

The Other Internment

Teaching the hidden story of Japanese Latin Americans during WWII

BY MOË YONAMINE

MY UNIT ON THE LARGELY UNKNOWN history of the internment of Japanese Latin Americans began 12 years ago. I was on a bus from Portland, Ore., to Tule Lake, Calif., site of one of the largest Japanese American incarceration camps during World War II. “I am from Japan,” the elder sitting next to me said in Japanese. “But I am originally from Peru.” For me, it was an honorable coincidence to find myself next to this elder.

An elder sitting in front of us turned around and said in English, “He looks very familiar.” As I translated their conversation, it came out that they were both young boys interned at Tule Lake. “I know him!” said the Japanese American elder. “He was my friend!” Grabbing the Peruvian man’s hand and shaking it firmly, he explained that they played baseball together often but that one day his friend just disappeared. His friend had only spoken Spanish, so he could never ask him what he was doing in the camp. He had wondered all of these years what had happened to him. The Peruvian Japanese elder’s face beamed with joy as the two continued to shake hands, not letting go. “I am so glad you are safe,” he said. They had reunited after more than 50 years.

Among those who attended the Tule Lake Pilgrimage were children and grandchildren of internees who

hoped to learn from the oral stories of the elders. Many have since joined the Campaign for Justice, seeking redress from the U.S. government for orchestrating and financing the forcible deportation and incarceration of Japanese Latin Americans (JLAs) during World War II.

This is the little-known background to the unit that I decided to teach my 8th-grade U.S. history students: Even before Pearl Harbor, in October 1941, the U.S. government initiated plans to construct an internment camp near



Jordin isip

the Panama Canal Zone for JLAs. The United States targeted JLAs it deemed security threats and pressured Latin American governments to round them up and turn them over, prompting Peru to engage in the mass arrest of Japanese descendents it sought to expel. Beginning in 1942, 13 Latin American governments arrested more than 2,300 JLAs in their countries (more than 80 percent from Peru), including teachers, farmers, barbers, and businessmen. The U.S. government transported the JLAs from Panama to internment camps in the United States, confiscating passports and visas. Two prisoner exchanges with Japan took place in 1942 and 1943 of at least 800 JLAs—many of whom had never been to Japan. Fourteen hundred JLAs remained in U.S. internment camps until the end of the war, when the government deemed them “illegal aliens.” Meanwhile, the Peruvian government refused to readmit any of its citizens of Japanese origin. With nowhere to go, more than 900 Japanese Peruvians were deported to Japan in December 1945. Some JLA survivors are now telling their stories for the first time; new information is still being uncovered.

As an Okinawan, this history hit close to my heart. In *The Japanese in Latin America*, I learned that large waves of Okinawans migrated to South America beginning in the late 1800s as the once sovereign Ryukyu island chain was brought under Japanese control. By the time WWII began, the majority of immigrants to Peru were Okinawan. There was also a large group in Brazil. Many families in Okinawa today have relatives from South America including my own, but stories of their migration and their lives thereafter remain largely untold.

My own questions turned into my inquiry as a history teacher. How can I teach 8th graders to imagine the experiences of people from another time in history and make connections to today? How can I teach them about social injustice in a way that will make them feel empowered and not cynical? How can I encourage students to visualize what a just world would look like to them?

Teaching Internment

“Are those refugee houses?”

“It looks like people are being treated like animals.”

“It looks hot. Is it World War II? Are they Asian? Are they Jewish?”

“I think of boot camp and prison.”

My students had just walked through a photo gallery showing the forced removal and incarceration of JLAs. Our overcrowded room (40 students!) included many immigrants—Mexican, Vietnamese, Filipino, Pacific Islander, Russian—along with Chicano/as, African Americans, and white students. They wrote their impressions of the black-and-white pictures, trying to make sense of a story none had ever heard.

Then I wrote on the board:

Rounded up in the sweltering yard.

Unable to endure any longer

Standing in line

Some collapse.

This is one of 13 poems etched in the stones of the Japanese American Historical Plaza of Portland, which honors the internment stories of local Japanese Americans. I read the poem aloud to the class and asked students to write what they thought the poem was about. It brought up more questions than answers. One student wrote: “In trouble? Military thing? Why is she there? What did she do to deserve this?” I read a few more of the poems and students continued to write.

One Mexican American student wrote: “Like any group working in the camp, they can’t take the heat anymore because they’ve been working all day. Standing outside ready to be transported to a new place like the Asian people in the pictures.” Throughout the unit students wrote regularly in journals. This particular student often wrote about his family’s experience as migrant workers and connected their experiences to those of the internees.

When I showed the class a map of the detention centers and incarceration camps, Ashley shouted, “That’s Oregon!” I explained that many people from Portland were affected and told the story of the Portland Expo Center (now used for

large community events and cultural festivals), which was a detention center used to round up Japanese American families from our area. “You mean the racetracks up there in North Portland?” one student asked. “I grew up there!”

