

History/Spring

I. Abstract

Between 1942 and 1945, the War Relocation Authority forced over ten thousand Japanese Americans into internment camps hastily constructed across the country. The rural towns of Jerome and Rohwer, Arkansas, located in the historically racially-charged Delta region, housed two of these internment camps. There is a distinct lack of academic research on these two particular internment camps and especially the resultant violence perpetrated by the white population against the Japanese-American internees. This research project, used to fulfill the senior thesis requirement for graduation from the Department of History, intends to further investigate the racial tensions between whites and Japanese-American internees by exploring three specific cases of violence, analyzing the roots of the violent outbreaks, and determining if the long-held white supremacist mentality is to blame or if the violence is a product of abject poverty among the white population. In order to complete this research, access to the newspaper archives at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, AR is crucial, as these provide concrete evidence of the specific instances of violence that occurred between 1942 and 1943. The University of Arkansas houses a large collection of memoirs, papers, and pictures from both the internment camps and the surrounding communities and access to these materials would further strengthen the research project. Also, the National Parks Service is in the midst of a renovation project restructuring of the ruins at both Jerome and Rohwer into a memorial and educational unit, and experiencing the sites themselves would be beneficial in regards to placing the events in contexts. In combining this on-site research with primary source material already available, we will determine the truth behind the violence at Jerome and Rohwer and its origins.

II. Description of Research

On the morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese armed forces attacked the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii as a preemptive strike against American forces that could possibly interfere with the Japanese attacks against Allied forces in the Pacific Rim. Pearl Harbor incited the United States' entry into World War II, and also incited actions against the population of Japanese-American citizens that resided on the West Coast. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, already deemed any individual over the age of fourteen with discernible ethnic ties to Japan as "alien enemies" in Presidential Proclamation 2525.¹ On February 17, 1942, he signed Executive Order 9066 into action which authorized the Secretary of War to designate specific geographic areas as "military areas" and those as "exclusion zones" of non-occupation. These zones determined that "all persons may be excluded [from inhabiting the zone], and with such respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion."² Executive Order 9102 issued on March 18, 1942 established the War Relocation Authority to further facilitate the removal of Japanese-Americans from the aforementioned exclusion zones which covered California, western Oregon, western Washington, and southern Arizona.³ Almost 120,000

¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Presidential Proclamation 2525: Alien Enemies--Japanese" December 7, 1941. <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/polsciwb/brian/docs/1941PRESIDENTIALPROCLAMATIONaliensjapanese.pdf> (Accessed October 4, 2012)

² Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9066: Authorizing the Secretary of War To Prescribe Military Areas.," March 18, 1942. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=61698> (Accessed October 4, 2012).

³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9102: Establishing the War Relocation Authority.," March 18, 1942. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=162> (Accessed October 4, 2012).

Japanese-Americans were sent to one of sixteen WRA Assembly Centers that dotted the exclusion zone and then dispersed to one of ten WRA Relocation Centers located outside of the exclusion zone.⁴ The government constructed two of the camps in the Delta region of Arkansas, in two rural towns named Jerome and Rohwer.

The Southeast region of Arkansas (where Judson and Rohwer are situated) was one of the poorest regions in the United States during the early 1940's. Poverty ran rampant among the heavily segregated population. The Great Depression hit the region exceptionally hard, not only due to the harsh economic conditions, but due to agricultural famine that impacted the largely agrarian population. The worst drought of the twentieth century occurred in 1930 to 1931, devastating crops across the entire state.⁵ At the height of the Great Depression, one in four families in Arkansas received food aid from the American Red Cross, and one can only speculate (at this time, as research has not validated this point) that the percentage was much higher in this particular region.⁶ Most homes were devoid of electricity and indoor plumbing and access to resources like health care and education were scarce. The population of both towns hovered around the 100 to 150 mark at the time that the camps began construction and the Japanese-Americans came to reside there.⁷ Thanks to the enactment of Executive Order 9102 and the creation of these two WRA Relocation Centers, the populations of each area increased tenfold with a captive population of Japanese-Americans. The established white population did not take kindly to the internees or the apparent resources the camps provided them, and at times violence erupted out of the anger. The African-American populations of Jerome and Rohwer lived in a constant state of fear of reactionary racial violence. The white supremacist mentality prevalent in the area relegated the black population to the fringes of society.⁸

