

Teacher Resource

Teaching U.S. Immigration Series:
Immigration and World War II
Resource Roundup





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Cover image: Heart Mountain High School Campus. The original caption for this photograph reads: Heart Mountain Relocation Center, Heart Mountain, Wyoming. Heart Mountain high school campus scene. Classes are housed in tarpaper-covered, barrack-style buildings originally designed as living quarters for the evacuees. <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/heart-mountain-high-school>

Introduction

Humans have been migrating throughout every place and time in our history, so in this series we give you the tools to explore immigration through the lens of the history and social studies curriculum already being taught. The period of World War II was a crisis for immigrants and immigration across many nations, including the United States. The question of how to teach about immigration during this time period has received answers from many organizations determined to provide students with a clear view of the experiences, decisions, successes and failures of the era. The first two topics in this roundup, the United States and European Refugees and the Incarceration of Japanese Americans, are essential to understanding this critical time period. We have provided a curated selection of freely available lesson plans, articles and other resources so teachers can choose those that best fit the needs of their class. For teachers who have the time to dive deeper into this fascinating time period, we have provided a brief overview and suggested resources about The United States' incarceration of Japanese Latin Americans, Japanese American soldiers in World War II and other topics from the National WWII Museum.

Topic One:

The United States and European Refugees

At the outbreak of World War II, the United States was in a period of xenophobia and isolationism, refusing to get involved in the war until forced to by the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. Hundreds of thousands of European refugees, mostly Jewish, were fleeing their homelands, many applying for U.S. visas. American immigration laws had strict quotas on the number of immigrants per country and additionally denied visas to any immigrant “likely to become a public charge,” or depend in any way on government assistance. This posed a serious barrier to Jewish refugees who had lost all their possessions under Nazi rule. The U.S. State Department temporarily raised immigration quotas for Germany, but the American public largely opposed admitting large numbers of Jewish refugees. A bill to admit Jewish refugee children above quota limits was introduced in Congress but failed to pass. The St. Louis, a German ship full of Jewish refugees en route to Havana, was not permitted to land in Cuba, and then refused by the United States and Canada, forcing the refugees back to Europe, where many were killed. The following lessons and resources below examine many of the social and political aspects of the United States’ position on refugees during World War II.



Lesson Plans



Americans and the Holocaust: The Refugee Crisis

(Facing History & Ourselves)

Grade level:
9-12

Time frame:
One week

Description from Facing History & Ourselves

This three-lesson unit deeply explores the motives, pressures and fears that shaped Americans' responses to Nazism and the humanitarian refugee crisis it provoked during the 1930s and 1940s. By examining primary sources that range from public opinion polls to personal narratives to radio plays, students will explore why widespread American sympathy for the plight of Jewish refugees didn't translate into widespread support for prioritizing their rescue. The unit also highlights the stories of individual Americans who did take tremendous risks to rescue Jews, as well as the questions this history raises for taking action in the context of contemporary refugee crises.

Why we recommend it

This unit is a comprehensive resource on America's response to the Holocaust and the refugee crisis. It includes supportive teaching notes and two options for unit assessment (Socratic seminar discussion or a role-audience-format-topic/RAFT, writing assignment).



Americans participate in an anti-Nazi protest in New York after learning of the Kristallnacht attacks on Jews in Germany, November 1938.



Immigration and Refugees, A Case Study on the Wagner-Rogers Bill **(United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)**