My students had learned little about the incarceration of local families. I explained that many people left Japan for the mainland United States, Hawaii, and Latin America, beginning in the late 1800s, to look for work. “Like the Mexicans now,” Javier said. “We come over here because there’s no work, you know. There’s no money. Our parents just want to do something so they can make sure there’s food and stuff.” A few other Mexican American students in the room nodded, listening attentively.

“Well, it’s like that for Filipinos, too,” Addel chimed in. “I know my family came over for a better life. I think it’s like that for a lot of people.” Javier looked at Addel and nodded from across the room. I had never seen Javier and Addel interact with each other before.

I introduced President Franklin Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066, ordering the internment of Japanese Americans along the West Coast in 1942. I explained that more than 110,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated. But there were also Japanese Latin Americans. I pointed to the photo gallery and a student let out a gasp from the back of the room.

We read excerpts from “Latin Americans,” an appendix to *Personal Justice Denied*, a report by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. Students immediately jumped in with questions:

“How could they get away with that?”

“That’s messed up. How can people just sit there and let this happen?”

Sam, an immigrant from Liberia, interjected passionately, halfway out of his seat, “Why couldn’t we [the United States] just let everyone live here?” Since Sam had never before participated in class discussion, his excitement brought smiles from classmates.

Reparations Role Play

I didn’t tell too much of the history because I wanted the role play I had developed to spark the students’ curiosity. I based my role play on the format of Wayne Au’s “Addressing Redress,” which focuses on the issue of Japanese American redress. Au’s activity appealed to me because it is structured so that students are empowered to imagine a different conversation among groups and a different outcome in providing justice.

I introduced the role play by telling the class that, since there is not enough information on this history, a committee has been appointed to hold hearings and to make decisions on the issue of

redress: “We are going to imagine what the outcome should be. You are each going to represent someone who has something to say about this.” I explained that they would share their character’s experiences and different perspectives with the committee.

When the students walked into class the next day, the group assignments were written on the board. Even before the bell rang,

all of the students had circled their desks into groups and seated themselves. I handed each group a placard to write their group’s name. The groups represented Japanese Latin Americans interned in the United States who stayed here; those who were deported to Japan; the governments of Latin American countries that gave up their Japanese descendents to the United States; Latin American vegetable growers who lobbied against the return of Japanese farmers; and contemporary U.S. citizens opposed to reparations. A final group of students were the judiciary committee that would have to make the ultimate decision on redress.

As I walked around the room introducing the groups to each other, the vibe was good-spirited and eager. There were some high fives and smiles of “What?!” when students learned what their role would be. Then I gave each group their full role play description to read together.

How can I teach my students about social injustice in a way that will make them feel empowered and not cynical?

As part of their regular journal writing, I asked students to introduce themselves to me in character to help them internalize the information.

After students wrote, they proceeded to discuss with their group—staying in character—the following questions:

- Was the removal and internment of Japanese Latin Americans just or unjust? Why or why not?
- If unjust, what kind of redress should there be? No redress at all, government apology only, commitment to public education campaign, or money?

Meanwhile, I gave the judiciary committee members copies of the role play descriptions of the other groups and asked them to predict what each group would propose.

The following day, students again were in their grouped seats before class began. Sam raised his hand and said, “This is for the whole class.” He turned to the class and said: “Guys, I am really, really sorry for what I’m about to say today. I’m not trying to offend anybody. This isn’t me. I know I’m going to make some of you guys mad. And I’m really sorry about that.” Sam was about to speak on behalf of Americans opposed to

reparations. I was blown away at his gesture of respect and solidarity. The class fell into silence, surprised by Sam’s comments. I told him that I appreciated what he had said.

“Good job, man!” Addel said.

John, a Russian American student, nodded to Sam from across the room, “Yeah, that was tight.”

I reinforced to the class that we were taking the roles of people who may have very different views from our own, saying: “The issues that we’ll address in our conversations are themes we find throughout history. In order to understand how such events can occur and how different people were affected, we have to learn from the perspectives of others.”

I opened the forum with a welcoming statement as the facilitator of this judicial hearing and reviewed the decision that the judiciary committee would need to make in the end.

The JLA group that volunteered to go first had studied a narrative taken in great part from the memoirs of JLA survivor Seiichi Higashide in *Adios to Tears*. “Nobody had the right to take us like that,” Cesar explained. “We had a family, a home, and a country. We were taken just like that and put in the internment camp.” They went on to recommend restitution for the JLAs, but didn’t think any amount of money

U.S. Army Signal Corps Photo National Archive; Campaign for Justice



Panama Canal Zone. Japanese Peruvians en route to U.S. internment camps; April 2, 1942.

was enough to repay the survivors for what they went through.

