

Lesson 8: Where To?

OVERVIEW

This lesson examines the closing of the camps at Jerome and Rohwer and the resettlement of Japanese Americans through the geographic theme of movement. Students will examine excerpts from oral histories, student writings, and artwork and view parts of the documentary video *Time of Fear*.

OBJECTIVE

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the closing of the camps and resettlement of Japanese Americans through a short essay similar to those written by Japanese American students at Rohwer.

GUIDING QUESTION

What were the experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II?

FRAMEWORKS

TCC 1.2, 1.3, 1.4

PPE 1.4, 2.5, 2.6

PAG 1.5

SSPS 2.2, 2.3

MATERIALS

Copy of poster “Where To? Pick Your Place.” from CD-ROM; reproduce on to overhead transparency or project image using computer, data projector, and CD-ROM

Documentary video *Time of Fear*, television, and VCR

Excerpts from student essays and oral histories

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During the war, students who had gained entrance to a university and those who found jobs and received clearance from the government were allowed to leave camp to resettle outside of the West Coast. Many left camp with little more than their luggage, a few dollars, and a bus ticket.

Jerome was closed on June 3, 1944. Inmates from Jerome went to Rohwer or one of the other eight camps, or resettled to other parts of the United States outside of the Military Exclusion Zones. After Japanese Americans left Jerome, it functioned as a Prisoner of War camp for POWs from the European theater. Rohwer closed on November 30, 1945. After it was closed, 120 acres were deeded to the local school district and the remaining land was sold to farmers or veterans. Equipment and buildings were sold to bidders from across the country.

Resettlement was a difficult process for Japanese American families. Many returned to

California and were forced to start over again with only the possessions they had carried to camp. Others looked for new homes and jobs throughout the United States. All faced discrimination and hard times as they worked to rebuild their lives.

After the war, many Japanese Americans were reluctant to speak out against the injustices they suffered. The Civil Rights Movement helped renew the interest in fighting for government redress and reparations. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act into law, issuing a formal government apology to those Japanese Americans who were imprisoned by the government and providing a token \$20,000 in reparations to those who were still living.

OPENING

Show students the image of the poster “Where To? Pick Your Place” from the CD-ROM [file name – poster – where to; also reproduced following this lesson]. Pose the following questions to students: Why do you think the artist painted this poster? When do you think it was created? To what places do you think the author is considering traveling? Where would you want to go?

Explain that this poster was created by a student in an art class at the Rohwer camp. The artist was responding to the re-opening of California to Japanese Americans. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in December 1944 that loyal American citizens could no longer be kept from returning to their homes. The War Relocation Authority prepared to close all of the camps. Japanese and Japanese Americans had to decide where they would go. Some inmates returned to the West Coast and attempted to rebuild their lives, while others chose to resettle in the Midwest or East Coast. Only a few families chose to stay in Arkansas. Ask students whether they would have wanted to stay in Arkansas, return to California, or start over in a new city elsewhere in the U.S. Discuss the difficulties involved in starting over.

ACTIVITIES

1. View the documentary video *Time of Fear* from 29:34 until 52:47 (approximately 23 minutes). This section of the documentary discusses the following subjects

- a) Activities in camp (29:34-32:00)
- b) Nisei (younger generation) moving to colleges & to take jobs (32:00-36:00)
- c) The 442nd Regimental combat team – those who left camp to join the military, as well as the loyalty questionnaire and fighting in Europe (36:05-47:10)
- d) Daily life in 1944 & changes from tight security of 1942 (47:15-48:53)
- e) Changing of local reaction to the camps by 1944 (48:53-49:55)
- f) Closing of the camps and resettlement (50:00-52:47)

If time is a factor, teachers may choose to show only the segments from 32:00-36:00 and 47:15-52:47, which most closely relate to resettlement.

After viewing the documentary, have students reflect upon whether they would have a) left camp to attend college, take a job, or join the military or b) stayed in camp with their families. Discuss possible motivations for each of these actions, and compare student responses to the responses of those interviewed in the documentary.

2. Have students read the excerpts from oral histories and student writings about re-settlement, or read them aloud. Compare these documents with the experiences of those in the documentary. Have student answer the questions below the excerpts individually, with a small group, or as a class.

CLOSING

Close by reading the student essay “I Took it All for Granted” (reproduced after this lesson – copy on to an overhead transparency). Ask students to consider the things they take for granted.

