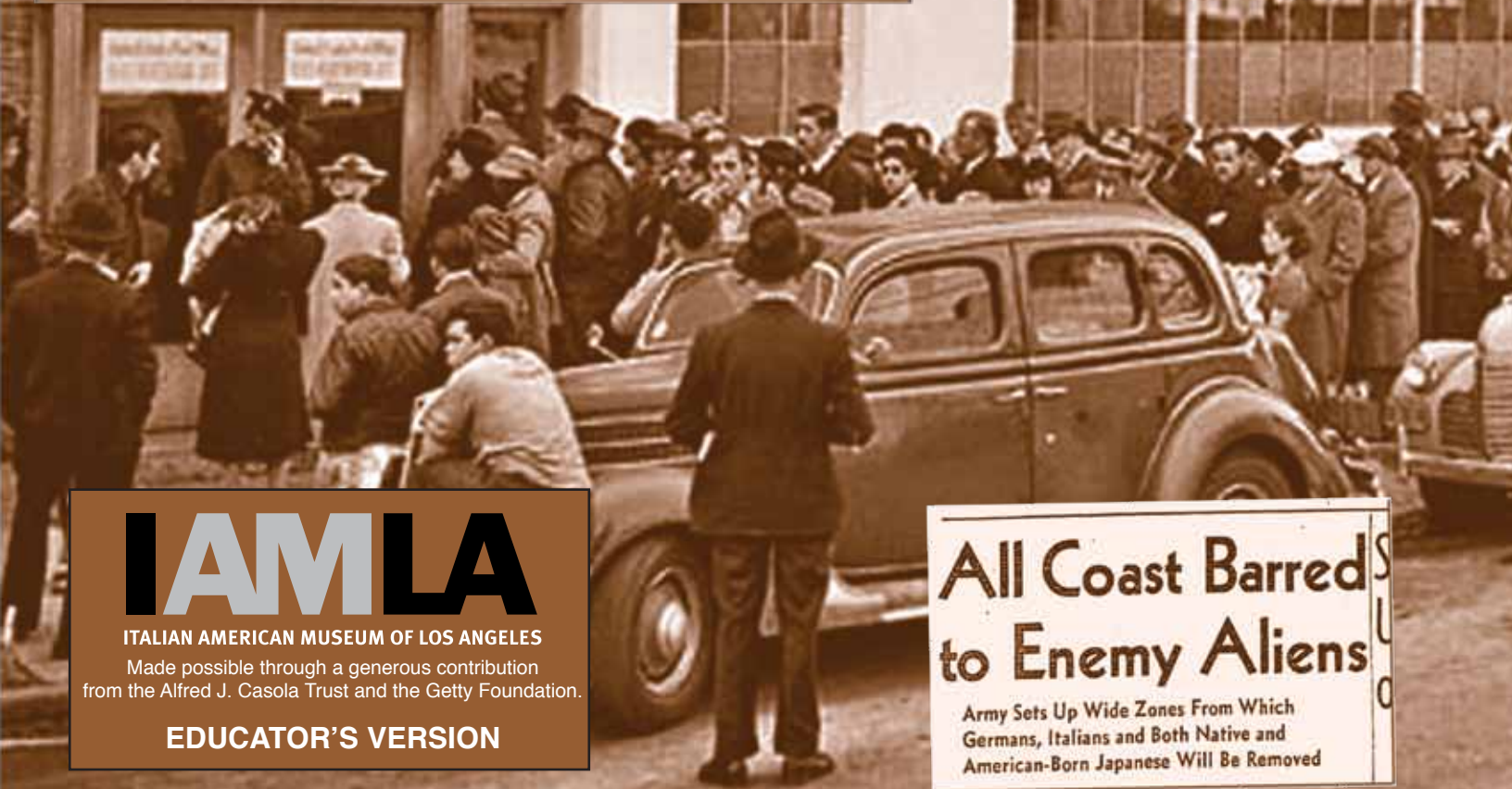


UNA STORIA SEGRETA: THE INTERNMENT OF ITALIAN AMERICANS AND THE VIOLATION OF THEIR CIVIL LIBERTIES DURING WORLD WAR II



IAMLA
ITALIAN AMERICAN MUSEUM OF LOS ANGELES
Made possible through a generous contribution
from the Alfred J. Casola Trust and the Getty Foundation.
EDUCATOR'S VERSION

