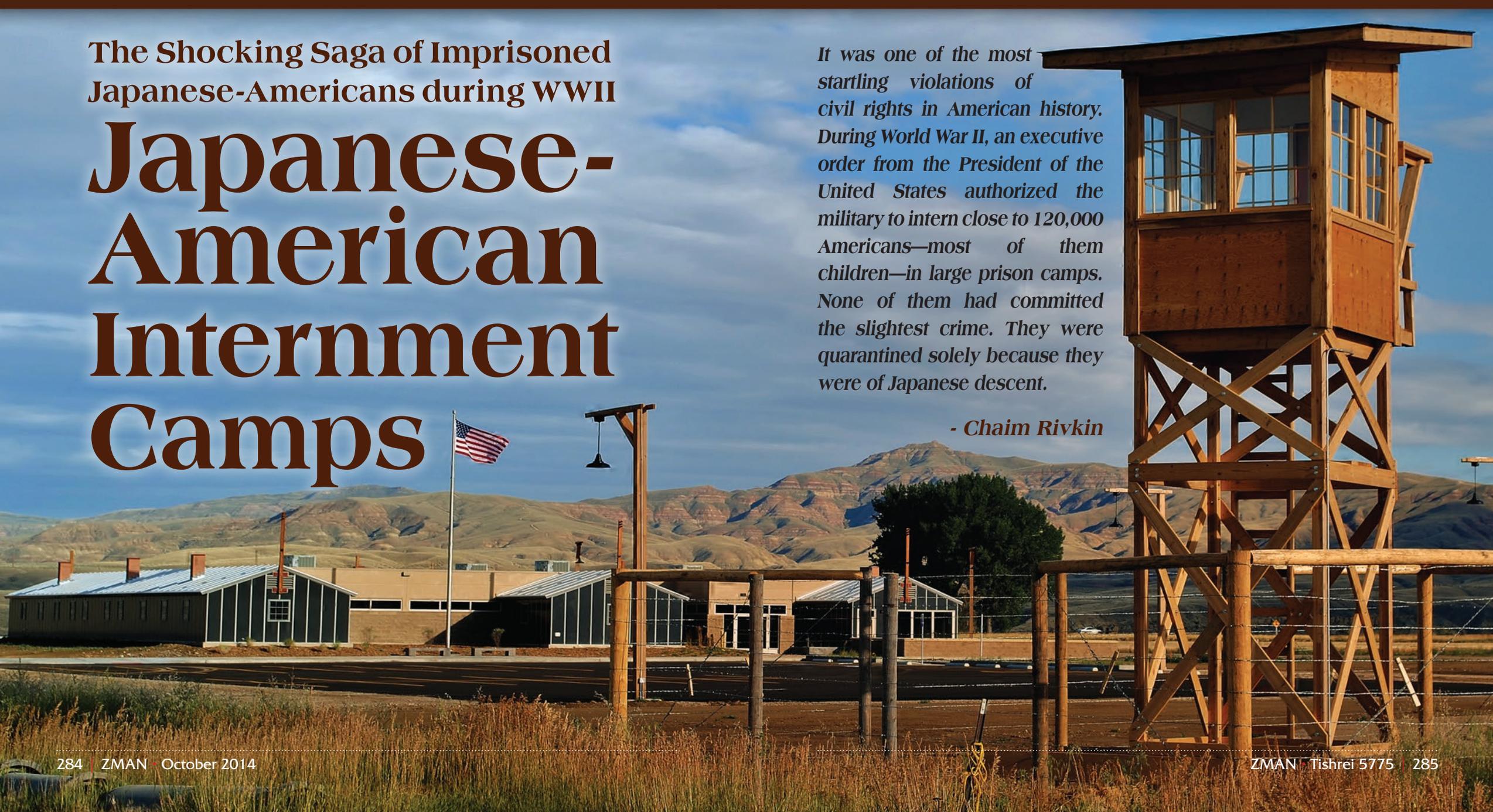


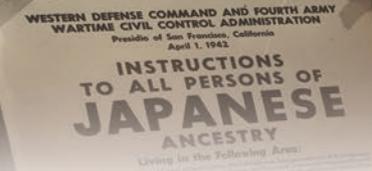
The Shocking Saga of Imprisoned Japanese-Americans during WWII