Grade level:
9-12

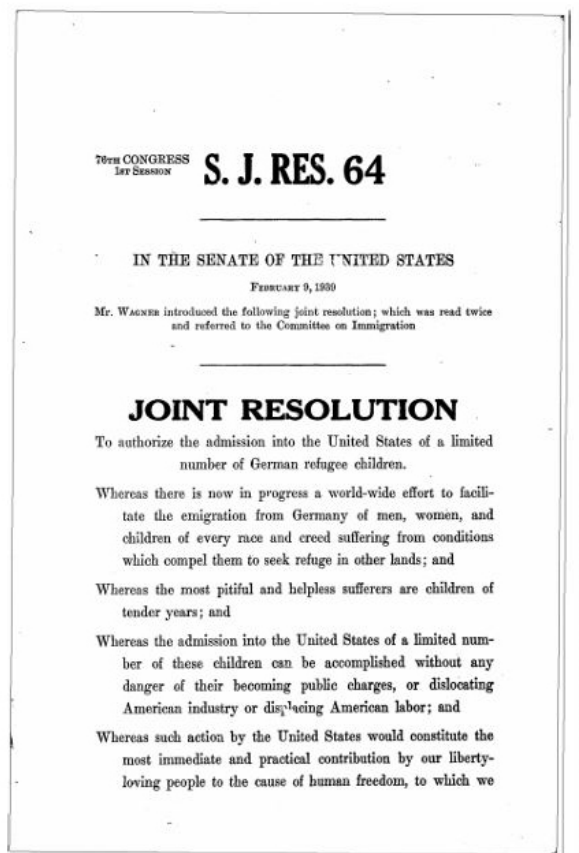
Time frame:
90 minutes

Description from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

By examining the Wagner-Rogers Bill of 1939, students learn how Americans debated the country's role as a haven for refugees, identifying economic, social and geopolitical factors that influenced Americans' attitudes about the United States' role in the world during the critical years of 1938 to 1941. Using primary-source documents, students identify and evaluate arguments that Americans made for and against the acceptance of child refugees in 1939. The lesson concludes with reflection on questions that this history raises about America's role in the world today.

Why we recommend it

This lesson is flexible and adaptable. It includes a slide deck and speaker notes for historical context, along with three extension ideas after a rich, primary source-based class discussion.



Wager-Rogers Bill.



Analyzing a Writing Assignment by a Teenage Refugee in New York During World War II

(DocsTeach by the National Archives)

Grade level:
7-12

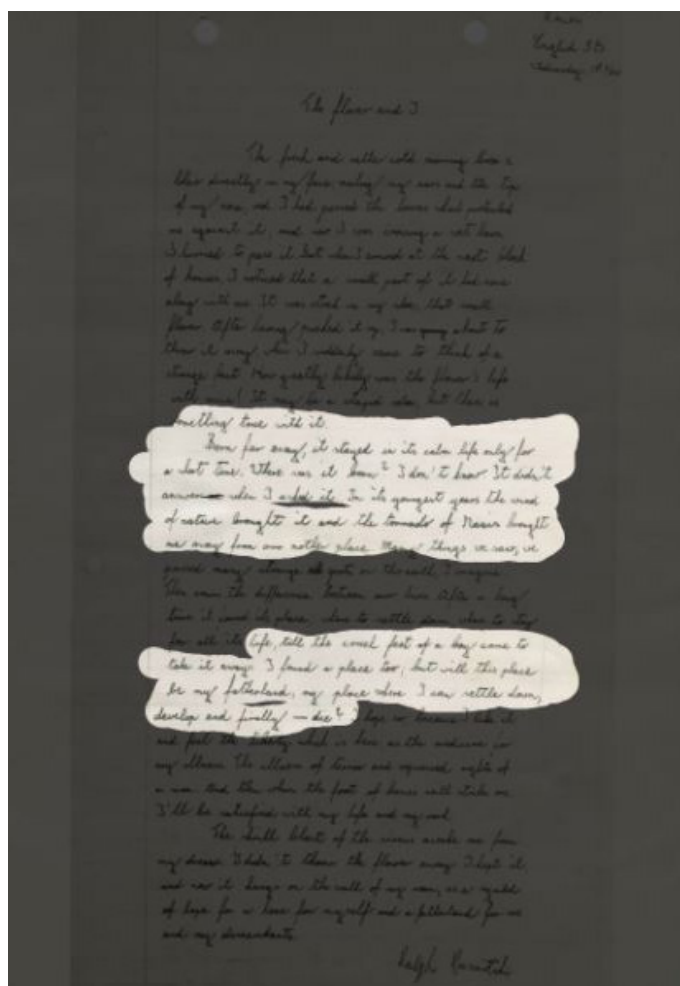
Time frame:
20 minutes

Description from the National Archives

In this activity, students will analyze a composition by Ralph Kuznitzki, a 15-year-old refugee living in the United States during World War II. He describes his experience coming to the United States to seek freedom, only to be housed at the Fort Ontario refugee camp, a former Army base near Oswego, NY, with no possibility of permanent settlement in the United States.

