyrics could also be written on the board.) After reading the lyrics, ask the students what they believe the songwriter’s message is.

What tone is the lyricist using? Is he serious or sarcastic?

What should we be carefully teaching children?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Conflicting Reports

Have the students examine the newspaper article from the *Arkansas Gazette* entitled “Relocation Center for Japs Torn by Waste and Turmoil” and the letter to the editor by a Japanese American inmate entitled “Irrked by Complaints of ‘Coddling’ of Colonists at Rohwer” [The article actually dealt with Jerome] As students read, have them use Post-It notes to write down questions they think of as they read. You may choose to use shorter excerpts of the article, or substitute the PowerPoint presentation of Governor Homer Adkins’ reactions to the camps (from the CD-ROM; questions appear with the documents) instead of this activity.

Ask students the following questions:

What complaints did Arkansans have about the camps at Rohwer and Jerome?

Were these complaints based on fact?

How did the letter written by the Japanese American dispute some of the claims made in the article?

### 2. Outside Influences.

Discuss the similarities and differences in the two articles. Then, view the documentary video *Time of Fear* from 26:33 to 29:33 (three minutes). Ask students why they think many Arkansans felt prejudice towards the Japanese Americans. During the discussion, point out how opinions can be shaped by the news media and other forms of mass communication. Discuss how we are each taught about prejudice and discrimination, noting the lyrics of the song that opened the class discussion. Ask students the following question, “Where do we get ideas about people from other ethnic groups or cultures?” Some examples they might give are movies (Disney might have its own category), family, church, Internet, friends, or teachers.

3. Direct students to the ACTAAP writing prompt sheet and have students complete the exercise.

## CLOSING

Return to the lyrics of “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught” and discuss our responsibilities today. Have the students reflect on how their understanding of the lyrics may have changed during the class lesson. Share the lyrics of another song about what you believe student should be “carefully taught” about racism and prejudice. Discuss with students how they can break down racial stereotypes and prejudice. Have students offer suggestions of how this applies to their lives.

## EXTENSIONS

Show the Governor Adkins PowerPoint from the CD-ROM and have students answer the questions that accompany each document as a class.

Have students create songs, poems, skits or other creative writing pieces to demonstrate their feelings on racism and prejudice.

Research current events and have students find an article concerning the living conditions prisoners of war or political detainees. Compare and contrast the current event to one of the primary sources.

## REFERENCES

Ickes Harold L, “The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes,” Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Anti Japanese War Propaganda Posters

<http://mcel.pacificu.edu/as/students/propoganda/top.html>

# You've Got to be Carefully Taught

by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II

[Note: This text was unavailable for inclusion in the on-line version of this curriculum.]



[Note: This image was unavailable for inclusion in the on-line version of this curriculum.]

# Relocation Center For Japs Torn By Waste And Turmoil

Denson, Ark., Setup Is Far From Utopian Goal—Correspondent Says Evacuees Toss Food Away And Make

No Effort To Aid Selves

By EUGENE RUTLAND

Staff Correspondent

DENSON, Ark., Jan. 2.—Dreams of an ideal relocation center where some 8000 Japanese-American West Coast evacuees would be almost self-supporting for the duration, have turned into a nightmare of confusion, waste of food, slow-down strikes, refusal to work and threats against construction workers at the Jerome Relocation Center. The evacuees began moving into the center here on Oct. 8.

Investigating reports of "deplorable conditions and silk glove handling of evacuees" from high officials of the Rife Construction Co. and the United States Engineers at the Center, The Commercial Appeal learned that:

Three truckloads of Japanese evacuees recently cornered H. H. Hobbs, assistant area engineer, United States Engineers, and Leonard Ball, foreman, and threatened to kill them during a "cuss-fest" at an isolated spot in the camp before military guards who were helpless to intervene inside the center.

## They Throw Food Away

War Relocation Administration officials are having difficulty getting coal unloaded from railroad

cars and trucked to the block kitchens because the Japanese-Americans "do not like to handle coal." The coal is used to fire the stoves used in preparing meals for the evacuees.

