



Jose Carlos Fajardo Knight Ridder Tribune

A view of the Sierra mountains can be seen through a window in one of two military police sentry posts at the entrance to the newly created Manzanar National Historic Site in California.

## Former WWII camp dedicates new center

The former location for the Manzanar Japanese internment camp is turned into a national historic site

By Sandy Kleffman  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

MANZANAR, Calif. — Walk the grounds here, and the only sounds that emerge are the rustle of a darting lizard, the drone of an occasional jet and the distant rumble of traffic.

Yet Manzanar tells its story.

Weathered brown signs reveal where the mess halls, the hospital and the churches once stood.

Row upon row of foundations show how more than 10,000 people squeezed into one square mile, surrounded by barbed wire, searchlights and armed guards.

Finally, a worn historical marker drives the message home:

"May the injustices and humiliation suffered here as a result of hysteria, racism and economic exploitation never emerge again."

Last month, hundreds of people began converging on the Manzanar National Historic Site for the opening April 24 of a \$5.1 million interpretive center in the old Manzanar gym.

The center commemorates what many consider to be a shameful chapter in American history — the internment of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry during World War II.

To some, it may seem strange to transform a relocation center into a national park, recalling America at less than its finest hour.

But the former internees who pushed for such recognition say it's one thing to read about what happened in history books. It's another to walk where the military-style barracks stood, breathe the dust and envision the men, women and children who ate, slept and toiled here for 3 1/2 years.

"We tried very hard to personalize this story," said Alisa Lynch, chief of interpretation and cultural resources management for the National Park Service.

"It's a story that's so complex and controversial, it's important to have

multiple voices."

San Francisco resident Paul Ohtaki, who entered Manzanar at age 17, said he encounters young people today who don't believe the internment really happened.

"You must have done something wrong," he says they tell him.

"The main point is that we were locking up regular American citizens," Ohtaki said. "We were put in for no other reason than the fact that we looked like the enemy."

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Paul Ohtaki  
Former Manzanar prisoner

Park officials designed the interpretive center to illustrate experiences at all 10 relocation camps, including Topaz, Utah, where many Bay Area residents went.

The center, funded with a congressional allocation, has a section about Tule Lake in Northern California, where authorities segregated those who refused to sign loyalty oaths.

It also contains displays sure to provoke debate. A Sept. 11, 2001, photo of smoke billowing from the World Trade Center towers sits next to a shot of the USS Arizona in flames during the Pearl Harbor attack.

A quote from Benjamin Franklin runs above both photos: "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Park officials hope visitors make connections with recent events as they learn the Manzanar story, said Superintendent Frank Hays.

The United States entered World War II after Japan's deadly attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

The attack intensified racial  
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