Addel spoke for the JLAs who were sent to Japan. “We were kidnapped. Nobody gave us a choice of where we were going to go. And we were just there [in Peru] to work. But then, you guys made us prisoners and sent us to Japan. I had my wife and child. And you took that away from me because you sent me to Japan. That’s not even where I’m really from.” This group also wanted redress, but they demanded the right to live in the United States or go back to Peru.

Sam represented Americans against reparations. “We don’t believe that any of this even happened,” he said. As Sam counted the reasons on his fingers he said, “There’s no proof, no evidence of these camps, and we don’t think the Japanese people would’ve been fooled.” He meant that the Japanese government would not have taken the JLAs in exchange for U.S. prisoners when some of them did not even speak Japanese. Sam continued, “And besides that, if the U.S. government did do all of these things, they probably had a good reason.” Sam sat down. I asked him for their recommendation on redress, and several of the kids in the group called out “None!”

Ashley presented the thoughts of Latin American vegetable growers. After explaining why they created their organization of small businesses, she said, “We feel that the Japanese are a competition for our business.” She described how Japanese farmers came to dominate the agricultural market in Peru and said: “We don’t want them to come back and take our jobs. We’ve worked hard to get to where we are, and they’re just going to take it back again.”

Last, the group representing the governments of Latin America said, “We feel bad for them [JLAs] but it wasn’t like we had a choice.” Tiffany explained, “If it wasn’t for the U.S. asking us to gather and remove JLAs, we probably wouldn’t have done it.” Another student added, “And at the same time, we didn’t want them [JLAs] in our

country either because they were causing a lot of problems for us.” She was referring to the anti-Japanese rioting and looting of businesses and homes in Peru. “We feel bad but it wasn’t really our fault. The U.S. made us because we’re scared of them,” they concluded.

When I offered all of the groups a chance to add additional arguments, Maria, from the first JLA group, spoke up. She said that people need to have immigration documents and to feel secure knowing that they won’t be deported.

In the discussion, Maria, who is from Oaxaca, Mexico, expressed her feelings as a young immigrant in today’s anti-immigrant climate. Cesar added that interning the JLAs was similar to treating immigrants as terrorists. “We are not terrorists,” Cesar said. “Don’t treat us like that. That’s racist.” He was full of emotion and the entire class listened quietly. “This is like the cops harassing us and stuff. I don’t

know what the word is . . .”

Pedro looked up and said, “Profiling! Racial profiling!”

Yeah,” continued Cesar. “That’s what I’m talking about.”

Although Maria and Cesar stepped out of character, I was delighted to see students connecting their personal experiences to those of people more than 60 years ago.

‘They Weren’t Criminals’

From the energy in the room, I knew that students needed an outlet to express their own feelings on this issue. I asked them to write in their journals again, this time talking back in their *own* voices to their character or another group in the room. A number of students wrote that the forced removal and internment of Japanese Latin Americans was based on racism. Rumel, who had portrayed an American against reparations, wrote to his group: “They weren’t criminals. They didn’t do anything wrong. How can you say it’s OK to treat people like this? It’s just straight racist. Is this what we want to tell future generations?”

I was delighted to see students connecting their personal experiences to those of people more than 60 years ago.

Ben, from the Latin American vegetable growers' group, reflected on his experiences growing up in Portland as a Vietnamese immigrant: "I used to feel invisible because I didn't belong anywhere. . . . I don't know what I'd do if someone told me I can't be here [in the United States] anymore just because of my race."

Jenny, who had struggled to stay in her character as the governments of Latin America during the role play, disagreed strongly with her group. She wrote, "It's just an excuse to say that the U.S. made us [the governments of Latin America] do it [the forced removal and internment of JLAS] because we didn't want them here in the first place. . . . I think everyone's trying to blame somebody else."

As the other students wrote, the judiciary committee had the job of deciding what would be a just response of the U.S. government. Students in the group felt heavyhearted with this responsibility. "This is a lot of pressure," Jasmine remarked.

Nick agreed. "How do we decide what's fair for these people?"

I encouraged the group to think about what they thought was the "messed-up-ness," a term coined by the class to describe social injustice. "Why do you think what happened was messed up or not messed up? Does the U.S. government need to do something to make that wrong right? And what does that right thing look like to you?" Finally, the committee began discussing their thoughts with each other.

The next day, the committee was eager to give its decision. Tina spoke on behalf of the group. She explained that they decided "yes" on redress. "What we [the United States] did to them was wrong and we're responsible to fix it." She said that since the JLAS were forced from their homes, they added their own type of reparation which was "to help them reunite with their families." The committee concluded that the U.S. government should also issue a formal apology and public education, but no money. "We should apologize because we know it was wrong," Tina explained. "We should have public education so this never happens again."

Nick added that they recommend that this story be taught in U.S. history classes "so that everybody knows." However, they did not want to give money because "our economy is in bad shape right now. . . . People are losing jobs and there's just no money. We're sorry, but we just can't pay them."