**All Coast Barred
to Enemy Aliens**
Army Sets Up Wide Zones From Which
Germans, Italians and Both Native and
American-Born Japanese Will Be Removed

UNA STORIA SEGRETA: THE INTERNMENT OF ITALIAN AMERICANS AND THE VIOLATION OF THEIR CIVIL LIBERTIES DURING WORLD WAR II

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Una Storia Segreta: The Internment and Violations of Italian Americans' Civil Liberties During World War II

While the United States has had a long history of **anti-Italianism**, hostility directed at Italian Americans reached another peak during World War II, when the United States joined the Allied powers in the fight against Germany, Italy, and Japan. Following the bombing of **Pearl Harbor**, 600,000 Italian American residents of the United States who had not become **naturalized** citizens were declared “enemy aliens.” Many were arrested, imprisoned at **internment camps**, forced to **evacuate** their homes, and ordered to surrender property to the United States government. Italian Americans refer to this event as *Una Storia Segreta*, or “a secret history,” because it remained **shrouded in secrecy**, denial, pain, and humiliation for decades. The lack of knowledge about this tragic series of events persists. Most high school and college textbooks contain no mention of the violations of Italians’ and Germans’ civil liberties during World War II. A recent article in the *San Francisco Examiner* on the Japanese internment declared, “The United States was also at war with Hitler and Mussolini, but no Italians or Germans were sent to concentration camps.”

Prelude to War

Initially, the United States had supported **Benito Mussolini** and his efforts to modernize Italy, grow the economy, and improve the country’s agricultural, education, and transportation systems. This changed in 1937, however, when Mussolini



Newspaper announcing the United States' entry into WWII



World War II propaganda poster, with caricatures of Adolf Hitler (of Germany), Emperor Hirohito (of Japan), and Benito Mussolini (of Italy), urging Americans to not speak German, Japanese, Italian, “the enemy’s languages.” *Courtesy of the Italian American Studies Association Western Regional Chapter*

joined the **Axis powers**. As

concern over

fascism spread, many members of the Italian community attempted to distance themselves from their **ethnicity** and **reaffirm** their loyalty to the United States. When Britain and France declared war on the Axis powers, President Roosevelt asked FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to make a list of possible “enemy agents” among the Japanese, Italian, and German populations in the United States to be arrested in case of a **national emergency**. The list

included influential members of the communities, as well as language teachers, journalists, war veterans, and anyone suspected of harboring “anti-American” sympathies.

Enemy Aliens



President Roosevelt signing Executive Order 9066

Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the United States’ entry into World War II, Roosevelt issued Presidential Proclamations 2525, 2526, and 2527, which authorized the United States to detain potentially dangerous “enemy aliens.”

Nationwide, approximately 600,000 Italian-born residents of the United States were declared **enemy**

aliens. The term “enemy alien” was not unique to World War II. The classification traces its roots to the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, which stated that if the United States was at war with a country, then any “natives,

citizens, denizens, or subjects of the hostile nation” residing in the United States who were not **naturalized** citizens were considered “enemy aliens.” Using this authority, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies arrested thousands



Enemy alien identification card for Frances Corsentino, of Los Angeles. Courtesy of the IAMLA

of individuals, most of whom were of German, Italian, or Japanese ancestry.

Registrations and Restrictions

In the weeks following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, enemy aliens in the United States and its territories were ordered to surrender cameras,

short wave radios, and **radio transmitters.**

Other contraband items were flashlights, boats, binoculars, and weapons, including hunting rifles. Enemy aliens were prohibited from traveling outside

a five-mile **radius** of their homes, even for employment, and were banned from entering “strategic areas” such as power stations and airports. In San Francisco, Giuseppe DiMaggio, father of baseball great Joe DiMaggio, could not visit his son’s restaurant because it was in a prohibited zone.