Why we recommend it

This single activity is well worth the time needed to bring it into class. It's powerful in both cognitive load (close reading and analysis of a primary historical source) and development of empathy.



Composition written by Ralph Kuznitzki, a teenage refugee in New York during World War II.



U.S. Policy and the Holocaust Refugee Crisis

(DocsTeach by the National Archives)

Grade level:
10-12

Time frame:
90-100 minutes

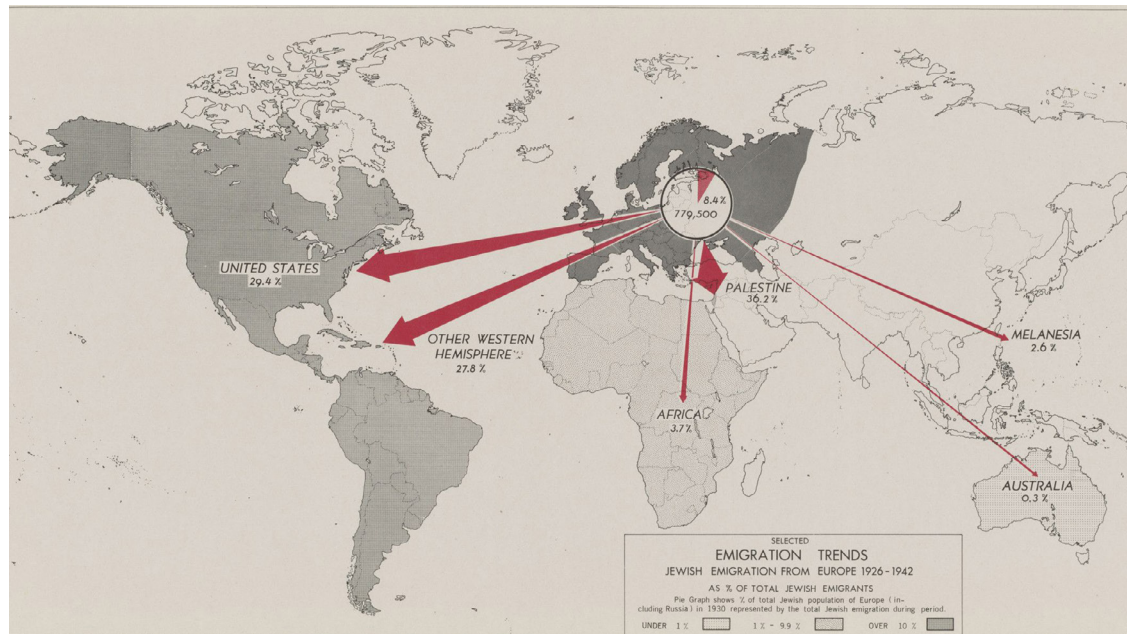
Description from the National Archives

This activity introduces students to the dispute between U.S. government agencies over rescuing Europe's Jews from extermination during the Holocaust. Using memos from the State and Treasury departments, as well as presidential proclamations and congressional legislation, students will:

- 1) Identify impediments to the admission of refugees to the United States
- 2) Explore actions taken by various U.S. officials to both rescue and block immigration of European Jews
- 3) Explain the roles of the State and Treasury departments in rescuing refugees

Why we recommend it

This lesson involves an online activity in which students read and analyze primary sources and then click-and-drag to place them on a “scale” of two interpretations of U.S policy and the refugee crisis. Students’ placement of each document along the scale will cause it to tip one way or the other, which students use to prepare for a class discussion with a compelling question.



Jewish Emigration from Europe, 1926-1942.



The Epstein Family Story **(Tenement Museum)**

Grade level:
4-5

Time frame:
2-4 class periods

Description from the Tenement Museum

Students read about how the Epstein family escaped Europe after the Holocaust and created a family and home in New York City. Inspired by Bella Epstein's oral histories about her childhood in the 1950s, they consider how advertising and media influence what it means to be American in Bella's time and today.

Why we recommend it

This lesson, part of a 13-lesson series on New York City immigrants, is a thoughtful and age-appropriate way to introduce upper elementary students to the difficulties faced by Holocaust refugees. The materials include an article with a glossary and discussion questions, photos, a primary source video and an oral history. The lesson plan itself uses a discussion of advertisements to connect to themes of identity and belonging while leveraging key media literacy skills.



