

Post Pearl Harbor, Japanese-Americans

Executive Order 9066: Causes, Content, and Consequences

Introduction

On February 19, 1942, President **Franklin D. Roosevelt** signed **Executive Order 9066**, authorizing the U.S. military to designate military areas and exclude “any or all persons” from them. Although the order did not name a specific ethnic group, it directly enabled the mass removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. One of the **primary states used for incarceration was Arizona**, which housed some of the **largest camps in the entire system**.

Arizona's Role in Executive Order 9066

Arizona was **not merely adjacent** to the internment process — it was **central** to it.

Under Executive Order 9066, Arizona hosted **two of the largest Japanese American incarceration centers**:

- **Poston War Relocation Center**
- **Gila River War Relocation Center**

Together, these two camps confined **over 30,000 Japanese Americans**, making Arizona one of the **most significant incarceration states** in the nation.



Poston War Relocation Center (Arizona)

The **Poston camp**, located in western Arizona near the California border, was the **largest incarceration center** created under Executive Order 9066.

Key facts:

- Built on land belonging to the **Colorado River Indian Tribes**, without full consent
- Held more than **20,000 Japanese Americans** at its peak
- Operated in extreme desert conditions, including severe heat, dust storms, and inadequate infrastructure

Poston illustrates how Executive Order 9066 not only violated civil liberties but also **displaced harm onto Indigenous land**, compounding historical injustices.

Gila River War Relocation Center (Arizona)

The **Gila River camp**, located south of Phoenix, incarcerated approximately **13,000 people** and was unique in that it was built **entirely on Native American reservation land**.

Notable aspects:

- One of the **most remote and harsh environments** used
- Surrounded by desert with limited resources
- Japanese Americans were confined there **against the wishes of the tribal government**, which formally objected to the camp's presence

This further demonstrates how Executive Order 9066 intersected with **racial hierarchy, land control, and wartime**.

Legal and Constitutional Impact

The incarceration carried out in Arizona and other states was upheld at the time in **Korematsu v. United States**, which accepted the government's argument of "military necessity."

Decades later, this ruling has been widely condemned.

Aftermath and Redress

- Camps in Arizona closed in **1945**
- Many families leaving Arizona camps returned to the West Coast to find homes and businesses lost
- In **1976**, President **Gerald Ford** formally rescinded Executive Order 9066
- The **Civil Liberties Act of 1988** issued formal apologies and reparations

Why Arizona Must Be Named Explicitly

It was a **primary detention state** under Executive Order 9066.

Conclusion

Executive Order 9066 stands as a warning about how constitutional rights can be suspended through fear and executive power. Arizona's camps — **Poston and Gila River** — remain enduring symbols. Naming Arizona directly is essential for historical accuracy, ethical education, and accountability.

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