Race riots were not uncommon to the Delta; in 1919, the single deadliest racial confrontation in Arkansas history and one of the deadliest in United States history occurred in the town of Elaine, 100 miles to the north of Jerome and Rohwer.⁹ Violence against non-whites spilled into the communities surrounding the two internment camps. Three distinct instances of violence are central to this project:

- In November 1942 Private Louis Furushiro, a Nisei member of the armed forces, was singled out and shot at by W.M. Wood, a local, who was determined to harm the next Japanese he saw.
- Four days after the incident in Dermott, three Rohwer residents were shot at by tenant farmer M.C. Brown who allegedly thought the men were escaping.

⁴ Jeffery F. Burton, Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord, *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*, Western Archeological and Conservation Center, National Park Service, Publications in Anthropology 74, 1999. http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/anthropology74/index.htm (Accessed October 4, 2012)

⁵ Central Arkansas Library System. "Drought of 1930–1931 - Encyclopedia of Arkansas." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*. <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=4344> (accessed October 4, 2012).

⁶ "History of Arkansas." Southern Arkansas Community College. www.southark.edu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1393:history-of-arkansas&catid=75&Itemid=871 (accessed October 4, 2012).

⁷ *Time of Fear*. NC Live. MP4 file. Directed by Sue Williams. Alexandria, Va.: Public Broadcasting System, 2005. http://media.nclive.org/play_video.php?vid=189 (accessed October 4, 2012).

⁸ *Time of Fear*, 2005.

⁹ JW Butts and Dorothy James, "The Underlying Causes of the Elaine Riot of 1919." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 20 (Spring 1961): 95–104.

- On December 4, 1942, two Nisei women in the Jerome internment camp were propositioned by Nebo Mac Person, an African-American construction worker, and he allegedly tore the coat off one and exposed himself to both.¹⁰

This project proposes to explore the racial tensions that resulted from the internment of Japanese-Americans in War Relocation Authority (WRA) Relocation Centers outside of the two rural towns of Jerome and Rohwer in Arkansas as an either an expression of white supremacy or ethnic fear. The title of the thesis, “Imprisoned by Circumstance”, reflects the fact that the two populations represented two separate forms of “imprisonment: the Japanese-American physical imprisonment and the white imprisonment by their impoverished. The Japanese-Americans were forced from their homes on the West Coast, shipped across the country on trains, and imprisoned behind barbed wire fences, guarded by soldiers with guns. They lost their autonomy as an individual because of the actions of ethnically similar individuals against American forces in Hawaii and abroad. The residential population in Jerome and Rohwer was heavily impoverished. Racial tensions between African-Americans and whites were already volatile. The white population was impoverished and had little access to resources such as quality health care, education, job training, or food. The tensions that resulted from the internment ran beyond color lines, yet the root of the tensions could possibly be tied to the white supremacist movement that was so heavily entrenched in the Delta region of Arkansas and Mississippi.

III. Research Methodology & Significance

In examining the situations both inside and outside of the camp environment, the following research questions must be directly addressed. First, what was the nature of the negative situations both populations are caught in? Under what circumstances did the two populations intersect? Were these interactions peaceable or violent? Was there hostility from both populations or was the hostility one-sided? After the context of the relationship between the Japanese-American internees and the white population is established, the reason and the impact of the resultant racial tension must be discussed. Does the underlying white supremacist mentality (as evidenced by the prevalence of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan in the geographic region) among the white population spur on the violent actions against the Japanese-American internees or is it just a product of Axis power resentment and fear at the time? Does religious differences play a role in the resultant tension? What other circumstances impact the culmination of tension between the two populations? Is the racial tension between Japanese-Americans and whites different than the racial tensions between whites and African-Americans during the same time in the same geographic region?