Passport photo of Maria Ricci, a satirist and writer declared an “enemy alien”
Courtesy of the IAMLA

Enemy aliens were subject to a curfew from 8 pm to 6 am. Many enemy aliens lost their jobs because of the curfews and travel restrictions. In Santa Rosa, California, Aristide Bertolini, who had



Enemy alien registration at a Los Angeles post office
Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times

a produce business, arrived home one evening just minutes after 8 pm. A neighbor reported him, and Bertolini was arrested and held at an INS detention center for two months. In January 1942, enemy aliens 14 years and older were ordered to register at their local post office, where they were fingerprinted and provided enemy alien identification cards, which they were required to carry at all times. Failure to comply could result in severe penalties, including internment. Maria Ricci, a **political satirist** and so-called enemy alien, was visited by the FBI every month for nearly a year because a shortwave radio and revolvers were found in her home. At no time during the bureau's investigation of Ricci was she found to be engaging in subversive activity.

Evacuations and Internment

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which, along with Executive Order 9102, authorized the removal of persons from specified areas in the interest of **national security**. While this order cleared the way for the removal of Japanese Americans, nowhere in the order are the Japanese mentioned specifically. This law allowed for the removal of *any person* from prescribed sensitive military areas. Approximately 10,000 Italian Americans were evacuated from their homes located in the "restricted zones" along the California coast, including the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles, as well as locations in close proximity to oil fields, aircraft plants, and **hydroelectric installations**. Evacuees were often given very little notice before their forced relocation. Because of wartime housing shortages, some Italian families resorted to living in chicken coops or garages or having multiple families reside in a single home.

F.B.I. ARRESTS OF PERSONS OF ENEMY NATIONALITY REPORTED
for the period
December 7, 1941 to June 30, 1945

F.B.I. Field Office	German	Japanese	Italian	Other	Total
Los Angeles	201	2,041	142	0	2,384
New York	2,159	391	406	8	2,964
San Diego	37	272	6	0	315
Miami	158	29	212	0	399
San Francisco	334	667	458	0	1,459
Newark	756	49	30	1	836
Subtotal	3,645	3,449	1,254	9	8,357
Percent	44%	41%	15%	< 1%	100%
Remaining 56 FBI Field Offices	3,519	2,577	2,342	15	8,453
Percent	41%	31%	28%	< 1%	100%
Total Arrests	7,164	6,026	3,596	24	16,810
Percent	43%	36%	21%	< 1%	100%

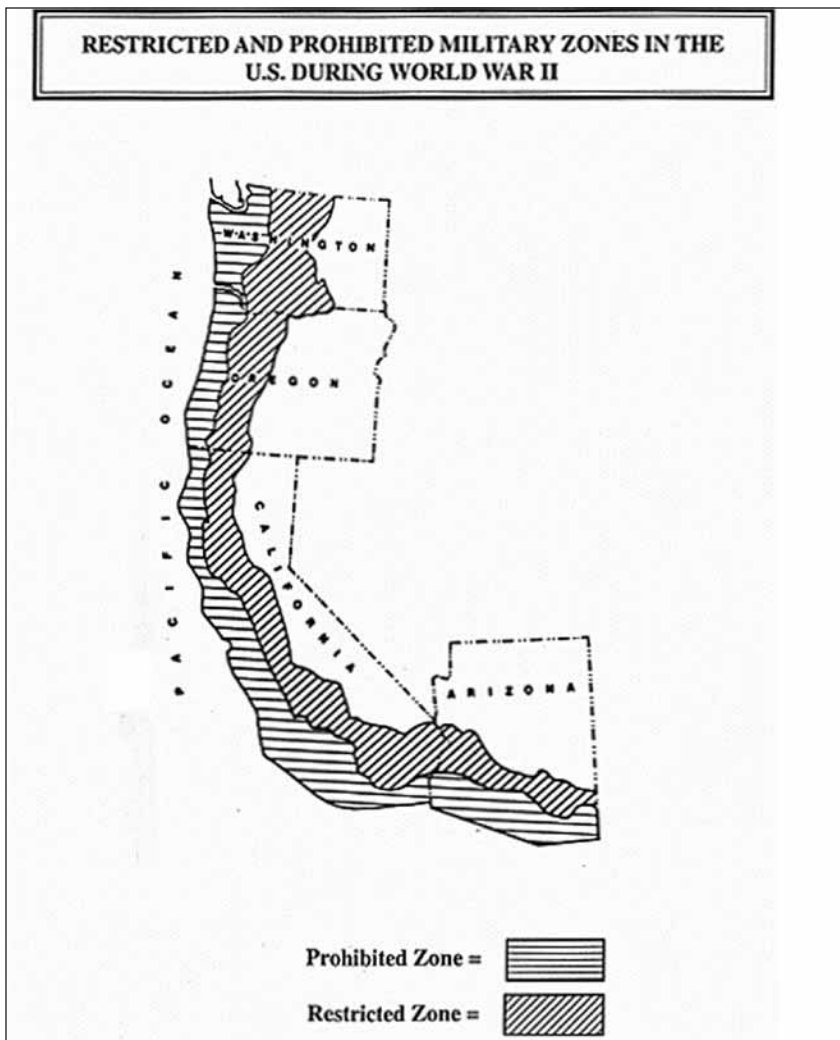
Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.), Department of Justice. Reference Document 100-2-4014, entitled APPREHENSIONS, December 7, 1941 to June 30 1945, unclassified on 8/17/90. Freedom of Information and Privacy Act request number 319,225.