Locate on a U.S. map the places mentioned by the student in this essay.

Have students pretend they are Japanese Americans who have just learned the camp will be closing soon. They should write a diary entry or a letter to a friend explaining

- Where they think they will go now
- How the war has impacted them

Remind students that they should refer back to the documentary and the excerpts from writings and oral histories for examples of how different Japanese Americans reacted to the closing of the camps.

This diary entry or letter can be used as part of their final project.

EXTENSIONS

Have students research the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and their role in World War II. Compare the terrain in which they fought in Europe to that of the camps, and that of California. Talk about adaptations these soldiers made to their environment, and the movement of goods, services, and people that was involved in sending troops to war.

REFERENCES

On the *Life Interrupted* primary source documents CD-ROM, see
Roy Uno interview, REgenerations Oral History Project
“Collected Thoughts”
“California Opens”
“My Feelings”



Poster "Where To? Pick Your Place" by Rohwer art student, ca. 1944 Mabel Rose Jamison Vogel Collection, courtesy of Rosalie Santine Gould

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EXCERPTS FROM STUDENT ESSAYS AND ORAL HISTORIES

Camp Closing

“What have we got to return for? For me I have still got a home, car and most of all a business, but what of these people that have sold all these goods? They have nothing to return for. In my opinion they should remain some place in the east, where they have opportunity and the racial discrimination is much lower than in California.”

– Sami Murishi, Rohwer student

“When this news was sprung upon us, I had a wonderful feeling...How long I have waited for this moment. But now I feel that I can’t leave this barrack-like city. There are friends who are dear to separate from, friends who I laugh with, played with, and even cried with. How am I going to leave this center with a happy heart? Maybe happy because I am going back to our dear town. But will I be happy there? What will be in store for us there? Somehow I cannot even imagine how it would be back home....

Regardless how I feel, I know this. Camp life has built for me in three years something that I would never have obtained in a lifetime. It taught me that we could all face and must face difficulty. Everything isn’t going to be a bed of roses to us...”

— Missa Nakauchi, Rohwer student

Resettlement

“They paid for fare to Chicago for us, but other than that...I remember we pulled into the Dearborn Station in Chicago, which is just south of the loop. We came out of the station like two typical tourists and looked up at the tall buildings, and we didn’t know where to start. So we took a cab and he gave us a good run around. But it didn’t take us too long to get our bearings and get situated.”

– Roy Uno, REgenerations Oral History Project interview

“It was probably the most difficult time for me, personally, in terms of reestablishing ourselves, and so forth. Because you have to remember that when we were in camp for three years, we weren’t exposed to the kind of movies and radio programs [that were aired] about the Japanese. And suddenly here you would have a Japanese face in an all-white classroom in Utah, of all places, where [they had] very few Japanese anyway, to begin with.

The amount of discrimination that I personally faced in junior high school was very, very difficult. Every day was a fight to get home – I mean physically – being spit upon in the hallways and things like that were common occurrences initially, until my classmates got to know me, and we played together, and so forth. But it was very difficult to get reestablished.

The place we were living was literally a shack. It didn’t have running water, had electricity, and it was a dirt floor. And I still remember taking apart Life magazines, and boiling rice so

that it makes a paste, putting it on the Life magazine and sticking it on the walls. That was our wallpaper... ”

— Paul S. Sakamoto, REgenerations Oral History Project interview

Questions to Think About

1. What were some of the difficulties faced by Japanese Americans due to the closing of the camps and the process of rebuilding their lives?
2. To which different locations did these individuals go after the camps closed?
3. How do you think the experiences of Japanese Americans during World War II impacted their lives following the war?

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“I Took It All for Granted”

I have roamed all over the Pacific Coast from Mexico City to the Canadian border. I’ve slept under the towering, majestic redwoods; I’ve swum in the crystal clear Big Bear and Arrowhead lakes; I’ve gotten sick on the blue open Pacific; I’ve frozen in Snow Valley and cooked in the great Death Valley.

I have heard the Philharmonic orchestra and danced to the music of famous bands; I’ve seen hundreds of famous movie stars; I’ve rubbed elbows with famous people at Santa Anita Races.

There isn’t much I haven’t done in California, but I took it all for granted. When I get back, I’ll appreciate it all....I think this war will make a better human being out of me. I’ve never thought of things I dream of now. When I think back, then I look ahead at the dark future, I sometimes wonder...

—17 yr. old student at Rohwer, 1945