This was an interesting conclusion, and reflected the students' recognition of the economic difficulties of families in the neighborhood and nationally. Many students in the class were experiencing harsh living conditions as the economic crisis disproportionately affected families of color and immigrants. During the winter I taught this unit, I worried about whether students were going home to heated places. In addition, they had seen their classroom size explode and understood that a lack of money was the underlying factor. All of this had led students to assume that the U.S. government has no money, rather than that the money is distributed unequally or that the government is spending money on things that it thinks are more important, like the war in Afghanistan.

'What Really Happened?'

The next day, Sam walked into the room asking, "Ms. Yonamine, *now* are you going to tell us what really happened?" I told the students about the actual bill seeking redress and showed them a timeline of the bill's development and current status. As I shared information, students listened attentively. Addel jumped in, disturbed that all of the surviving JLAS had not yet received reparations, "So there's no decision yet whatsoever by us [the United States]?" I explained that we are still waiting for an official study by a congressional committee on wartime violations by the U.S. government against JLAS.

"What would you recommend to this committee based on what you have learned?" I asked. "Write them a letter." The class fell into silence as they busily went to work. This was the most effort I had seen students put into any written assignment all year. The responses showed their ideals and empathy.

"How would we feel if this happened to us?" asked Beto. "We did it. Now it is time to fix it. . . ."

They should especially include public education. That way in the future it won't happen again."

Sarah agreed. "They deserve to have their lives back. . . . Americans should provide apologies and money toward building their lives or whatever we took from them. . . . We need to help put all of the elders' minds at ease! So many of the elders have not given up in court yet and are still fighting to get back what they lost. We would want the same to be done for us."

By the time our unit was complete, something important had developed in our class. Students showed more courage to call out race and racism as they analyzed both history and current events. Students began to explore how race has been a fundamental factor in the history of U.S. foreign and domestic policy.

Most importantly, through their discussions and writing, students began to reflect on how race affects their own lives, often incorporating the history of their own families. They began to see how racism is not just an issue for some groups, but is an issue of human rights for all people.

Throughout this unit, my 8th-grade class inspired me with their compassion. Later in the year, students wrote reflections on their learning from this unit. Many suggested that it be taught each year.

"I can use the way we learned to talk to each other for the rest of my life," said Rumel.

"It challenged us to think like different people, and it gave us power to make the decision," said Nick.

And finally, Sam, after sitting silently for several minutes carefully pondering what to write, left me one line: "We listened to each other."

Note

There is discussion among Asian American scholars and activists about whether to call what happened to Japanese Americans (and Japanese Latin Americans) during World War II "internment" or "incarceration." In this article, both terms are used interchangeably.

Resources

Au, Wayne. "Addressing Redress." *Teaching About Asian Pacific Americans: Effective Activities, Strategies, and Assignments for Classrooms and Communities*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

United States. *Personal Justice Denied—Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982.

Higashide, Seiichi. *Adios to Tears—The Memoirs of a Japanese-Peruvian Internee in U.S. Concentration Camps*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993.

Masterson, Daniel and Sayaka Funada-Classen. *The Japanese in Latin America*. Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Campaign for Justice. www.campaignforjusticejla.org ["History" and "Resources" tabs].

Japanese American Citizens League. www.jacl.org ["Education" tab].

Map of internment camps is found at: www.jacl.org/edu/MapofConcentrationCamps.pdf.

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Chuck Yamamoto

Your job is to read and talk about this role that you've been assigned, which is described on this sheet. Decide as a group whether you will read the role sheet out loud together or quietly to yourself as individuals. When you are all finished reading, discuss whether you think (staying in your role) that the Japanese Latin American abduction, internment, and displacement were just or unjust. Come up with specific reasons for why or why not. Then discuss whether the JLAs should receive redress. ("Redress" means to set something right or to repair something. "Reparations" means the repairing or restoring of something.) Why or why not? What specific redress is most appropriate? This can be a combination of options. The options are as follows:

1. *No redress/reparations at all*
2. *U.S. government apology only*
3. *Commitment to public education campaign*
4. *Monetary reparations*

Be ready to say why you chose specific options if your group chose to give redress.

You are 90 years old. You were born in a village in northern Japan in 1909. You grew up doing a lot of farmwork to help support your family. As a teenager, you started to hear success stories about Japanese immigrants in Peru, and in 1930 when you were 21 you got on a ship to migrate there. You started a successful new life—first as an elementary school teacher, later running a small shop. You learned Spanish. You married a Peruvian woman and began a family. Peru became what you called your "second motherland."