Table prepared by: Arthur D. Jacobs, September 5, 1990.

List of arrests made by the FBI in the Los Angeles area

In February 1942, two agents from the Department of Justice arrived at the Santa Cruz home of Batistina Loero, who was seventy-eight years old and weighed less than 100 pounds. Batistina did not speak English, and the federal agents spoke no Italian. Her granddaughter, who lived next door, was summoned to explain that, as an enemy alien who lived in a restricted area, Batistina was in violation of federal law and had 48 hours to move or face arrest. Batistina was the mother of two sons and two grandsons then serving in the U.S. Navy and had lived in her home for almost 50 years.

As the deadline approached, immigrant families often panicked. In many families, only one member, perhaps the mother or uncle, had not attained citizenship. If the mother was forced to leave, what



Map depicting zones prohibited to enemy aliens *Courtesy of the U.S. War Department*

enemy aliens, contain numerous ironies. Many enemy aliens had been living in America for decades and had American-born children and grandchildren. The mayors of important U.S. cities—Fiorello LaGuardia in New York and Angelo Rossi in San Francisco—were of Italian ancestry. During World War II, Italian Americans were the largest and among the most decorated ethnic group in the U.S. military, yet the loyalty of their parents and elders was questioned. Italian American fishermen, who proudly contributed their catches to the war effort, often had their boats **seized** or were prohibited from fishing in coastal waters. Newspapers often wrote about the absurdity of this: “Fishermen With 23 Sons in Army and Navy Are Bound to Wharf While Boats Lie Idle and Sea Food Is Needed.” Other enemy aliens were **anti-fascist** refugees who fled Mussolini’s **regime**; some were Jews who had escaped Nazi Germany. When the Ghio brothers of Santa Cruz returned from serving in the U.S. military in the spring of 1942, they discovered their family home empty and their family missing.

Italian American and Lincoln Heights resident Joe Romano, who enlisted in the U.S. Navy during WWII and perished in combat *Courtesy of the IAMLA*



