

Congressional Timeline Lesson Plan: "The Japanese Americans Reparations Act of 1988"



SUBJECTS

American Government, Social Studies, U.S. History, Ethnic Studies



GRADE LEVEL

10-12



OBJECTIVES

This lesson will introduce students to efforts by Congress to redress injustices to Japanese Americans and Aleut civilian residents committed during World War II. Students will learn about the circumstances surrounding the relocation of Japanese Americans in 1942. Students will compare the reasons for relocation with the justification for reparations in 1988.



LESSON PLAN

Context:

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 which authorized local military commanders to designate "military areas" as "exclusion zones" from which "any or all persons may be excluded." The order was used to declare that all people of Japanese ancestry were excluded from the entire Pacific coast. Of the approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans interned in "War Relocation Centers," 62 percent of them were U.S. citizens.

In 1944, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the exclusion, removal, and detention, arguing that it was permissible to curtail the civil rights of a racial group when there is a "pressing public necessity."

Executive Order 9066 was rescinded by President Gerald Ford on February 19, 1976. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed legislation to create the Commission of Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC). The CWRIC was appointed to conduct an official governmental study of Executive Order 9066, related wartime orders, and their impact on Japanese Americans in the West and Alaska Natives in the Pribilof Islands.

In December 1982, the CWRIC issued its findings in *Personal Justice Denied*, concluding that the incarceration of Japanese Americans had not been justified by military necessity. The report determined that the decision to incarcerate was based on "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership." The Commission recommended legislative remedies consisting of an official government apology and redress payments of \$20,000 to each of the survivors; a public education fund was set up to help ensure that this would not happen again (Public Law 100-383).

On August 10, 1988, the Japanese Americans Reparations Act, also known as the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and based on the CWRIC recommendations, was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan.

On November 21, 1989, President George H.W. Bush signed an appropriation bill authorizing payments to be paid out between 1990 and 1998. In 1990, surviving internees began to receive individual redress payments and a letter of apology.

Lesson:

1. Have students read Executive Order 9066 posted at:

http://www.congressionaltimeline.org/Documents/100th_pg1_08101988_doc2_pg1-2.pdf.

Discussion topics:

- On what basis did President Roosevelt justify the Executive Order?
- Identify at least five provisions of the Order and explain how they might be implemented.

2. To understand President Roosevelt's frame of mind in February 1942, read the text of President Roosevelt's Fireside Chat, February 23, 1942:

http://www.congressionaltimeline.org/Documents/100th_pg1_08101988_doc3_pg1-4.pdf.

Discussion topics:

- Evaluate the language the president used to describe the threat posed by the Japanese—are his words measured or hysterical? Do they carry racist overtones or not?

3. Have students read the text of the Japanese Americans Reparations Act posted at

http://www.congressionaltimeline.org/Documents/100th_pg1_08101988_pg1-3.pdf.

Discussion topics:

- **Explain how the first paragraph of the "Provisions" of the Act contrasts with the justification for the Japanese Americans' relocation in 1942.**
- Identify the three motivations the Act attributes to President Roosevelt's action in 1942, later confirmed by the Supreme Court. Do these motivations seem plausible?
- What are the main provisions of Title I?

- In what ways does the Act treat reparations to Japanese Americans and to Aleuts differently? Why?
- Review the **chronology of the Act** (see “Major Legislative Action”). **Have students do research to find** out who introduced the legislation and why they did so. Examine the vote on the bill in the House on September 17, 1987, and discuss the nature of the opposition to **the bill’s passage**. **Refer to** <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d100:HR00442:|TOM:/bss/d100query.html> for details.



RESOURCES

Congressional Timeline, 100th Congress: <http://www.congressionaltimeline.org>. Expand the item at August 10, 1988: Japanese Americans Reparations Act, and select documents.



CREDIT

Frank H. Mackaman
The Dirksen Congressional Center
<http://dirksencongressionalcenter.org>
June 2011