In 1941, racism against Japanese people increased in Peru when the United States declared war against Japan. You heard that many people saw Japanese Peruvians as "enemy

aliens." The U.S. government even circulated a blacklist, called the "United States' Proclaimed List of Blocked Nationals" with names of people with Japanese backgrounds that the United States thought were dangerous. These people were ordered to be arrested and deported to the U.S. internment camps. Your name was on it. You had no idea why.

There was no way you were going to let anyone deport you. Your wife, a Peruvian citizen, was expecting your third child. With her help, you hid every time the police came to your house. But in January of 1944, five armed detectives came while your family sat down for dinner and forced you to leave with them. The detectives took you to a jail cell in Lima, which smelled of urine. No one told you why you had been arrested.

U.S. soldiers carrying rifles put you onto a ship. It was then that you finally understood that you were a prisoner of war. You were one of 1,800 Japanese Peruvians taken from Peru between 1942 and 1944.

You were taken to a detention center in Panama controlled by the U.S. military, and your passport was confiscated. You spent the next three months in Panama doing unpaid labor. While in Panama, the U.S. government said that you could reunite with your family only if they joined you in the detention camp.

In July of 1944, you were taken to an internment camp in Crystal City, Texas, with more than 3,000 people. In addition to Japanese Latin Americans, there were also people of German and Italian descent who had also been deported from Latin American countries. (Germany and Italy were also enemies of the United States during World War II.) However, most were Japanese Americans. The American soldiers called it a "camp," but nothing about the place felt like a vacation. You were surrounded by barbed wire

fences and armed guards and no way out. Still, no one told you why you were there. Your only joy was that three months after entering this prison, your wife and children arrived, eager to be with you even if it meant they would stay in this prison for who knows how long.

In the summer of 1945, the war ended, but you and many JLAs were not allowed to leave the internment camp until it closed in 1947. The U.S. government considered you an “illegal alien” because you had no immigration visa or passport, though they had taken away your passport when they seized you as a prisoner of war. Until the U.S. government could decide what to do with your deportation orders, you and your family were transferred to a food production plant in New Jersey to work. You hoped to one day get a green

card and become a legal permanent U.S. resident. You and the 346 other Japanese Latin Americans who stayed in the U.S. after the war finally won the right to stay in 1952. In 1960, you became a U.S. citizen.

You feel that you have three homelands now. At the same time, you believe that if there had been no war, you would have stayed in Peru forever and become a citizen there. You loved Peru dearly. In 1988, Japanese American internees received an apology from the U.S. government and \$20,000 to compensate them for their years of imprisonment. But you didn’t get anything because you were not a Japanese American during World War II but a Japanese Peruvian. You want some justice. But what kind of justice and from whom? Mostly, you don’t want this to happen to anyone ever again.

Jorge Shimabukuro

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3. *Commitment to public education campaign*
4. *Monetary reparations*

Be ready to say why you chose specific options if your group chose to give redress.

You are 98 years old. Your Okinawan parents came from the Ryukyu Islands, south of mainland Japan. In 1879, the Japanese government had taken over the islands and put the people under Japanese control, but refused to give them rights as citizens. Your parents, hoping to start a new life, had migrated to Peru in 1900.

You were born in Peru in 1922. Peru was always your first home, but your parents also told you to always remember that you are Okinawan, native of your island, and that no one can tell you different.

You married your Okinawan Peruvian sweetheart in 1940, when you were 18 years old. You were happy together. You were a farmer and

worked hard every day in the field, cultivating land to produce cotton.

Then, as World War II began, racism against Japanese people increased. When Peruvians saw people of Japanese descent, they would often shout, "Chino macaco!" which was a derogatory term that meant "dirty Chinese." They didn't even know the difference between Okinawans and Japanese and Chinese people, you thought. To them, you were all crazy spies and couldn't be trusted.

On May 15, 1940, your home was destroyed in a race riot that lasted for two long days. People thought to be Japanese were targeted. Hundreds of people were injured and some died as a result, while 620 businesses and houses were destroyed. And wouldn't you know that more than 500 of those belonged to Okinawan people, not mainland Japanese? Yours was one of them. With the help of neighbors and friends, you and your wife rebuilt a home, while many others became homeless.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941 and the United States declared war against Japan, the United States sent out a list of Japanese people in Latin America that they said were dangerous. These people were to be arrested and deported to U.S. internment camps. You were not on that list. But you heard that, as a result of bribes taken from Japanese people, the Peruvian police had started to arrest many people not on the list who could not afford to pay off the local police and other corrupt Peruvian government officials. Many Okinawans were arrested because they were easy targets since they had not achieved high status in Peruvian society. Finally, in February of 1943, armed men came to arrest you at your home. Your wife was not home. There was no warning.

You were put aboard a ship with no explanation. You ended up at a detention camp in Texas called Camp Kennedy. It was fenced in with barbed wire and surrounded by armed U.S.

soldiers. Weeks after you got there, married men whose families had come to join them were sent out to another internment camp in Texas. But you were not. You had sent your wife a telegram to get on the deportation ship to join you. She was expecting your first child. You worried that she did not make it in time for the last deportation ship out of Peru. You remained in the detention camp with other men for two years.

