



## *Listening to Immigrant Voices*

# Japanese American Internment

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Grandfather moved to Hawaii to teach at a Japanese language school. Grandmother came a few years later to marry him. They had six children. The children were Americans by birth. Grandfather and Grandmother could not become American citizens because they were Asian. They could not own land.

On Sunday, December 7, 1941, seventy-five years ago, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The next day Grandfather was arrested and taken to Volcano, Hawaii. The reason was that he was a community leader and a Japanese citizen. By that time, Grandfather had lived in Hawaii for twenty-nine years. After several moves he ended up at the Justice Department facility in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Around 120,000 people of Japanese descent were sent to internment camps after Executive Order 9066 was signed in February 1942. Each person could take only what they could carry. Many had to sell their belongings and businesses for ridiculously low prices. Some kept their belongings in their locked homes which were ransacked while they were gone.

Two-thirds of these people were American citizens. They were incarcerated without due process of law. Most were from the mainland but a few were from Hawaii. They were told that it was for military reasons that they were moved from the west coast and it was for military reasons that they were not moved from Hawaii. Fear whipped up by media, politicians, and business leaders was the real cause on the west coast. In Hawaii the whole economy would have collapsed if the Japanese and Japanese Americans were removed.

A year after Pearl Harbor, Grandfather and Grandmother decided that Grandmother and the two youngest children, an eleven-year-old and a twelve-year-old, should join him at camp. Grandmother and the two children were sent to Jerome, Arkansas, where eventually Grandfather joined them.

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The people who lived around Jerome were poor and did not have enough to eat. They hated the Japanese Americans because the camp was given a small food subsidy. It was very dangerous to leave the camp.

The conditions in Arkansas were not as bad as the camps in the Arizona desert where the 110-plus-degree heat and fine dust made life difficult. Nothing grew. And Jerome wasn't as bad as the camps in Wyoming, Idaho, and Utah where the temperatures would get so cold and the wind would blow through the cracks in the boards.

In March 1944, Grandfather and Grandmother and their two children were sent to Tule Lake in California. The war ended in August 1945. Grandfather, Grandmother, and the two children were able to return to Hawaii in December 1945. Grandfather was fifty-seven years old. They no longer had jobs. Someone else had been hired at the Japanese language school. They began working in the cane fields.

The Japanese Americans were not a national security risk. There was no evidence of espionage or sabotage. Their only crime was that they bore the face of the enemy.