Bella Epstein, a child of refugees, is featured in this oral history about her 1950's childhood home.



Fort Ontario, NY, and Jewish Refugees in WWII America **(National Park Service)**

Grade level:
9-12

Time frame:
1-2 class periods

Description from the National Park Service

In 1944, 982 Jewish refugees arrived from parts of Southern and Eastern Europe to Fort Ontario in Oswego, NY. These were the only refugees the United States took in during World War II. They lived in the Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter for a year before President Harry Truman granted them resident status at the end of the war. Exploring their story helps students understand religion, foreign policy, refugee policy and the World War II home front. It is designed to fit into a larger unit on World War II or the Holocaust.

Why we recommend it

In this lesson, students closely read a policy document (an excerpt from Executive Order 9417) and compare oral histories of experiences in the refugee shelter, two cognitively rich exercises that complement each other for this exploration of the only group of refugees the U.S. took in during the war.



Refugees registering at the Fort Ontario Refugee Camp, August 1944.



Text to Text: Comparing Jewish Refugees of the 1930s with Syrian Refugees Today

(The New York Times, 2017)

Grade level:
6-12

Time frame:
One class period

Description from *The New York Times*

This lesson pairs a *Times* article about the historical resonance of Europe's refugee crisis with an excerpt from "Defying the Nazis" that chronicles [a] relief and rescue mission in 1939. Together, these texts raise important questions about whether there are "lessons" of history and invite reflection on how individuals and governments choose to respond to those in need.

Why we recommend it

Students are asked to read a short article and watch a 10-minute video, with suggested graphic organizers provided. Six writing or discussion questions, along with additional ideas and resources for "Going Further," provide a framework for students to think deeply about history and its implications for the present.



More Resources

Articles



[Immigration Policy in World War II](#)
(Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History)



[United States Immigration Policy and Hitler's Holocaust](#)
(Constitutional Rights Foundation)



[The U.S. Government Turned Away Thousands of Jewish Refugees,
Fearing That They Were Nazi Spies](#)
(Smithsonian Magazine)



[The War Refugee Board](#)
(The National WWII Museum)

Topic Two:

The Incarceration of Japanese Americans

Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States began to place limits and increased scrutiny on residents of Japanese, German and Italian descent. Japanese Americans faced the most dramatic sanction: 120,000 Japanese citizens and immigrants were forcibly relocated to War Relocation Authority (WRA) incarceration camps. This dark chapter in American history has reverberated through generations, with decades of community activism working towards reparations and apologies from the U.S. government, ultimately leading to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.



Lesson Plans



Japanese American Internment: Fear Itself (Library of Congress)

Grade level:
6-12

Time frame:
1-3 class periods

Description from the Library of Congress

What was the World War II experience like for the thousands of Japanese Americans living on the West Coast? The activities in this lesson are designed to provide a window into the war years. Using primary sources, students will explore a period in United States history when 120,000 Japanese Americans were evacuated from the West Coast and held in internment camps.

Why we recommend it

This is an impactful introductory lesson to the topic of Japanese incarceration, using several powerful primary sources. Students will analyze photographs and brainstorm connections between sources. In extension ideas, students write primary source based poetry and newspaper articles.



Japanese-Americans transferring from train to bus at Lone Pine, California, bound for war relocation authority center at Manzanar.



Teaching Japanese-American Internment Using Primary Sources

(*The New York Times*)

Grade level:
6-12

Time frame:
One class period or several

Description from *The New York Times*

In this lesson, students use original Times reporting and other resources to investigate the forced internment of Japanese-Americans--and track how the government has gradually apologized for some of its actions over the decades. Students will also have the opportunity to look for echoes in today's world of this difficult chapter in American history.

Why we recommend it

This is a flexible series of high-quality activity ideas using *The New York Times* sources, including newspaper articles, photographs, first-person video interviews, and op-eds. It also includes “Ideas for Further Research” with descriptions and resources, spanning topics that go deeper into life in the camps, reporting and media during the time period, reparations and modern connections. There is enough material to find an activity to tie into any related lesson, or to create several days’ worth of thought-provoking research, analysis and discussion.