Camp Kennedy closed when World War II ended in 1945. Even then, you still had not heard anything from your wife. The U.S. government now considered you an “illegal alien” because they said you had entered the country illegally in the first place. But how could you have entered “illegally”? You were kidnapped and forced to enter the United States. Thus, you were now subject to deportation. On top of this, the Peruvian government would not allow any of its Japanese descendants to return. This included you. With nowhere to go, you joined more than 900 Japanese Latin Americans who got on deportation ships again, this time to Japan. You hoped that your wife would do the same and find you there.

You landed in Japan in 1946. This was your first time there and you spoke broken Japanese. But you remembered your parents’ gentle stories of Okinawa and found your way all the way to the southern islands. The Ryukyu Islands were devastated from war, having been used by the Japanese government as a site of the bloodiest battle in the history of the Pacific. You found relatives in the village that your parents used to tell you about and settled there with their help.

You searched for your wife but never found her again. You heard years later that many Okinawan and Japanese Peruvians who were left behind in Peru emigrated to Argentina after the war, where racism against Japanese people was thought to be somewhat less.

For many years since then, you have lived in silence. You don’t know what happened to your wife and child. But you’ll go crazy if you start to think about that now. No one in Okinawa knows what happened to you. The truth is that you miss Peru even after all of these years. But there’s nothing that can bring back everything you lost. Everything is changed now.

Representatives of the Governments of 13 Latin American Countries

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4. *Monetary reparations*

Be ready to say why you chose specific options if your group chose to give redress.

You are representatives of the governments that abducted, interned, and deported some or all of the Japanese-descended people from your countries during World War II. You represent Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru. (Brazil interned a mass group of Japanese descendents within its own country but did not send them to the United States) Peru alone sent out 84 percent

of the more than 2,200 total Japanese Latin American men, women, and children that were sent to the United States. The U.S. government orchestrated this mass abduction.

In 1941, the U.S. government asked your governments to participate in this crusade to protect the Western Hemisphere from the Japanese enemy. They told you that your participation was essential because the danger was real and immediate. You also read a report that there were large Japanese spy networks both in the U.S. and South America. The United States said the danger of Japanese invasion was greatest on the West Coast of South America and Panama.

The United States sent you a list of Japanese descendents that they said were dangerous to all of the Americas. This list was called "United States' Proclaimed List of Blocked Nationals." You were told that they were all potential spies and dangerous to your countries. Yet, you had not heard of any criminal charges brought against any of the named people. The U.S. government said that all you had to do was arrest the people on the list and deport them to the United States to be interned. The U.S. was going to pay for everything. They didn't even ask for a commitment from you to take back any of the Japanese once they were shipped out of your countries, even after the war ended. The U.S. planned to send the Japanese from your countries to Japan to be exchanged with Americans held prisoner by Japan in different parts of Asia.

You responded quickly to U.S. requests to help secure the hemisphere. Many of you closed down Japanese newspapers, organizations, and

schools. Some of you even went as far as freezing Japanese assets, knowing that this would bring hardship to a lot of Japanese-owned businesses in your countries. Six of your countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Uruguay, and Venezuela) joined the United States in forming a committee called the Emergency Advisory Committee for Political Defense in 1942. This committee told the rest of the Central and South American governments to intern people from Japan, Germany, and Italy living in their countries. As a result, more than 8,500 people from Latin America were interned, including citizens of your own countries. The U.S. government said that people believed to be dangerous should be interned. Peru took this further by arresting and deporting many people who were not on the list.

The reason for this action, you believed, was that this mass abduction and deportation would resolve the problem of racial tensions in your countries that had led to rioting in several areas. More than 155,000 Japanese had immigrated to Latin American countries in the 15 years before the war. Racial tensions had escalated everywhere as economic competition soared. Many of the townspeople who were rioting believed that anyone whose parents were Japanese were taught as they grew up that they were first and foremost loyal Japanese no matter what, even if they were citizens of your countries. Even in Peru, the Japanese were unwilling to Peruvianize and mix racially. Thus, many people believed they couldn't be trusted. Why else would a U.S. Army general say that, "There isn't such a thing as a loyal Japanese"?

In your eyes, the United States was a huge, imperial power. Even if you had thought to question this request of mass abduction by the United States, fighting this gigantic military power was

not a good idea. After all, they would act to help defend your country against a possible Japanese invasion, but only if you proved you were on their side. And the United States has invaded countries throughout Latin America when governments did things to upset those in power in the United States. So you announced that it was necessary to protect your country and sacrifice the Japanese Latin Americans for military security.