Much of the primary source material for this project is going to be derived from memoirs, newspapers, and oral histories collected from both the Japanese-American internees and from the impoverished white and African-Americans of the area. The University of Arkansas at Little Fayetteville has a large collection of newspapers and letters from both the camps and the surrounding towns in their library’s Special Collections section. Densho, the Japanese American Legacy Project housed in Seattle, Washington has a large number of oral histories of internees available online, as does the University of California at Berkley, the University of Washington in Seattle, and other sources that the researcher is still discovering. Also, there are two documentary projects that will be utilized as primary source material about the tensions present: “Time to Fear”, produced by PBS in 2005 and “Life, Interrupted”, produced by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2003.

¹⁰ Letters from the Robert Lefler Collection at University of Arkansas, as quoted in John Howard, *Concentration Camps On the Home Front: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2008), 132-3. These incidents are also mentioned in the *Arkansas Gazette* and the *Rohwer Jiho* for further validation.

A large amount of scholarly research has been done on the conditions of internment of Japanese-Americans, but it is the researcher's experience that much of the published work is concentrated on the WRA Relocation Centers that were located in the western half of the United States, such as Tule Lake, Manazar, and Topaz. There has been some scholarly research undertaken by individuals on the conditions within the camps in Jerome and Rohwer and social issues that arose within, but not much has been published thus far on the aforementioned racial aggression that resulted from the internment in southwestern Arkansas. As was stated prior, most of the secondary material covers only the Japanese-American experience of internment, not the impact of the white community around the camps and not of the explosion of tension that resulted around the camps. Two documentaries have been produced on the internment in Arkansas, but they each only briefly touched on the tension in the surrounding community. It is the researcher's hope that this thesis will provide context for the tensions, explore them more, and put them into context for historical significance in the fight for racial equality.

IV. Presentation and Publication

At the minimum, this research project will be presented on-campus at the Spring Undergraduate Research Symposium at UNCA and the paper submitted to the UNC Asheville Journal of Undergraduate Research.

V. Budget

ITEM DESCRIPTION	COST	
Rental car through Hertz for 1/17 through 1/22 (insurance included)	\$161.90	
Hotel room in Springdale, AR for 1/17 through 1/20 (Hotwire)	\$197.90	
Hotel room in Memphis, TN for 1/20 (Hotwire)	\$81.83	
Grocery/Food budget (\$10/day for 5 days)	\$50.00	
TOTAL COST/AMOUNT REQUESTED	\$491.63	

VI. Proposed Trip Itinerary

Thursday, January 17, 2013

Depart for Fayetteville, AR (~13 hours)

Friday, January 18, 2013

Research in Special Collections/Newspaper Archives

Saturday, January 19, 2013

Research in Special Collections/Newspaper Archives

Sunday, January 20, 2013

Finish Research/Depart for Judson/Rohwer, Arkansas (~5 hours)

Spend night in Memphis, TN (~ 2 hours drive)

Monday, January 21, 2013

Depart Memphis for Asheville (~8 hours)

VII. Research Timeline

December 2012: Finalize thesis portfolio materials

January 17-21: Travel to Arkansas to complete research

April 24, 2013 (Pending approval): Present at UNCA Undergraduate Research Symposium

April 2013: Thesis defense/approval

Works Cited

- Burton, Jeffery F., Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord. *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*, Western Archeological and Conservation Center, National Park Service, Publications in Anthropology 74, 1999. http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/anthropology74/index.htm (Accessed October 4, 2012).
- Central Arkansas Library System. "Drought of 1930–1931 - Encyclopedia of Arkansas." The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture. <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=4344> (accessed October 4, 2012).
- "History of Arkansas." Southern Arkansas Community College. www.southark.edu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1393:history-of-arkansas&catid=75&Itemid=871 (accessed October 4, 2012).
- Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Executive Order 9066 Authorizing the Secretary of War To Prescribe Military Areas.," March 18, 1942. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=61698> (Accessed October 4, 2012).
- Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Presidential Proclamation 2525: Alien Enemies--Japanese" December 7, 1941. <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/polsciwb/brianl/docs/1941PRESIDENTIALPROCLAMATIONaliensjapanese.pdf> (Accessed October 4, 2012).
- Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Executive Order 9102 Establishing the War Relocation Authority.," March 18, 1942. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=162> (Accessed October 4, 2012).
- Time of Fear*. NC Live. MP4 file. Directed by Sue Williams. Alexandria, Va.: Public Broadcasting System, 2005. http://media.nclive.org/play_video.php?vid=189 (accessed October 4, 2012).