Evacuees of Japanese ancestry are boarding a special train for Merced Assembly center. They are part of a group of 750 persons evacuated from Woodland, California.



The Fred T. Korematsu Institute Collection

(PBS)

Grade level:
6-12

Time frame:
Varies

Description from PBS

The Fred T. Korematsu Institute promotes the importance of remembering one of the most blatant forms of racial profiling in U.S. history, the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans. In this collection, standards-aligned lesson plans on the WWII Japanese American incarceration explore topics such as Japanese American resistance to the incarceration and the U.S. government's misleading use of language and euphemisms. Each lesson plan integrates a documentary film clip and includes background information, focus questions, objectives, historical thinking skills, detailed activities and supplementary materials.

Why we recommend it

This is a collection of nine high-quality lesson plans for middle and high school. Each lesson plan topic connects to broader themes as well as guides students through grappling with this challenging history, many using the documentary *And Then They Came For Us* in part or in its entirety. Any related curriculum will have room for one or more of these lessons.



Panoramic view of Central Utah Relocation Center. In September 1942, Fred Korematsu and his family were transferred here.



Japanese American Internment Camps during WWII

(EDSITEment!)

Grade level:
6-12

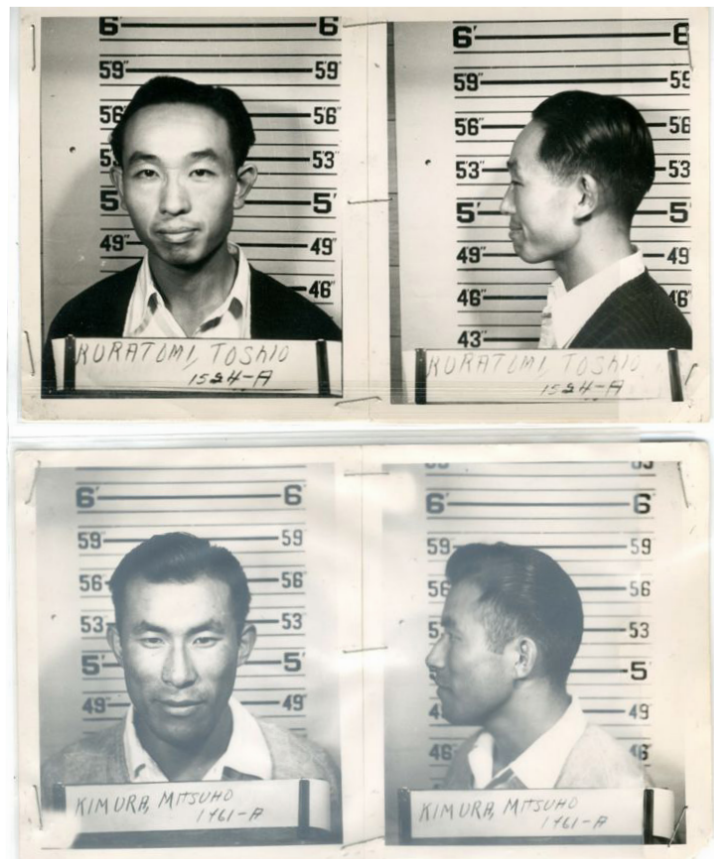
Time frame:
One or more class periods

Description from EDSITEment!

This lesson examines the incarceration of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry during WWII. Students will analyze primary sources to learn about the consternation caused by the questionnaire that was used to determine the loyalty of the Japanese and Japanese Americans incarcerated in War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps, and the subsequent removal of “disloyals” to the Tule Lake Segregation Camp.

Why we recommend it

This lesson requires some context. It is a valuable and thoughtfully assembled deep dive into the topic of Japanese incarceration using primary source materials from the California State University Japanese American History Digitization Project. Students begin by investigating ideas of loyalty, and then learn about the variation in types of internment camps during WWII before moving on to examining photographs and letters from the camps.



Photographs of internees Toshio Kuratomi and Mitsuho Kimura, presumably upon intake into the Tule Lake camp.