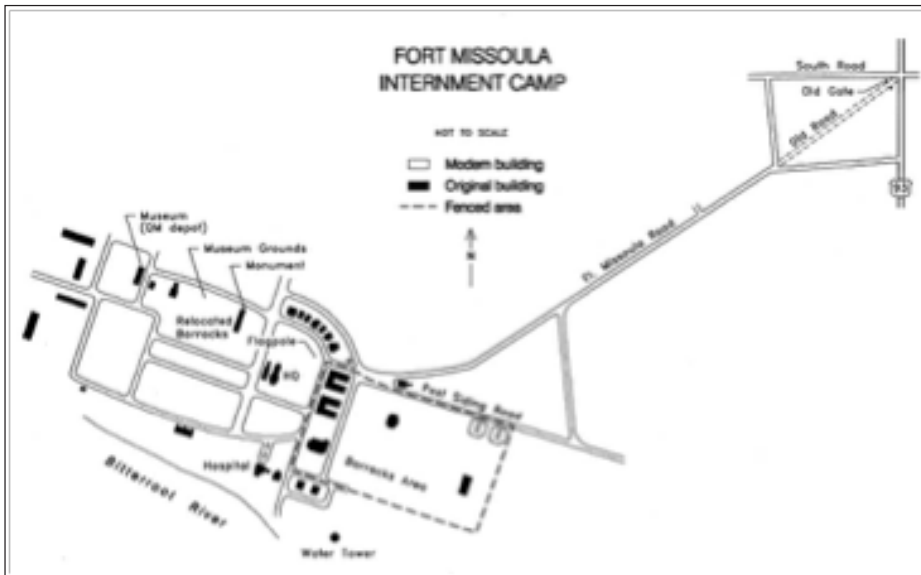
would happen to her children? If the family’s store or farm was located in the prohibited zone, who would operate the business? How would the family survive? When Josephine Billeci, of Pittsburg, California, gave birth in a hospital located in a prohibited zone, her husband, Nino, an enemy alien, could not visit her unless he was accompanied by law enforcement. The first time he saw his child, Billeci was wearing handcuffs, escorted by police.

No consideration was given for age or health when relocating enemy aliens. Eighty-nine-year-old Placido Abono was carried out of his San Francisco home on a stretcher because it was in a prohibited zone. Perhaps one of the most heartbreaking stories among the evacuees is that of Rosina Trovato, of Monterey, California. Trovato was informed that both her son and nephew had perished at Pearl Harbor. The following day, she was forced to evacuate her home.

Rosina’s story, and that of the majority of

Steve Ghio, still in his Navy uniform, then went to the police station. After reviewing a series of records, he discovered that his family had been evacuated and was living miles away.

In the early days of the war, many of Roosevelt's advisors called for the relocation of German, Italian, and Japanese Americans in various parts of the country, regardless of citizenship status. Roosevelt eventually dismissed his advisors' counsel, recognizing that the mass evacuations of Germans and Italians, which would have involved the removal of approximately 10 million people, would likely provoke **hysteria** and be **detrimental** to the war effort. Due to the difficulty of enforcing Executive Orders 9066 and 9102, relocations were often sporadic, limited to the Pacific Slope (coastal lands of Washington State, California, and Oregon to about 60 miles inland), and enforced primarily in the Japanese American community.



Map of Fort Missoula Internment Camp *Courtesy of the National Park Service*

Japanese Americans were easier to identify, based on **phenotypes**, and had long been the subjects of racially discriminatory laws that prevented them from owning land, voting, and testifying against whites in court. While 40 percent of the population of Hawaii was of Japanese ancestry, few were detained or **incarcerated**. Meanwhile, on the West Coast, 120,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of whom were American citizens, were evicted and held in internment camps. The Japanese community of Terminal Island, near San Pedro, California, which numbered 3,500, was the first to be evacuated and interned **en masse**. Their neighborhoods were **razed** and replaced with defense industry operations, such as shipbuilding. These actions suggest that factors other than “military necessity,” including greed and racism, motivated the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans.

By June 1942, the FBI had arrested over 1,500 Italian enemy aliens; approximately 400 were considered threatening enough to confine in internment camps. Filippo Fordelone, a popular radio broadcaster in Los Angeles, was arrested by the FBI and imprisoned at an internment camp. His wife was left to care for the couple's three young children without any means of support

Enemy aliens waiting to register at a Los Angeles post office. *The lines often stretched several blocks.* *Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times*



after the family's assets were frozen. It took months and sometimes years before relatives and associates learned what happened to their loved ones. When Filippo Molinari, employee of *L'Italia* newspaper in San Francisco, was arrested at 11 pm on December 7 at his home, he was wearing slippers. The policemen did not allow him to put on his shoes. When he arrived at the internment camp, it was 17 degrees below zero, and he had neither a coat nor shoes.