Current Working Bibliography

Primary Sources

The Arkansas Gazette. Fayetteville, Ark: Gazette Print. Co, 1889.

The Arkansas Gazette ran multiple stories on the rising racial tensions in Jerome and Rohwer, mainly in 1942 and 1943. These archives are available on microfilm at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project. "Densho Digital Archive." <http://www.densho.org> (Accessed October 16, 2012).

Densho has a sizable collection of digital media (including interviews, digitized copies of camp newspapers, and photos) that illustrates life in the internment camps from the Japanese perspective. Specifically, Densho's collection of internee interviews provide a first-hand account of life both inside and outside of the camp walls.

The McGehee Times. McGehee, Ark: Stuart Print. Co, 1928.

The McGehee Times was the semi-weekly newspaper of McGehee, Arkansas that ran until 1977. The University of Arkansas has all of the issues from 1942 until 1945 on microfilm, and this contains allegations of racial violence against the Japanese-American internees.

Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Executive Order 9066 Authorizing the Secretary of War To Prescribe Military Areas.," March 18, 1942. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=61698> (Accessed October 16, 2012).

This is the full text of the executive order that established the areas of no occupation and led to the establishment of the internment camps.

Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Presidential Proclamation 2525: Alien Enemies--Japanese" December 7, 1941. <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/polsciwb/brian/docs/1941PRESIDENTIALPROCLAMATIONaliensjapanese.pdf> (Accessed October 16, 2012).

This is the full text of the proclamation that delineated who was considered an "alien" and thus determined which citizens would be forced into the internment camps.

Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Executive Order 9102 Establishing the War Relocation Authority.," March 18, 1942. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=162> (Accessed October 16, 2012).

This is the full text of the executive order that established the War Relocation Authority. Soon after the establishment of the WRA, construction began on the camps at Jerome and Rohwer and completed in late 1942.

Time of Fear. NC Live. MP4 file. Directed by Sue Williams. Alexandria, Va.: Public Broadcasting System, 2005. http://media.nclive.org/play_video.php?vid=189 (accessed October 16, 2012).

This documentary contains many of the interviews utilized in this project, as well as the background data on the state of the economy in Arkansas at the beginning of World War II.

Truman Presidential Museum and Library. "The War Relocation Authority and the Incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII." http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/japanese_internment/docs.php (Accessed October 16, 2012).

The Truman Presidential Museum and Library has a large compendium of documents concerning both the establishment of the internment camps and the aftermath.

United States National Archives and Records Administration. "Japanese American Records." <http://www.archives.gov/research/japanese-americans/> (Accessed October 16, 2012).

The National Archives is a repository of government documents concerning the internment of Japanese Americans, such as census records and legal proceedings dealing with citizens in the internment camps.

United States. *The Rohwer outpost*. Rohwer [i.e. McGehee] Ark: [s.n.], 1942.

The Rohwer Outpost (also known as *The Rohwer Jiho*) was the one of two newspapers published by the internees of WRA Camp Rohwer that ran semi-weekly from October 24, 1942 to July 4, 1945. This runs concurrent with the rise and fall of the tensions around the camps. These are available on microfilm at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

United States. *Rohwer Relocator*. McGehee, Ark: Rohwer Relocation Center, 1945.

The Rohwer Relocator was the one of two newspapers published by the internees of WRA Camp Rohwer that ran semi-weekly in 1945 as the camp was being decommissioned. These are available on microfilm at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. "Special Collections: Japanese Americans Interned in Arkansas." Special Collections: Fayetteville, Ark.

