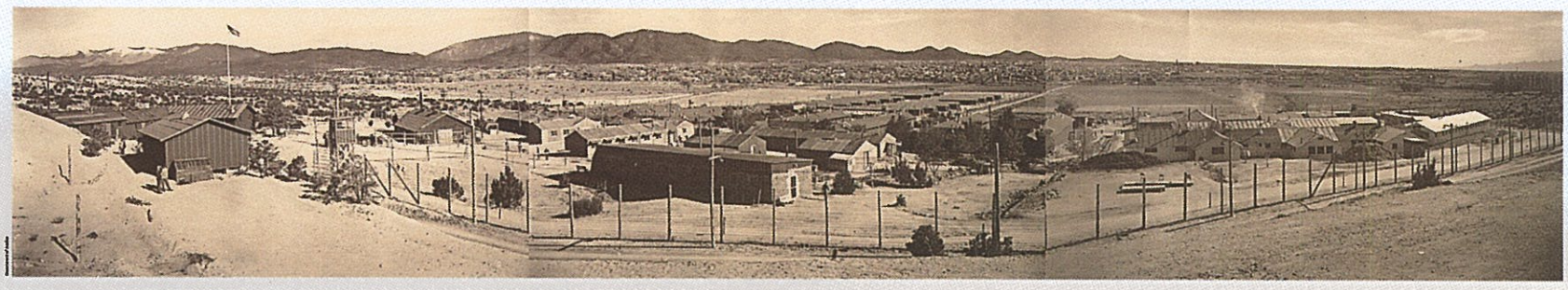
GENERATIONAL LEGACIES

Santa Fe Internment Camp

New Mexico, the "Land of Enchantment," is also a "Land of Entrapment" for people captivated by its natural beauty, diversity, and cultural arts who relocate to New Mexico; or, because of circumstances, are unable to leave. However, for thousands with Japanese ancestry, New Mexico became a harsh reality of imprisonment after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941.



December 7, 1941 — The United States enters World War II when Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i is bombed by the Empire of Japan. Within hours, thousands of first-generation Japanese immigrant men or *Issei*, classified without cause as potentially dangerous "alien enemies," are rounded up and sent to prison camps.

February 19, 1942 — President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066 leading to the forced removal and incarceration of nearly 45,000 Japanese nationals (denied citizenship because of race) and 75,000 Japanese American citizens.

February 1942 — The US Department of Justice (DOJ) acquires a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp built in 1933 on the outskirts of Santa Fe.

March 1942 — CCC camp is converted into Santa Fe Detention Camp, initially for about 800 Issei men transferred from short-term holding facilities. Hearings are conducted by the Alien Enemy Hearing Board.

September 1942 — The detention camp is deactivated after hearings conclude, leading to Issei internees' parole (mostly to WRA camps) or continued internment for duration of the war. Camp briefly holds internees of German and Italian descent until February 1943.

February 1943 — The US Army transfers custody of civilian internees to DOJ's Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

March 1943 — Santa Fe Detention Camp is reactivated. Japanese internees from the US mainland, territories of Hawai'i and Alaska, as well as Latin America, are transported to Santa Fe from US Army camps.

July 1944 — The Denaturalization Act (US Public Law 78-405) allows citizens to renounce citizenship.

December 1944 — Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrants), Nisei (second-generation Japanese American citizens by birth), and Kibei (American-born Nisei, educated in Japan), renunciants and dissidents (disillusioned by their treatment without due process) from Tule Lake Incarceration Center and other camps are sent to Santa Fe.

January 1945 — Camp is redesignated Santa Fe Alien Internment Camp (SFIC). New internees clash with existing internees and camp administrators.

September 2, 1945 — Japan formally surrenders after America bombs Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9), ending WWII.

April 1946 — Departure of last internees from SFIC. Subsequently, camp is dismantled; the land is sold to a housing developer and renamed Casa Solana.

August 10, 1988 — The Civil Liberties Act is signed into law by President Ronald Reagan: "Congress recognizes that ... a grave injustice was done to both citizens and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry ... by the evacuation, relocation, and internment of civilians during World War II. ... These actions were carried out without adequate security reasons and without any acts of espionage or sabotage."