# Japanese-American Internment Camps

*It was one of the most startling violations of civil rights in American history. During World War II, an executive order from the President of the United States authorized the military to intern close to 120,000 Americans—most of them children—in large prison camps. None of them had committed the slightest crime. They were quarantined solely because they were of Japanese descent.*

*- Chaim Rivkin*





Isolation and desolation meets the eye in all directions. Inside the camp, bleak rows of barracks are lined up with military precision. These small wooden shacks with tarpaper roofs housed entire families in a single room as small as 20 x 20 feet. The bare furnishings consist of cots and a small stove to heat the room in the winter. There are no plumbing or kitchen facilities. Each block of barracks is served by its own communal kitchen, play area, shower and bathroom.

Nobody came here to enjoy a vacation. The occupants of these dwellings were there because they were not permitted anywhere else. They were forced into this camp, surrounded by barbed wire and stony-faced armed guards. Here they were kept safely apart from the rest of the population, under the watchful eye of the military administration.

This camp was indeed erected during World War II, but it was not created in Europe by Nazis to contain Jews and other "undesirables." This camp was set up right here in America.

No, the inhabitants were not dangerous criminals, enemy spies or saboteurs. In fact, more than half of the inhabitants were children. The sole reason people were sentenced to internment in this camp was because of their Japanese ancestry. American



The attack on Pearl Harbor intensified the longstanding hatred Americans felt toward Asians.



Remains of an American internment camp.



Remains of the Manzanar internment camp for Japanese-American citizens in California.

citizenship or naturalization did not protect them from this treatment.

Nor was this camp the only one of its type: Nine other identical camps were created in isolated locales in Wyoming, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho and Arizona. In all, over 100,000 people were interned in these camps.

And all this misery came about through an executive order from the President of the United States.

## Enemy Aliens

In the 1930s, Japan had embarked on an aggressive campaign of expansion in China and Southeast Asia. The United States had its own interests in Asia, and the two powers often clashed over just how much each was infringing on the territorial rights of the other. Diplomatic efforts kept the situation more or less in check, but as time went on it

became increasingly evident that a military conflict was looming.

America expected a conflict, but not the way it came about.

Early in the morning on December 7, 1941, the Japanese carried out a devastating surprise attack, sending 350 airplanes from undetected aircraft carriers to bomb US naval vessels anchored in Pearl Harbor. The attack lasted two hours, but inflicted a crippling blow to the US Pacific forces. Eight battleships and thirteen other war vessels were either sunk or put out of commission. Close to 200 American planes were destroyed as well, and casualties numbered some 3,000. The attack would leave US military might in the Pacific badly crippled for months to come.

In his speech to Congress the following day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared war and referred to the "unprovoked and dastardly attack by the Japanese," dubbing it "a date which will live in infamy." The intensity of the shock and surprise would not be felt again in America for another 60 years, until 9/11.

With the US officially at war with Japan, Nazi Germany's ally, Hitler declared war against America three days later. America responded with its own declaration of war against the Axis nations. The European conflict was now officially a world war.

From 1939, when the war first broke out in Europe, the FBI began keeping tabs on American citizens and foreigners in the US. In 1940, a special wartime law was passed requiring all foreigners ages 14 and up to register with the US government and to submit to fingerprinting. Nearly five million foreigners registered at US post offices across the country. These foreigners were given five days within which they were obligated to inform the government of a change of address.

Of the 127,000 Japanese-Americans within the United States, 112,000 lived along the West Coast. Of those, approximately 80,000 were "nisei," second-generation Americans,



Japanese board a bus to a relocation center.



Transport of Japanese-Americans arrives at a camp.

or "sansei," third-generation Americans. The remaining were "issei," first generation immigrants born in Japan living in the US. Under extant US immigration laws, Asian immigrants could not become US citizens. (This law was not changed until 1952!)

The deadly attack on Pearl Harbor deeply frightened all Americans. The attack succeeded in large part because Japanese intelligence had provided the planners and attackers with information on the targets (principally from Takeo Yoshikawa, a Japanese spy posing as a diplomat). It was only natural that Americans would become deeply suspicious of all foreigners and wonder whether some of them may have contributed to the blow by spying on behalf of their former homeland.

Adding fuel to the fire, rumors quickly began circulating that the surprise attack had been successful because the invaders were assisted by Japanese-American