What made it easier for your countries was that the U.S. government committed to paying to remove the Japanese. You didn't have to do anything except send in your police, arrest the Japanese, and send them off to the U.S. officials. You had heard that the United States had already constructed a temporary prison camp in Panama to house the Japanese Latin Americans, along with some Latin Americans of German and Italian descent.

You learned that the U.S. government would have taken even more Japanese Latin Americans into their internment camps but they could not figure out how to ship and pay for more to be sent to the United States. On top of this, the internment camps in the United States were overcrowded with Japanese Americans, since they had already interned more than 110,000 Japanese Americans—many of whom were citizens of their own country.

The United States determined that the mass relocation of Japanese descendents in the Western Hemisphere was the only way to secure the Americas. Overall, you were convinced by the United States that your national security was in danger. Rounding up Japanese Latin Americans was necessary to protect your country during a time of war.

Vegetable Growers Inc.

Your job is to read and talk about this role that you've been assigned, which is described on this sheet. Decide as a group whether you will read the role sheet out loud together or quietly to yourself as individuals. When you are all finished reading, discuss whether you think (staying in your role) that the Japanese Latin American abduction, internment, and displacement were just or unjust. Come up with specific reasons for why or why not. Then discuss whether the JLAs should receive redress. ("Redress" means to set something right or to repair something. "Reparations" means the repairing or restoring of something.) Why or why not? What specific redress is most appropriate? This can be a combination of options. The options are as follows:

1. No redress/reparations at all
2. U.S. government apology only
3. Commitment to public education campaign
4. Monetary reparations

Be ready to say why you chose specific options if your group chose to give redress.

You are the managers of big agricultural companies based in Peru. You started out as an alliance of commercial farmers in 1940. In your mind, the Japanese came to Peru and Brazil in the late 1800s and early 1900s to take over the farming business. The Japanese had been farmers for generations in Japan and had acquired extensive skills in starting new farms. When times got hard in Japan, they came to South America in the thousands, all looking for work.

All over Latin America, what started out as local people giving the Japanese small jobs here and there turned into an agricultural industry dominated by the Japanese. The Japanese

immigrant farmers created groups called "cooperatives" in which they shared resources among other Japanese farmers. This gave them advantage over native Peruvian competitors. Within 20 years after immigrating to Peru, the Japanese farmers dominated cotton production, beating out native Peruvian farmers.

Your attitude was, so what if their country of Japan wasn't doing that well and people needed to work? Farmers in South America needed work, too. Why couldn't the Japanese have stayed in Japan?

Your success came when more than 2,000 Japanese were deported back to Japan. At least that's the story that you were told. The U.S. and South American governments thought they were a security issue. The Peruvian government canceled all land leases held by Japanese farmers in 1942. Thus, most Japanese farmers who remained in Peru after avoiding deportation during World War II ended up losing their farms.

Native Peruvian farmers stepped in and quickly began to mass-produce vegetables on these farmlands. Many of the local farmers created an alliance, similar to how the Japanese maintained their cooperatives. With the Japanese competition out of your way, the alliance grew and became a large agricultural competitor.

If the Japanese farmers who were deported during WWII were allowed to return and take back their farmland, imagine what would happen. They might take over the agricultural market again. Even before the war, you heard about what had happened around the northwest of the United States. Before the internment, many Japanese went to live in rural areas in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho and developed large farmlands. They were so successful that they out-competed local farmers. You weren't going to let that happen to you.

After all, look at what happened in Brazil. Before the war, Japanese farmers rented out land to grow coffee. On top of this, they grew other crops like corn, beans, and other vegetables so that they could use the added profit to buy more land. Their farming business spread all over Brazil. When World War II began, these Japanese farmers in Brazil were arrested and interned. But unlike the other Latin American countries, Brazil let the Japanese stay in the country instead of deporting them to the United States. Can you believe that when the war ended, more than half of the Japanese went right back into farming? As a result, the Japanese Brazilians came to dominate the fruit and vegetable market in Brazil by the 1990s.

If the farming takeover in the U.S. Northwest and Brazil wasn't a clue enough, look at what the Japanese did to the small business owners in Peru. There used to be so many Peruvian owners

of small businesses that were maintained mostly by "beginning merchants" who had worked themselves up in Peruvian society. The Japanese used their economic advantage from having made money in farming to start competing for these other Peruvians' small business (many of them barbershops). This wouldn't be good for your business if all of those Japanese farmers were allowed to take their land back.

You are very proud of the accomplishments. Now that your company has invested time and money to develop farmlands, you don't think it's fair to let the Japanese come back. What good would that do? They should stay where they are. If the Japanese who were here before are allowed to come back to countries like Peru, they might then fight to get their farms back. But these farmlands have skyrocketed in value thanks to your hard work. You think that the rights of farmers who were here first should be protected.

