



## UNIT 3

# Japanese American Internment and Heroic Service

### MATERIALS:

- Historical Narrative
- Poster
- Congressional Gold Medal curriculum supplement
- Video Clip #1
- Video Clip #2
- e-Comic
- Assignments & Activities
- Some Additional Resources

### Historical Narrative

#### INTERNMENT

"The Japanese race is an enemy race."

— *Final Report: Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast*  
1942 by Lieutenant General John DeWitt, head of the wartime Western Defense Command, justifying the internment of all persons of Japanese descent during World War II.

The harshest example of America's abiding perception of Asians as aliens came in 1942, with the country engulfed in World War II. The Empire of Japan's attack on Hawai'i's Pearl Harbor triggered suspicion that Japanese Americans were a threat to the nation's security.

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing removal of "any or all persons" judged to be a potential security threat. A month later, the War Relocation Authority built ten "internment camps" to imprison nearly 120,000 Japanese American and immigrant families for the next three years.

Ultimately, not a single Japanese American was ever found guilty of espionage.

Fred Korematsu and Gordon Hirabayashi tested the constitutionality of the government's internment actions in the courts, launching legal battles that took decades to resolve.

The 1988 Civil Liberties Act, the culmination of the Japanese American redress movement, acknowledged the wrongs of the internment and granted reparations of \$20,000 to the survivors.



Japanese American laborers at Tule Lake War Relocation Center, Tule Lake, California. Credit: Library of Congress



Fred Korematsu, right, and Gordon Hirabayashi, left, tested the constitutionality of the government's internment actions in the courts, launching legal battles that took decades to resolve. Credit: Photo by Corky Lee



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### Historical Narrative

#### HEROIC SERVICE

Despite the incarceration of their families and friends, and despite classification as “enemy aliens,” more than 14,000 Japanese Americans, accompanied by a number of Native Hawaiians and Korean Americans, chose to serve their country during World War II, joining the 100th Infantry Battalion, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and the Military Intelligence Service.

The 442nd, a unit composed almost entirely of Nisei, (U.S.-born Japanese Americans), was dubbed the “Go For Broke” regiment and became the most decorated unit in the history of the U.S. military, with 21 of its members receiving the Medal of Honor. It also suffered heavy casualties, and nearly 10,000 members were awarded Purple Hearts. Many of the Nisei soldiers who fought for America abroad would return home and dedicate themselves to public service. One veteran of the 442nd, Senator Daniel K. Inouye (1924-2012), whom President Barack Obama called “a true American hero,” embodied this spirit of selfless patriotism and service. He would serve his home state of Hawai‘i in Congress for 52 years, one of the longest tenures of service in American history.



George Oni and daughter Georgette bid farewell to George's brother Henry, a soldier, at an internment camp in Tule Lake, California.

Credit: National Archives and Records Administration



Colonel Young Oak Kim served in the 100th Battalion despite concerns by Army leadership that Japanese American soldiers might not want to report to a Korean American officer. He was awarded the Silver Star, a Purple Heart, and the Legion of Honor. He later co-founded the Japanese American National Museum and the Go For Broke National Education Center. Credit: Korean American Digital Archive, Korean Heritage Library, University of Southern California



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### Assignments & Activities

#### POSTER

1. What elements of the poster stand out to you?
2. What does the famous image of the Manzanar camp (pictured top-center) suggest about the camp and the camp environment? Why do you think this image is so frequently used to represent the internment camps in general?
3. Why do you think the poster combines the story of Japanese American internment with the story of Japanese American military service during World War II? How are the two related? Why is it important to understand one in relation to the other?
4. How does this cultural/historical material relate to your own community and family?
5. Why is this cultural/historical material important?

#### HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

1. What does the narrative include that the poster does not?
2. Why is it important to think about the internment in terms of what came afterwards, the legal battles and the push for redress?
3. Pick either Gordon Hirabayashi or Fred Korematsu and conduct some additional research online. What new information can you find about these key figures in Asian Pacific American history? Why are their legal battles important? Give a short oral report of your findings to your group.

#### VIDEO CLIP #1

*Secretary Norman Mineta discusses the Japanese American redress movement.*

1. What was the redress movement? How was Secretary Mineta involved?

#### VIDEO CLIP #2

*General Antonio Taguba discusses the Philippine Scouts and recognition for Filipino American World War II veterans.*

1. What roles did the Philippine Scouts play in World War II?
2. Why is recognition for Filipino American World War II veterans important?

#### e-COMIC

1. What stands out about the page on internment and heroic service?
2. How is the comic book page like the poster? How is it different? How does its layout change how you understand the stories it tells?

#### SOME ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES

- Densho - Oral histories of Japanese American internees  
<http://www.densho.org>
- Manzanar, National Historic Site. National Park Service  
<http://www.nps.gov/manz>
- Tule Lake, National Historic Site. National Park Service  
<http://www.nps.gov/tule>