

RECLAIMING  
LOST  
LIVES



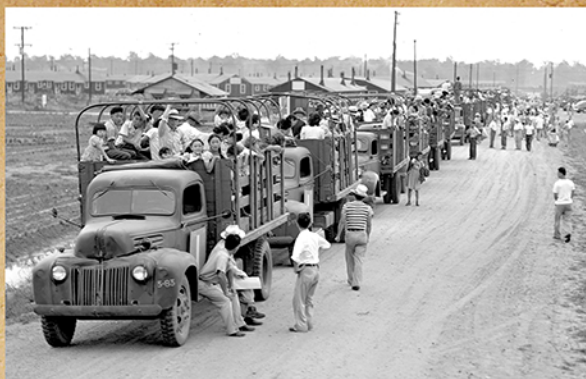
At left, one of the last residents to leave camp at Poston, Arizona, Mr. Yoneichi Asami labels his boxes prior to returning to Reedley after more than three years - September 29, 1945. National Archives



When internees, such as Yoshiki Matsushigo were allowed to leave camp, they were given \$25 to restart their lives - September, 1945. Hikaru Iwasaki, War Relocation Authority



Internees at Jerome board train for transfer to Rohwer War Relocation Center - June 15, 1945. Hikaru Iwasaki, War Relocation Authority



At right, former residents of the Jerome War Relocation Center, situated in Denson, Arkansas, wait in trucks to entrain - June 19, 1944. Charles E. Mace, War Relocation Authority



The deserted buildings of the Colorado River War Relocation Center were already falling to pieces within months of abandonment. These barracks illustrate the cheap materials, rough lumber and tar-paper used in their construction - May, 1945. National Archives

A year after initial internment, the War Relocation Authority created a loyalty review program. Approximately 31,000 internees determined to be loyal were allowed to leave internment sites to attend school or work, but were not allowed to return to the West Coast. The War Department eventually terminated the exclusion and internment orders on December 17, 1944. Internees were given a train ticket and \$25 to resettle. There were no programs to help Japanese Americans reintegrate into normal American life. By the end of March, 1946, all of the War Relocation Centers were closed. Many who returned to their homes found that their property had been stolen or vandalized. A large number never returned to their homes, but instead resettled in places in the Midwest and East. Some faced strong public sentiment against Japanese Americans.

There are also countless stories of kindness. The Kazuo Hiyama family returned to the area on December 25, 1944, and found their farm in Fowler had been well-tended by neighbors R.L. Oliver and Henry Dies, who leased and operated the 40-acre vineyard during the Hiyama's forced two-and-a-half year absence. Many of the internees were fortunate to have friends that took care of their farms while they were detained. Charles Pashayan and Minoru ("Min") Omata were best friends who hunted together regularly before the war. The Omatas invited the Pashayans over for a traditional Japanese feast each New Year's Day. When the Omatas were required to report to the Fresno Assembly Center, Charles agreed to buy Min's farm in Sanger for \$1 and return it after the war. Charles was true to his word and Min was able to resume farming upon his release from the Minidoka War Relocation Center, Idaho.

Fred Hirasuna and Min Omata enjoy the fruits of their labor at Sunnyside Packing Company. In 1948, Min established the firm in Fresno on G Street with his partners, Morris Cocola and Fred Hirasuna, a charter member of the Fresno Loyalty League and Japanese American Citizens League. Chip Pashayan, the son of Min's friend, Charles Pashayan, was a Congressman during the Redress campaign. Mr. Hirasuna and other members of JACL approached Congressman Pashayan seeking his support of the Redress Bill. Chip agreed, becoming the first Republican co-sponsor in the House of Representatives. Congressman Pashayan knew from personal experience that "internment was clearly unconstitutional." Setsu Hirasuna Collection



Mary Masuda was threatened with bodily harm by five men unless she and her family moved out of Orange County, California. She had four brothers who served honorably during the war. Her brother, Sgt. Kazuo Masuda, was killed in action and received the Distinguished Service Cross. General Joseph ("Vinegar Joe") Stillwell and Captain Ronald Reagan presented the medal to Mary Masuda in an effort to reduce public sentiment against Japanese Americans resettling in the area. Masuda Family Collection



"Blood that has soaked into the sands of a beach is all of one color. America stands unique in the world: the only country not founded on race but on a way, an ideal. Not in spite of but because of our polyglot background, we have had all the strength in the world. That is the American way"  
Captain Ronald Reagan, December 10, 1945, at medal ceremony for Masuda Family

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