Japanese American Incarceration

(Digital Inquiry Group)

Grade level:
6-12

Time frame:
One class period

Description from Digital Inquiry Group

In 1942, over 100,000 individuals of Japanese origin or descent were forced from their homes and incarcerated. Their detention was federally mandated. However, a federal investigation in the early 1980s concluded that Japanese Americans posed no military threat. In this lesson, students investigate a series of primary documents to address the question: Why did the United States government incarcerate Japanese Americans during World War II?

Why we recommend it

This is a compact and accessible introduction to Japanese incarceration, and it includes a slide deck, teacher script and printable student materials. Students will examine five primary sources in three rounds of inquiry and discussion to determine answers to the central question.



People leaving Buddhist church in Manzanar Relocation Center.



Japanese American Incarceration During World War II

(DocsTeach by the National Archives)

Grade level:
10-12

Time frame:
60-90 minutes

Description from the National Archives

In this activity, students will analyze a variety of documents and photographs to learn how the government justified the forced relocation and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, and how civil liberties were denied.

Why we recommend it

This lesson includes an online interactive student activity in which students examine primary sources in themed batches and type in their responses to prompts. The lesson materials include suggested teaching instructions and lists of possible student responses to each prompt.



Baggage belonging to Japanese Americans being forcibly evacuated.



Japanese American Incarceration and the U.S. Constitution

(The Asian American Education Project)

Grade level:
PreK-6

Time frame:
Varies

Description from The Asian American Education Project

Japanese Americans suffered terrible injustices as a result of governmental policies that discriminated against them by treating them like enemies. In this lesson, students examine what happened to Japanese Americans during WWII, what constitutional rights were violated in the process and why such a massive injustice happened.

Why we recommend it

This is a series of activity ideas for various bands of elementary grades, including cause and effect analyses, identifying constitutional rights violations, and a list of suggested read-alouds about the Japanese American experience.



After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, more than 120,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated in prison camps. They did not know where they were going, or how long they would be detained. Despite most being U.S. citizens, Japanese Americans' constitutional rights were not recognized.

More Resources

Articles



[Japanese American Incarceration](#)
(The National WWII Museum)



[Japanese American Incarceration Education Resources](#)
(The National WWII Museum)

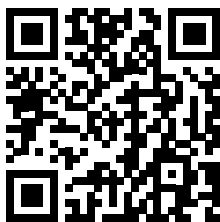


[Japanese-American Incarceration During World War II](#)
(National Archives)

Videos



[Ugly History: Japanese American incarceration camps](#)
(Densho/TedEd)



[Japanese American Incarceration](#)
(Densho/BrainPOP)

More Resources (continued)

Language and Terminology



[The Power of Words: A Lesson on the Japanese-American Internment](#)
(Rethinking Schools)



[The Power of Language](#)
(Learning for Justice)



[Do Words Matter? Euphemistic terminology](#)
(Densho)



[Terminology and the Mass Incarceration of Japanese Americans](#)
[during World War II](#)
(National Park Service)

Topic Three:

The Incarceration of Japanese Latin Americans

In the name of hemispheric security, the United States pressured South American countries to force residents of Japanese descent from their homes and into incarceration camps on U.S. soil. More than 2,000 people, the majority from Peru, were forcibly transported to the United States. Many were later deported to Japan or otherwise not allowed back to their homes after the war.

Resources

Articles



[The WWII Incarceration of Japanese Americans Stretched Beyond U.S. Borders \(Time Magazine\)](#)

This article examines the incarceration of Japanese Latin Americans during WWII through the story of Isamu “Art” Shibayama. The article is adapted from Erika Lee’s book, *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States*.



[The Japanese-Peruvians interned in the U.S. during WW2 \(BBC\)](#)

This article shares the memories of two Japanese Peruvians who were incarcerated in the United States during WWII.

Photo Essay



[Photo Essay: Japanese Peruvian Lives Before World War II \(Densho\)](#)

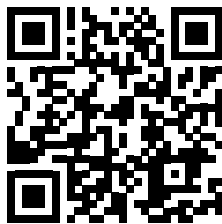
This collection of photos depicts Japanese Peruvians in Peru between 1930-1950.

Topic Four:

Japanese American Soldiers in World War II

With their families incarcerated in internment camps, thousands of Nisei, second-generation Japanese Americans, volunteered for or were drafted to serve in the United States military. Displaying exceptional bravery and patriotism despite racism and distrust from their home country, Nisei soldiers were instrumental to the Allies' success, and they fought in some of the most highly decorated units of the war.