Japanese-American cooks and their assistants are wasteful or careless in preparation of food, throwing away much food that is edible. An inspection of garbage pails showed evidence of this.

Reputable officials of the construction company reported that one of the men hauling garbage from the camp found partial sacks of potatoes, quantities of oranges, apples and grapefruit in good condition in the garbage pails.

## Supplies Sabotaged

Paul Taylor, project manager, said that he would begin an investigation of the alleged sabotage of the food supplies at the center.

On Dec. 16 the project manager asked for 300 volunteers to chop wood to relieve a critical fuel shortage. Thirty-seven responded on the next day and on Dec. 18, "Communique" official bulletin of the center said that Mr. Taylor "expressed his satisfaction of the

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# Relocation Center Of Japs Torn By Suspicion, Strikes, Threats, Waste And Turmoil

## Denson, Ark., Setup Is Far From Utopian Goal— Correspondent Says Evacuees Toss Food Away And Make No Effort To Aid Selves

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signup and declared if volunteers continue to come in, the critical wood situation would be solved in a short time.

### Demurrage Charges Mount

Construction officials reported that the evacuees "knock off" whenever they like to have tea. The Communique said, "The serving of hot tea to men on the wood detail was started yesterday (Dec. 17)."

The American Association of Railroads has protested the delay in unloading carloads of lumber at the center. Reports from construction officials were that the demurrage charges on the lumber totaled more than \$3000.

Evacuees refused to unload the lumber at first but finally agreed to unload the cars. They threw the lumber into water filled ditches along the tracks instead of stacking it. The lumber is for the construction of schools at the camp.

WRA has had to issue a special contract for clearing a space for a drainage ditch. A crew of 90 evacuees felled six trees in a day.

Carpenters Union No. 690 has protested to Senators Caraway and McClelland and Representative Norrell and WRA Director Myer over plans to use Japanese-Americans in the construction of work totaling \$120,000 at the Center.

### Material Stolen

WRA is planning to give indefinite furloughs to 25 per cent of the evacuees who can find employment.

Many school teachers are on the pay roll and no schools are in operation.

Thefts of material from contractors have been reported to WRA authorities and no action has been taken.

Recently these reports were presented to Mr. Taylor, Robert A. Leflar, project attorney, and Charles Lynn, public relations officer and they discussed the reports freely.

Mr. Taylor denied at first that there were any difficulties between the workers and evacuees but when told of the threats against Mr. Hobbs admitted that there had been a misunderstanding.

"We had some of the evacuees working on the back section," said Mr. Taylor. "At the hearing the evacuees said that Mr. Hobbs began the argument, which turned into a 'cussfest,' and that Mr. Hobbs and Mr. Ball left."

Mr. Hobbs, who is Col. A. M. Niemz' representative at the center, said that he told an evacuee truck driver to move his truck out of the way so he could get past. Colonel Niemz is head of the United States Engineers force which is in charge of construction of the camp.

"When he didn't do it I got out to see what was the matter and two other Japanese truck drivers loaded with evacuees cornered our truck," Mr. Hobbs said. "They jumped out of the truck and began hollering, 'kill them, kill them.' We got back in the truck and worked



our way free and reported the incident to Mr. Taylor."

#### Police Looked On

Mr. Hobbs said that the WRA official told him that he was sorry that he couldn't help him because it happened on a United States Reservation and urged him to handle the Japanese with care. Mr. Hobbs said that the driver did not get so much as a reprimand from the project director.

"We have taken the boy off the truck," said Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Hobbs said that the incident took place in full view of the Military Police, but they are not permitted to come within the center proper without a request from the project manager.

E. B. Whitaker, field director of the WRA, said the reason the military police do not patrol the inside of the center is because it would take too many soldiers, who are needed elsewhere. There is an internal security division of the WRA which has charge of the policing inside the center. This division is headed by one man with some assistance from the evacuees. Mr. Whitaker said it is planned to have additional white officers but he had not been able to obtain them yet.

