

FAST FACTS

Japanese-American WWII Incarceration and the Heart Mountain Relocation Center

- ❖ On Feb. 19, 1942, in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor by Imperial Japan, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 authorizing the mass removal of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast to so-called “relocation centers.”
- ❖ Nearly two thirds of those imprisoned were American citizens born in the United States. The other third were immigrants who were forbidden by law from naturalizing because they were Asian.
- ❖ Concerns about the loyalty of ethnic Japanese were the result of racial prejudice and wartime hysteria. By the end of the war, 10 people were convicted of spying for Japan; all were Caucasian.
- ❖ Internees were able to take few possessions with them; they left behind homes, farms and other businesses, sold at great losses or simply abandoned. Property put in storage was often plundered or otherwise lost.
- ❖ The Heart Mountain Relocation Center opened August 12, 1942 and closed November 10, 1945. By the end of 1942, it was the third largest “city” in the state of Wyoming. It had a peak population of 10,767; total number of people incarcerated for any period of time at Heart Mountain was 13,997.
- ❖ Heart Mountain was one of 10 “relocation centers” for Japanese and Japanese Americans run by the War Relocation Authority (WRA). In addition to these, Japanese Americans were confined at times in temporary assembly centers, Justice Dept. internment camps and other wartime prison facilities.
- ❖ The Heart Mountain Relocation Center was hurriedly constructed by more than 2,000 workers starting in June 1942. The center consisted of 740 acres enclosed by barbed wire fencing, with 650 barracks-style buildings, including a hospital, other support facilities and 468 residential structures. All buildings in the camp had electricity, which was unusual in Wyoming at the time.
- ❖ Heart Mountain internees used thousands of acres of surrounding land for farming, and Heart Mountain became the most agriculturally productive of the 10 WRA camps.
- ❖ More than 800 Japanese Americans from Heart Mountain served in the military, eleven of whom were killed and 52 wounded in battle. Some were volunteers, others were drafted. The draft generated a resistance movement at Heart Mountain. The Fair Play Committee formed to protest military induction and, as a result, 85 internees were elsewhere imprisoned for draft law violations.
- ❖ The redress movement of the 1970s resulted in a congressional commission formed in 1980, which issued the 1983 report “Personal Justice Denied” recommending token redress payments to victims and declaring internment “unjustly motivated by racism rather than real military necessity.”
- ❖ The Civil Liberties Act of 1988, implementing the recommendations of the congressional commission, was sponsored by Rep. Norman Mineta and Sen. Alan K. Simpson – who met as Boy Scouts at Heart Mountain when Mineta’s family was incarcerated there. President Ronald Reagan signed it into law in 1988.
- ❖ In 1996, the non-profit Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation was established; it purchased 50 acres of the original site, with 74 acres owned by the federal government’s Bureau of Reclamation.