April 20, 2002 — Santa Fe Internment Camp Marker overlooking the original site is dedicated, acknowledging SFIC's historic significance honoring 4,555 Japanese men who were unjustly detained there from 1942-1946.

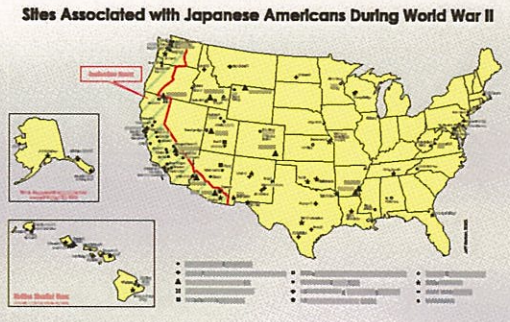
Immediate Impact of Pearl Harbor

Within hours of Pearl Harbor's attack on December 7, 1941 the FBI and local officials began arresting Japanese immigrant men from Hawai'i and the US West Coast. The 1798 Alien and Sedition Act authorized the imprisonment or deportation of alien immigrants considered "dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States," serving as a basis for incarceration during WWII.

Additionally, the 1940 Alien Registration Act enabled the US government to collect information on foreign nationals, leading to quick arrests without cause except for their country of origin. Responsible residents and community leaders, excluded by law from US citizenship by virtue of ethnicity, were instantly separated from their families. They were transported to internment camps run by the Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Service (DOJ/INS) or US Army.

After February 19, 1942 when Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, their families (two-thirds were American citizens) were removed from their homes to assembly centers, isolation centers, temporary camps, and finally, to one of 10 War Relocation Authority (WRA) incarceration camps. WRA camps (distinct from DOJ/INS or Army camps) held the majority of over 120,000 persons thus removed.

Sites Associated with Japanese Americans During World War II



New Mexico's World War II Confinement Sites

New Mexico had four DOJ/INS or US Army run camps during World War II: Santa Fe, Lordsburg, Fort Stanton, and Beca Camp (Old Raton Ranch). With the exception of Beca Camp, these camps held men only.

Santa Fe Internment Camp (SFIC)

By March 1942, DOJ had converted an old Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in Santa Fe into a prison camp. Ten-foot-high fences topped with two-feet high barbed wire, plus guard towers with spotlights, surrounded the camp.

Spread over 80 acres, Santa Fe Internment Camp (SFIC) was the largest of DOJ/INS sites. Unlike other isolated internment camps, SFIC was a mile-and-half from New Mexico's state capitol. Paradoxically, 35 miles northwest of SFIC, Los Alamos National Laboratory was secretly developing the world's first atomic bomb.

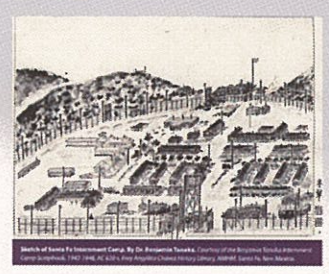
From 1942-1946, 4,555 men were imprisoned at SFIC for various lengths of time—rounded up from the mainland, territories of Hawai'i and Alaska, including Latin America. The US had briefly considered hostage exchanges with Japan.

In another ironic twist, many men imprisoned in SFIC had American-born sons in the 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team in Europe and the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) in the Pacific, fighting and dying for their country.

SFIC administrators knew internees were not prisoners of war; DOJ/INS followed Geneva Convention rules, allowing leeway for self-governance, work, social, and recreational activities. Appeals and complaints, many concerning reunification with families or poor camp conditions, could be made under Geneva Convention rules—unlike for WRA incarcerees.

Work was available in mess halls, gardens, hospital, maintenance, canteen, and other jobs; some could earn up to 80 cents a day. A select few worked outside camp, with guards accompanying them.

Although assigned tasks, the men had time to stay fit in body-mind-spirit. They pursued American and Japanese pastimes. Tennis, softball, hiking, Japanese board games of *go* and *shogi*, *Noh* chanting, theater productions, painting, poetry, and *sumo* wrestling.