Aerial view of Fort Missoula Courtesy of the Historical Museum Fort Missoula

Internees were transported on trains with darkened and barred windows. At the rear of each train car stood a guard armed with a machine gun. As the train traveled north, it picked up other internees, who often wept and grew increasingly anxious as the journey continued. It seemed inconceivable to them. Was the United States not the home of the free? Didn't the American justice system guarantee that they were innocent



Internees of Fort Missoula internees playing soccer Courtesy of the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula

until proven guilty? What crime were they accused of committing? Italian internees were most often sent to Fort Missoula in Montana, which was nicknamed *Bella Vista*, or "Beautiful View," by internees. Other detention camps existed in New Mexico, Texas, and California, including Tuna

Canyon Detention Station in Sunland-Tujunga, near Pasadena. Armed guards in towers monitored internees at all times at the camps. **Lodgings** at most camps were relatively comfortable. Fort Missoula was self-sufficient with a hospital, school, library, theater, and **mess hall**, which served Italian and Japanese food. Internees were often assigned to camp maintenance projects, and some found work at local farms. Although the camp routine could be monotonous, internees made the best of their situation, playing baseball and organizing musical entertainment. They remained, however, prisoners in freedom's land, their lives on hold, not knowing when they would be released and reunited with their families.

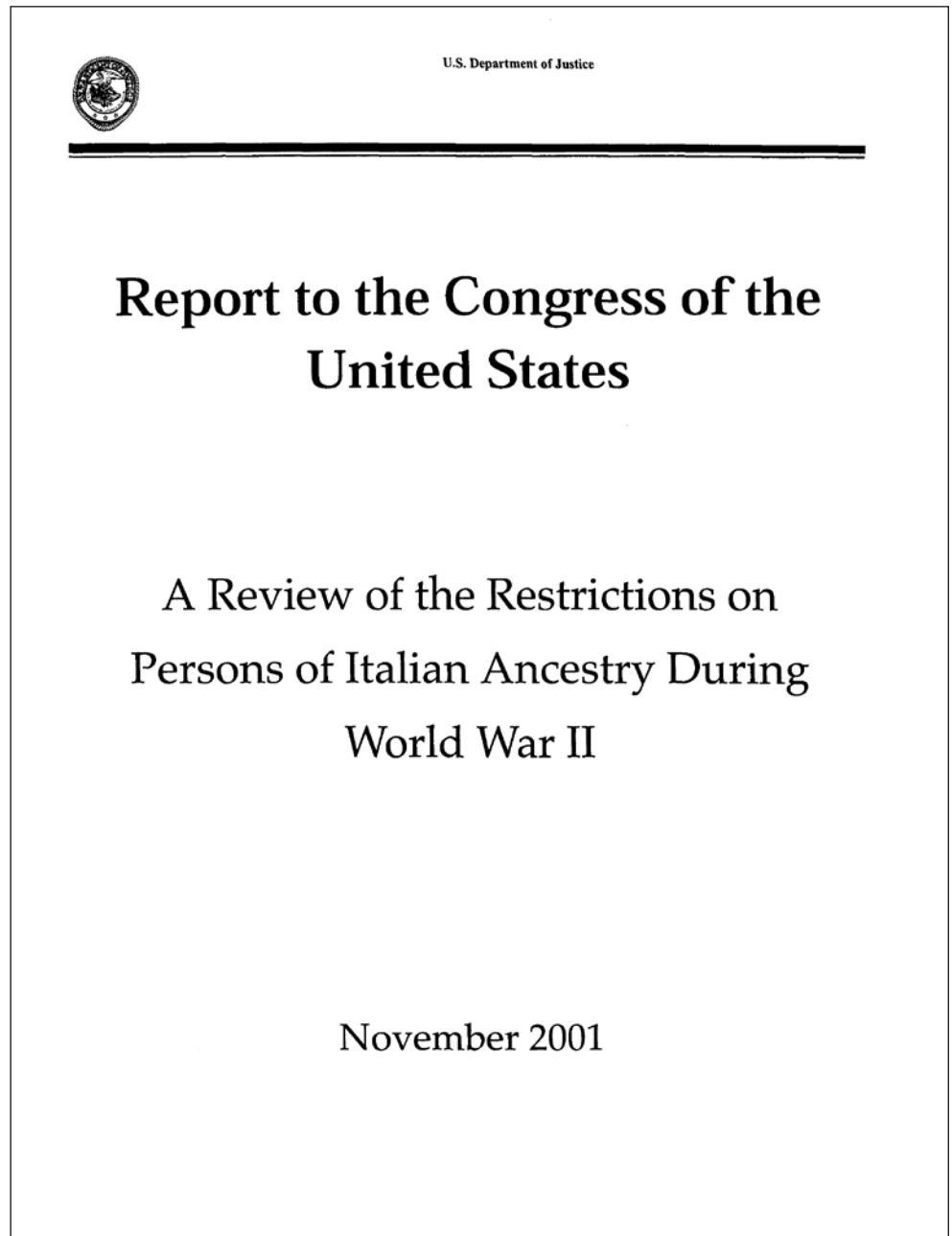
As World War II progressed in Europe, Roosevelt became increasingly aware that he needed support for the war. Italian Americans comprised 10 percent of the United States' population; they were the nation's largest ethnic group and an important voting bloc. On Columbus Day, October 12, 1942, Roosevelt removed the enemy alien restrictions from the Italian community, though many would remain imprisoned or evacuated until the war's end. Despite exhaustive investigations, not a single

