

Racism, Fear, and the Japanese Internment

AHTC Lesson Plan by Tami Bajema, UHS

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Abstract:

Students will study the social and political contexts that led to the Japanese Internment by examining national primary sources (political cartoons, a presidential executive order), and a local primary source (official letter) focusing on motives of racism and fear. Students will recognize the emotional and racial underpinnings that enabled this sad historical event to unfold in American history.

Essential Questions:

- How are racism and fear interrelated?
- How do individuals and groups react when influenced by racism and fear?
- How do individuals rise above racism and fear?

Assessment:

Students will be assessed through their completion of several document analysis sheets, small and whole group discussion, and a timed, summative written response.

Duration: 4 class periods

Day One: Ghettos: Driven by Racism and Fear

Activity:

- Draw a sketch of a typical ghetto from WWII
- Swap your sketch, then write on your classmate's sketch observing similarities/differences to your own ghetto drawing
- Return the sketches. Take 5 minutes to write a response to the following: What was the typical structure and daily routine in a ghetto? What is a ghetto's purpose? Why have such a thing? Write on your sketch.
- Now we'll discuss your responses.

Provide Background:

Ghettos are a result of both fear and racism. A significant event happened in American history: the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on Dec. 7, 1941. America's response, motivated by both fear and racism, was the Japanese Internment. Were these OUR ghettos of WWII? Consider that question during these next few days.

Hatred for the Japanese didn't suddenly emerge in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor. There was a negative racial attitude toward Japanese that preceded the attack, and that's important to understand.

Lab Activity:

Go to www.AsianAmericanMedia.org to review the history of racism against Japanese pre-Pearl Harbor. Take notes on your findings.

Day Two: Racism, Magnified by Fear

Review:

Yesterday you explored how some Americans already had racist attitudes against Japanese even before America went to war with the Japanese. What did you find from the website yesterday? What are some examples of racism toward Japanese during that pre-Pearl Harbor period? Discuss/take notes.

Lab Activity:

This racism was displayed in several political cartoons of this period. Using the document analysis sheet, analyze 2 of the political cartoons you see at <http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/dspolitic/Frame.htm>. (Direct students to just the Japan section.) In small groups, discuss and record your answers to the following: What traits do these cartoons share? Overall, what types of messages do these cartoons convey? How would “white” Americans respond to these cartoons, especially after the attack on Pearl Harbor? Why? Which cartoons seems to express fear more? Which most clearly express racism, and how do you see that? Class will discuss.

Activity:

Listen to an audio recording that announces the bombing at Pearl Harbor.

Class debate/discussion: Right after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, would you HAVE to be racist to fear the Japanese? What role do both fear and racism play in creating/portraying an “enemy”?

Day Three: The Political Response: Fear? National Security? Racism?

Review:

Existing racism, combined with fear which magnified after Pearl Harbor, led to an historic political response called Executive Order 9066.

Activity:

Independently, silently read the transcript of Executive Order 9066 which authorized the internment. Mark up the transcript, circling confusing words and asking questions in the margin. Circle 2-3 sentences/phrases that appear to be of particular significance.

As a class, examine what this order does, and does not, provide for. What rationale does the Order give? Can you detect any signs of “fear” or “racism” in this document. Why were the Japanese particularly affected by this order? Consider where most Japanese lived during this period. Look at a map and determine areas likely to be affected by this order.

Written reaction:

As a first generation Japanese American, what various reactions would you have to this presidential order? As a white American, what various reactions would you have to this presidential order?

Day Four: Internment Camps and Aftermath

Lab Activity:

Look at the collection of internment photos from the University of Utah's website (see sources). Begin to consider how these do or do not reflect a "ghetto" (discussed in day One). Consider both what the ghetto is physically, what its purpose is, and what the daily life would be like inside.

Wrap Up:

Not all people agreed with the Executive Order. Three cases protesting the constitutionality of the order went all the way to the Supreme Court. Eventually, the Order was removed and Japanese were able to "resume" their lives, but certainly not as before. Many Japanese Americans, having been displaced far from their homes, now settled in other parts of the country. In fact, some Japanese Americans were "resettled" in Illinois, far from their homes in California.

Activity:

Silently read Document 31 from Illinois State Archives, Illinois at War, 1941-45 and complete a document analysis sheet

What questions does this document raise? What do you find interesting about the time frame of the letter? How might these Japanese Americans feel about their displacement, considering that so many were interned? Do you sense any fear OR racism in this letter? Bottom line, what does this add to your understanding of the Japanese Internment? Discuss.

Conclude:

Retrieve and review your sketch and description of ghettos from Day One. Write for 15 minutes responding to (agreeing or disagreeing with) the following statement. Draw upon what you've learned in the last three days to support your position. Statement: The Japanese Internment camps were our ghettos of WWII.

Ties to Local Primary Sources:

Illinois at War, 1941-1945, Document 31 – A letter from the WRA regarding the resettlement of Japanese in the Chicago area.

Ties to National Primary Sources:

Dr. Seuss Political Cartoons focusing on Japan @ orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/dspolitic/Frame.htm

Transcript of Executive Order 9066 @ www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=74

Photos of Japanese internment camps @ www.lib.utah.edu/spc/photo/9066/topaz.htm

Secondary Source: www.AsianAmericanMedia.org

Materials: Thoma's Cartoon Analysis Sheet & NARA's [Document Analysis Sheet](#)