Video



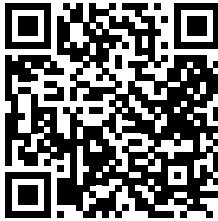
[The Nisei Soldier: Congressional Gold Medal \(Smithsonian Institute\)](#)

This three minute video shows primary source videos and photographs about the 442nd Central Postal Directory, the 100th Infantry Division and the Military Intelligence Service.



Resources

Articles



[Japanese-American Soldiers in WWII \(Re-Imagining Migration\)](#)

This article gives a brief overview of the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Infantry Regiment, along with embedded videos offering more information. This article is free, but you must register to view it.



[The Nisei soldiers who fought WWII enemies abroad—and were seen as enemies back home \(National Geographic\)](#)

This is a more comprehensive article about the Japanese American soldiers in WWII. This article is free, but you must enter your email address to view it.



[Going for Broke: The 100th Infantry Battalion \(The National WWII Museum\)](#)

This brief article focuses on the 100th Infantry Battalion, which was comprised of more than 1,400 second-generation Japanese Americans.



[Going for Broke: The 442nd Regimental Combat Team \(The National WWII Museum\)](#)

This article focuses on the 442 Regional Combat Team, which was comprised of second-generation Japanese Americans. It is the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in the history of the U.S. military.

Other Topics

From the National WWII Museum

The National WWII Museum has a robust collection of accessible and interesting articles. For a simple assignment to add depth to students' understanding of immigrant experiences during the war, ask students to choose an article, summarize it (or if structure is needed: main idea, three to five key facts, and major takeaway), and present it to the class.

Articles



[New Citizen Soldiers: Naturalization During World War II](#)

Article about the 109,382 foreign-born soldiers who became U.S. citizens between 1942 and 1945.



[Japanese Americans and the Wartime Experience in Hawaii](#)

This article explores the Japanese American experience in Hawaii during WWII, and possible reasons it differed from the experiences of Japanese Americans on the West Coast of the United States.



["We Are Americans, Again?"](#)

This article shares the story of Arthur and Estelle Ishigo, an interracial couple who was incarcerated at the Heart Mountain camp in Northwest Wyoming.



[Redress and Reparations for Japanese American Incarceration](#)

This article describes the activism that led to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which gave reparations and a formal apology to the Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during WWII.



[What We're Fighting For: America's Servicemen on Hypocrisy on the Home Front](#)

This article explores the impact that serving with Japanese American servicemen had on their non-Japanese American peers.



[Music at Heart Mountain—the “GI” Band that Crossed Borders](#)

This article examines the crucial role music played in the incarceration camps.



[Learning from the War:](#)

[Mexican Americans and Their Fight for Equality after World War II](#)

This article explores the experiences of Mexican Americans during WWII, along with their activism post-war.



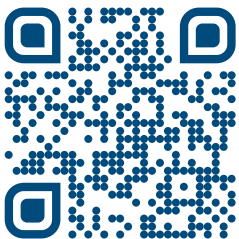
About The Immigrant Learning Center

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. of Malden, MA, is a not-for-profit organization that gives immigrants a voice in three ways. The English Language Program provides free, year-round ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes to help immigrant and refugee adults in Greater Boston become successful workers, parents and community members. The Public Education Institute informs Americans about immigrants and immigration in the United States, and the Institute for Immigration Research, a joint venture with George Mason University, produces valid, reliable and objective multidisciplinary research on immigrants and immigration to the United States. For more information, visit the website <http://www.ilctr.org>.

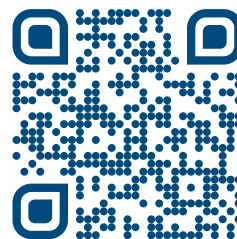
About the Writer Meghan Rosenberg

Meghan Rosenberg wrote and provided guidance for this resource. She is an instructional coach, curriculum developer and educational consultant. Her teaching experience includes being the founding middle school humanities teacher at a Boston K-12 charter school. Meghan holds a Bachelor of Arts in education and linguistics from Brown University and a Master's in teaching secondary English from Tufts University.

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