Mr. Taylor said that the WRA is having some difficulty getting the Japanese-Americans to unload coal because they don't like to handle it. He said that he got a group of them to unload the coal. Reputable persons at the center said that this group sat down and unloaded the coal lump by lump instead of using shovels.

Asked about the reported partial sacks of potatoes and fruit found in the garbage pails, Mr. Taylor said that he had not heard that report before and pointed out that "it would only mean that some of the evacuees would go hungry."

O. E. Owens, Dermott farmer, who pays the center approximately \$25 a week for the privilege of hauling the garbage from the center, told *The Commercial Appeal* that he had found partial sacks of food in the garbage pails.

#### "Waste Is Terrible"

"The waste there is terrible and something ought to be done about it," Mr. Owens said indignantly. "They waste enough there every day to feed the entire town of Dermott."

Officials of the center have already discussed the food situation with Mr. Owens. He is feeding more than 700 hogs daily with the garbage he gathers at the center.

Accompanied by James Mattux, superintendent, and Dick Yount, supervisor of the Rife Construction Co., who were inspecting some of the buildings this week, this reporter saw in several of the garbage pails vegetables that had been mutilated and thrown away.

Commenting on the delay in unloading and stacking the lumber, and the complaint of the American Association of Railroads, Mr. Taylor said, "we could have complained about them getting too many cars in at one time. We couldn't handle it. I don't know what the demurrage charges are and will not until the bills come."

We saw some of the lumber still in the ditches along the railroad getting water soaked. Some of it still lay scattered and hundreds of the evacuees were loafing, which seems to be a pastime at the center.

Mr. Taylor said that the special contract for clearing the way for the drainage ditch was let because the center was not geared to handle trees and stumps in water. He had no comment to make on the report that 90 evacuees cut only six trees in a day.

This report was verified by Linwood Smith, of Lake Village, Ark., the drainage contractor.

Under proposed plans the WRA will use evacuees to build three schools, and more than 10 administration buildings. The cost will be about \$120,000. Carpenter's Union No. 690 has protested against this.

The evacuees have already begun construction on the administration buildings, which are about 20 x 100 feet. In five weeks a crew of at least 30 men have succeeded in erecting the framing for one building and the floor on a second. The foundations were laid by the Rife Construction Company at the request of the WRA.

Construction officials said that the buildings could be erected in a few days with trained workmen and at a saving to the taxpayers.

Without school buildings the staff of teachers is having little to do. Folding chairs were received only a few days ago.

An intelligent Japanese-American, who had a responsible position in California and who is a college graduate, said that the "WRA has seen it has made a mistake and is making arrangements to let out about 25 per cent of us."

"I believe that they made a mistake by not waiting until the Tolen Investigating Committee report was finished before setting up these large camps. We are not working and it demoralizes us," he said.

### Japs Want To Farm

"If they had put us in small inland camps and let us farm we would be producing a lot of food. As it is it's killing ambition of those of us who want to work."

Construction officials said that they have received little or no cooperation from WRA officials in recovery of stolen equipment and tools. A foreman said that two kegs of nails and 10 boxes of hardware were stolen from a warehouse.

Mr. Taylor paid scant attention to this report saying that "they were reported stolen from a center and that the evacuees had little use for the hardware."

Construction officials, who have been erecting the center for six months, were critical of the "silk-glove" treatment that the WRA officials are giving the evacuees.

A survey of the warehouses at chases through the War Department the Japanese-Americans are getting first class meats, the same kind served men in the armed forces. In the center's large and modern cold storage plant are thousands of pounds of first class beef and lamb, crates of fruits, celery, oranges, apples, fresh vegetables and hundreds of pounds of bacon and hams.

One of the Japanese chefs said that meat is served twice a week in the form of steaks or stew. An order of 21,000 pounds of beef is used every three weeks. The cen-

#### Questions for discussion:

How do you believe Arkansans would have reacted to this newspaper article? Would they be sympathetic or angry?

How did this article contribute to prejudice and discrimination against Japanese Americans incarcerated in Jerome?