Italian American was found to be engaged in subversive activities or pose a significant threat to the nation's security.

The Aftermath

While Italian Americans were no longer considered enemy aliens, the restrictions, relocations, and internments left deep scars in the community. As a result of the wartime **stigma**, many Italian Americans stopped speaking their native language and distanced themselves from their heritage. The effects of these wartime stigmas can still be felt today.

In 2000, President Bill Clinton signed the “Wartime Violation of Italian American Civil Liberties Act,” a formal apology by the United States government for the mistreatment of Italian Americans during World War II. This document acknowledged the injustices that the community suffered, provided a detailed report of the restrictions, and expressed an interest in discouraging “the occurrence of similar injustices and violations of civil liberties in the future.” The state of California also issued an apology to Italian Americans in March 2010. California admitted its “deepest regrets of these acts” and reaffirmed that it would protect the civil rights of its people in the future. No Italian American has filed suit against the U.S. government for **reparations**.





Una Storia Segreta: The Internment of Italian Americans and the Violation of Their Civil Liberties During World War II

Objectives:

- Students learn about the violations of Italian American civil liberties during World War II, including internment, arrests, and relocation, and the legacy of this experience.
- Students identify how major events are related to each other in time.
- Students understand how national security measures collide with issues of due process and civil and human rights during times of war.

California State Content Standards

Social Science

U.S. History

11.7: Students analyze America's participation in World War II.

5. Discuss the constitutional issues and impact of events on the U.S. home front, including the internment of Japanese Americans (e.g., *Korematsu v. United States of America*) and the restrictions on German and Italian resident aliens; the response of the administration to Hitler's atrocities against Jews and other groups; the roles of women in military production; and the roles and growing political demands of African Americans.

Government

12.10: Students formulate questions about and defend their analyses of tensions within our constitutional democracy and the importance of maintaining a balance between the following concepts: majority rule and individual rights; liberty and equality; state and national authority in a government system; civil disobedience and the rule of law; freedom of the press and the right to a fair trial; the relationship of religion and government.

Materials:

Una Storia Segreta: The Internment of Italian Americans and the Violation of Their Civil Liberties During World War II readings for educators and students. Various videos exist online documenting Japanese evacuations. The following provides the U.S. government's perspective at the time: <https://archive.org/details/Japanese1943>

Vocabulary:

Anti-Italianism, Pearl Harbor, internment camps, evacuate, Benito Mussolini, Axis powers, ethnicity, reaffirm, national emergency, enemy aliens, naturalized, ancestry, short wave radios, radio transmitters, radius, curfew, political satirist, national security, hydroelectric installations, evacuees, seized, anti-fascist refugees, regime, detrimental, hysteria, phenotypes, incarcerated, en masse, razed, frozen, lodgings, mess hall, stigma, reparations.

Directions:

Provide students with copy of *Una Storia Segreta: The Internment of Italian Americans and the Violation of their Civil Liberties During World War II* reading. Assign reading as homework or read as a classroom activity. Discuss the reading in the context of the constitutional issues and impact of events on the U.S. home front, including the internment of Japanese residents and the restrictions on German and Italian resident aliens. Students then select (or teacher assigns) activity A, B, or C below.