Sketch of Santa Fe Internment Camp. By Dr. Benjamin Tasaka. Courtesy of the Japanese Nevada Internment Camp Scrapbook, 1942-1946, AC 630-1, Frey Angelica Chavez History Library, NMHM/DCA Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Three Waves of SFIC Internees

Three main waves of internees arrived at SFIC.

- ***First Wave***
  Within 72 hours of Pearl Harbor's bombing, Issei (first generation Japanese immigrant) community leaders were separated from families and imprisoned. Hearings were held; then men were sent to WRA camps in other states or imprisoned in internment camps for the duration of the war. The Alien Enemy Hearing Board decided their fates.

  "Their hearings were usually brief and informal. The accused could not be represented by a lawyer, nor could he challenge evidence the FBI submitted. If any doubt of guilt existed, the hearing boards were instructed to rule in favor of the government."

- ***Second Wave***
  Internees transferred from Army-run camps, including Issei men from the territories of Hawai'i and Alaska, and Latin American countries, plus Nisei (second generation American citizens).

- ***Third Wave***
  Transfers were mainly from Tule Lake Segregation Center: dissidents, those disillusioned by their treatment, coerced into renouncing US citizenship, or wishing to be repatriated back to Japan and Latin America.

The final group of SFIC internees left in April 1948. Camp was dismantled, its various components sold. Few traces were left, completely erased by the early 1950s construction of Casa Solana, a housing subdivision.

Aerial views of the location of the Santa Fe Internment Camp

Local Reaction to "Jap Trap"

Given wartime hysteria and lack of information about detainees, local reaction to SFIC was largely negative. Most wrongly thought the "enemy faces" were Japanese POWs and called the camp, "Jap Trap." These feelings increased when 1,816 New Mexico National Guardsmen suffered cruelly (829 died) at the hands of Japanese soldiers on the Bataan Death March in the Philippines.

Those who interacted with initial SFIC internees (including guards) noticed the peaceful and industrious nature of the men. However, later internees included disgruntled dissidents angered by their treatment.

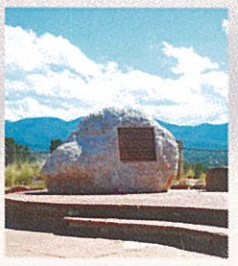
National Apology and Redress

On August 10, 1988 President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act—a Congressional apology to individuals of Japanese ancestry for violations of basic civil liberties and constitutional rights. With stipulations for reparations, the Act also apologizes for government actions "motivated largely by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

SFIC Marker Dedication: April 20, 2002

When an historic marker was proposed in the late 1990s, local misunderstandings about internees being enemy soldiers or POWs, coupled with sentiments surrounding the Bataan Death March, continued to persist. The divisive issue was resolved when the City Council eventually voted to erect a monument to honor the veterans' patriotic contributions; Mayor Larry Delgado broke Council's tie vote in favor of establishing a marker for the Santa Fe Internment Camp.

Dedication day on April 20, 2002 was a landmark achievement embracing multi-ethnic and multi-generational contributions. The marker honors the resilience of Japanese residents wrongly imprisoned there, and commemorates the courage of Santa Feans to acknowledge a significant, tragic event in the city's history.



Honoring Our Generational Legacies

Issei (first generation) and their American-born children (Nisei, second generation) have long lived a culture of silence about this injustice to avoid further racial discrimination and stigma. They turned their attention to rebuilding their interrupted lives.

However, younger generations are now breaking the silence and voicing concerns supporting social justice issues, not only for Japanese Americans, but also for all communities of color. They advocate for those (in historic and contemporary times) facing injustices such as racial discrimination, forced removal, detention, deportation, and family separations.

This exhibit highlights three individuals: two Japanese internees (legal US residents) and an American guard. Their descendants give insights into their own journeys of discovery, memories, and historical lessons learned, through to contemporary manifestations of how they have kept the stories alive about this period of American history.

As the Santa Fe Internment Camp marker reminds us, "History is a valuable teacher only if we do not forget our past."

Gail Y. Okawa

Jerry R. West

Nikki Nojima Louis

INTRO PANEL