

Schooling During Executive Order 9066

Executive Order 9066 began the series of events that effectively incarcerated 110,000 Japanese Americans with over two-thirds of those people being second generation Americans. The internment camps were constructed due to fear and heightened racial prejudice that was rampant following the bombing of Pear Harbor. As the Japanese American had very little notice of their forced evacuation, sometimes only 48 hours, they had no choice but to abandon their homes, business, farms, and much of their personal possessions. This of course decimated their economic stability in the short term and began compounding over the four years that Executive Order lasted (1942 to 1946). As one might expect, the living situations were diminished at best, there was a lack of socialization, routine, and jobs. One can relate the living corridors to a college dorm, with shared amenities and a general lack of privacy. As a result, the general atmosphere was dim, however when extended to the school of the Japanese Americans during this time period a solace from the overbearing weight of the internment camps can be found.

Schooling may not be first thought of when examining life in the internment camps, however with the large amounts of youths and adolescents' school is a necessary outlet. In fact, schooling was one of the main drivers in the camp. School provided structure to the day, for some it provided self-fulfillment, it gave those the ability to socialize, others it gave a job, and of course the schooling taught overtly patriotic and Americanized ideals. The schooling in the internment camps was a battle of two forces -- a dimming one that was caused by the poor conditions and a positive one fueled by the Japanese Americans themselves.

The poor conditions can not be overstated. Essentially there were no classrooms, many held in emptied barracks without chairs or desks. With this there was little to no supplies that could be given to the students or teachers, science relied heavily on textbooks and students were often informed to "imagine" how things worked. Those who taught were that were not from the camps themselves, typically could not get jobs anywhere else and even with that the turnover was extremely high due to the poor physical conditions they had to work in. This exemplifies the true conditions that the schooling was preformed, even with bottom of the barrel candidates they still were not willing to stay. Moreover, the course work was limited. It typically focused on the patriotic and Americanized topics, including the constitution and, ironically, freedom. Yet, with all these factors going against the schooling, many still speak positively towards it.

For this it is accredited with two reasons, one the intense outside weight gave the sociability of school a higher ranking and the personal strife of Japanese American teachers. Although, there is not much to say about the already known doldrums of the internment camps, it still needs to be stated to give light on why school was important. The individuals who taught with passion and purpose were the bright spot for many. The teachers enriched the studies and implemented more Japanese heritage and tradition into the curriculum. In addition to this they gave the emotional outlet to students helping them grow.

The schooling system of the internment camps reflect why school is so important today. It provided not just education but also a sense of community, purpose, and resilience in the face of adversity. Despite the hardships, schooling in the internment camps became a symbol of perseverance, demonstrating how education can serve as both a refuge and a tool for empowerment even in the darkest of times.

Citations

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