Activities:

Activity A: As we have seen in this lesson, and following the September 11, 2001, attacks with the passage of the Patriot Act, the United States government has suspended certain civil liberties in times of war and national emergency. Is it justified to suspend civil rights for the sake of national security during such times? Should our government be allowed to exercise extra-constitutional powers in case of emergency?

Teacher divides students into two groups. One group takes the affirmative position that the government has the right to suspend civil liberties in case of emergency or in the interest of national security, and the other group takes the opposing position. Each group should have at least three concrete reasons supporting their position, and will be awarded points based on a teacher-decided rubric for the persuasive strength and evidence provided in their arguments.

Activity B: Using what the students have learned about Japanese American and Italian American experiences in World War II, compare and contrast the experiences of the two groups. Then, in a one-page paper, explain why the restrictions on Japanese and Italian civilians constituted a civil rights violation.

Activity C: Arrange students in groups of 3-5. Ask students to select the story of an evacuee or evacuee's family (of any ethnicity) profiled in the *Una Storia Segreta* reading, or an evacuee's story from a different source. Demonstrating an awareness of historical facts, each group presents a dramatization of the evacuee or family of an evacuee's experience, such as:

- A mother ordered to evacuate who must leave behind her husband and children or children who have been separated from one or both of their parents due to

internment or evacuation.

- Enemy aliens who form a delegation that travels to Washington, D.C., to persuade elected officials that the restrictions are unfair.
- A sailor who returns home to find his family home empty and his family missing.
- A husband whose wife was arrested and interned and who does not know her whereabouts.
- A family whose business is located in the restricted zone. Who operates the business if the family is prohibited from entering?

Glossary

Fascism: A way of organizing a society in which a government ruled by a dictator controls the lives of the people and in which people are not allowed to disagree with the government.

Enemy Aliens: A resident living in a country at war with the country that he or she is a citizen of.

Internment: To confine, especially during war.

Satirist: Someone who writes satire; satire is a way of using humor to show that something is weak, foolish, or bad.

Hydroelectric Installations: Facilities that create electricity produced by moving water.

Internee: A prisoner at an internment camp.

Civil Liberties: Rights that protect individuals' freedoms, and ensure one's ability to participate in society without discrimination. Civil rights include freedom of speech and expression and freedom of religion.

Anti-Italianism: A negative attitude toward Italian people or people of Italian ancestry.

Pearl Harbor: A lagoon harbor on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, that is a United States deep water naval base.

Internment camps: Government-run camps used to keep certain people prisoner during war time.

Evacuate: To remove someone from a place.

Benito Mussolini: An Italian fascist dictator. He was appointed prime minister by King Victor Emmanuel III and assumed dictatorial powers. He allied Italy with Germany.

Axis Powers: Germany, Italy, and Japan, which were allied before and during World War II.

Ethnicity: A particular racial, national, or cultural group.

Reaffirm: To state again as being true.

National Emergency: A state of emergency resulting from a danger or threat of danger to a nation.

Naturalized: To become a citizen from a country other than where you were born.

Short wave Radios: A radio that transmits or receives short waves.

Radio Transmitters: An electronic device which, with the help of an antenna, produces radio waves.

Radius: The distance from the center to the edge of a circle.

Curfew: An order specifying a time during which certain people must remain at home or indoors.

National Security: A collective term for the defense and foreign relations of a country.

Evacuee: A person that has been evacuated from a place.

Seize: Take hold of suddenly or forcibly.

Anti-Fascist Refugees: People who have fled a fascist government.

Regime: A government, especially an authoritarian one.

Hysteria: Uncontrollable emotion or excitement, especially among a group.

Detrimental: Tending to cause harm.

Phenotypes: The expression of a specific trait, often in physical appearance, such as stature or blood type, based on genetic and environmental influences.

Incarcerated: Imprisoned or confined.

En masse: In a large group.

Razed: Completely destroyed.

Frozen: Can not be used in any way.

Lodgings: A place in which someone lives or stays temporarily.

Mess Hall: A room or building where groups of people eat together.

Stigma: A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance or characteristic.

Reparations: The compensation for war damage paid by a defeated state or government.

Further Reading

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