The University of Arkansas at Fayetteville Special Collections division of their library has numerous collections of newspapers from the surrounding communities and the internment camps, personal documents, government records, and essays by both internees and community members. The primary collections that information will be taken from are the Nathaniel Griswold Collection (Loc. 731-737), the Rose A. Heinke Collection (MC 1896), the Jerome Relocation Center Collection (MC 629), the Jerome Relocation Center Final Report Legal Division Collection (MC 695), the Robert A. Leflar Collection (Loc. 73-88), the Virginia Tidball Collection (Loc. 824), and the WRA Collections (MC 360 and 452).

University of California. "JARDA: Japanese American Relocation Digital Archives." <http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/jarda/> (Accessed October 16, 2012).

JARDA is yet another repository of numerous personal accounts of both the Japanese experience within both Jerome and Rohwer, but from white individuals as well. They illustrate the presence of tension between the town citizens and the internees.

Secondary Sources

Anderson, William Cary. "Early Reaction in Arkansas to the Relocation of Japanese in the State." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (Autumn, 1964): 195-211, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40038054>.

Anderson's work illustrates the early opinions of Japanese-Americans in Arkansas and the resultant tension that arose around the internment camps.

Bearden, Russell. "Life Inside Arkansas's Japanese-American Relocation Centers." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Summer, 1989): 169-96, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40030791>.

Bearden illustrates the daily struggle of living in both Jerome and Rohwer.

Bearden, Russell. "The False Rumor of Tuesday: Arkansas's Internment of Japanese-Americans." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (Winter, 1982): 327-39, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40038522>.

Like Anderson's work, Bearden highlights the tension between white and Japanese-Americans.

Bolton, S. Charles. "Turning Point: World War II and the Economic Development of Arkansas." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (Summer, 2002): 123-51, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40023212>.

As background information, Bolton details the economic situation in Arkansas before and during the internment period.

Daniels, Roger. *Concentration Camps North America: Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II*. Malabar, Fla.: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993.

Daniel's book provides an overview of the Japanese American experience as a whole.

Daniels, Roger. *The Decision to Relocate the Japanese Americans*. Reprint ed. Malabar, Fla.: Krieger Publishing Company, 1985.

Daniel's book details the lead up to internment and the logistical challenges in moving such a large population.

Friedlander, E. J. "Freedom of Press Behind Barbed Wire: Paul Yokota and the Jerome Relocation Center Newspaper." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Winter, 1985): 303-13, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40027735>.

The internment camp newspapers are a wealth of information on the treatment of Japanese-Americans, and this article explores one such newspaper in detail.

Girdner, Audrie, and Anne Loftis. *The Great Betrayal: the Evacuation of the Japanese-Americans During World War II*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969.

Girdner and Loftis explore the internment experience as a whole.

Howard, John. *Concentration Camps On the Home Front: Japanese Americans in the House of Jim Crow*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2008.

This book is an absolute wealth of information on the Japanese-American experience in Arkansas. In chapter 4, Howard alludes to three instances of violence against Japanese-Americans and this section gave direction to my research.

Myer, Dillon S. *Uprooted Americans: the Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority During World War II*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971.

Myer gives an overview of the Japanese-American experience during internment.

Ng, Wendy. *Japanese American Internment During World War II: a History and Reference Guide*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2002.

Ng's reference guide provides an overview of the internment experience.

Robinson, Greg. *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Robinson provides a retelling of the chain of events that lead up to the internment of the Japanese-Americans.

Smith, C. Calvin. "The Response of Arkansans to Prisoners of War and Japanese Americans in Arkansas 1942-1945." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 340-66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40030890>.

Smith provides an excellent collection of events that surrounded the internment relocation to Arkansas.

Ward, Jason Morgan. "'No Jap Crow': Japanese Americans Encounter the World War II South." *Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 1 (02, 2007): 75-104.

Ward's article, like Howard's book, focuses on the Japanese-American racial dynamic in Arkansas during the internment period.