Members of Americans for American Truth

Your job is to read and talk about this role that you've been assigned, which is described on this sheet. Decide as a group whether you will read the role sheet out loud together or quietly to yourself as individuals. When you are all finished reading, discuss whether you think (staying in your role) that the Japanese Latin American abduction, internment, and displacement were just or unjust. Come up with specific reasons for why or why not. Then discuss whether the JLAs should receive redress. ("Redress" means to set something right or to repair something. "Reparations" means the repairing or restoring of something.) Why or why not? What specific redress is most appropriate? This can be a combination of options. The options are as follows:

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4. *Monetary reparations*

Be ready to say why you chose specific options if your group chose to give redress.

You are a patriotic group of Americans who are completely against any redress for the Japanese Latin Americans. You believe that these so-called Japanese Latin Americans are trying to take advantage of the 1988 Civil Liberties Act where Japanese Americans were given an apology and money.

You see, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Japan had rapidly taken over large parts of Asia and the Pacific. The U.S. government had to protect the country from a Japanese attack of the West Coast. So in February

1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 ordering Japanese Americans to be removed from the U.S. West Coast. The order read that "the successful prosecution of the war requires every possible protection against espionage and against sabotage to national defense material. . . ." From there, over 110,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast of the United States were put in internment camps. The U.S. government did all of this based on military necessity.

Years after the war in 1988, President Ronald Reagan apologized for the internment on behalf of the U.S. government. Each surviving Japanese American was paid \$20,000. The U.S. government even issued a public education fund to teach the history of the internment camps. This 1988 Civil Liberties Act should have closed the book on this; the nation said, "OK, we're sorry. End of story."

Now this story about Japanese Latin Americans has surfaced. Supposedly, the United States interned more than 2,200 Japanese Latin Americans in U.S. internment camps with the purpose of exchanging them for Americans held prisoner by Japan. However, if some of these Japanese Latin Americans did not speak Japanese fluently, why would Japan accept them in the exchange? Wouldn't they know that many of them were ordinary citizens from Latin America and not Japanese nationals? There are too many loopholes to this story. At best, these are just rumors and not accurate history. History has to have some evidence and these accusations against the U.S. government sound more like the result of people trying to get a free ride into the United States and make money doing it.

If the U.S. government had helped round up the Japanese in Central and South America, they did it to protect the United States. Look, we were at war. So whatever happened was because the U.S. government was trying to protect its own people. Isn't that what a government is supposed to do? We all know how easy it is to come in from Central and South American into the United States. Look at all of the people hopping the border to get here today! So, the U.S. government couldn't have just rounded up potential Japanese spies and enemies on the West Coast of the United States. They also had to grab Japanese Latin Americans before they had a chance to sneak into the country. It was just the smart thing to do.

You think that the movement for redress is really a way for a bunch of Latin American immigrants to get U.S. permanent residency with the hopes of becoming U.S. citizens. Do we really need

more unemployed people in this tough economy? You heard that the Japanese Latin Americans who have come forward to say that the U.S. government directed Latin American governments to kidnap and then put them in these internment camps don't have any proof of identification in the first place. That sounds absurd. How can there be no way of proving who they are and where they really came from? That sounds fishy.

Whatever happened, it was a long time ago. If the U.S. government evacuated Japanese Latin Americans, they did it for legitimate national security reasons. History called for this government action. In fact, at the time, the U.S. Supreme Court even upheld Executive Order 9066 in interning the Japanese Americans. What are we supposed to do? Put the Supreme Court of the 1940s on trial too? It was the right and just thing to do at the time. Giving redress is absurd.

Members of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent

Your job is to read and talk about this role that you've been assigned, which is described on this sheet. Decide as a group whether you will read the role sheet out loud together or quietly to yourself as individuals. When you are all finished reading, discuss whether you think (staying in your role) that the Japanese Latin American abduction, internment, and displacement were just or unjust. Come up with specific reasons for why or why not. Then discuss whether the JLAs should receive redress. ("Redress" means to set something right or to repair something. "Reparations" means the repairing or restoring of something.) Why or why not? What specific redress is most appropriate? This can be a combination of options. The options are as follows:

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4. *Monetary reparations*

Be ready to say why you chose specific options if your group chose to give redress.

The job of the commission is to:

- Investigate and determine the facts surrounding the wartime deportation, internment, and relocation of Latin Americans of Japanese descent by the U.S. government.

- Make recommendations for any appropriate remedies based on your findings.

Your group was created by the U.S. Congress to investigate the U.S. government's involvement in the deportation, internment, relocation, and possible abduction of Japanese Latin Americans during WWII. Your group has the power to determine: (1) what will be deemed the "official" historical account as recognized by the U.S. government and that will thus potentially influence people around the world, and (2) what will be the U.S. response to the issue of redress for Japanese Latin Americans. If you as a group feel that any U.S. involvement was justified, then your explanation of such will be entered as part of an official record.

You are a group of nine members—three of you were appointed by the president, three by the House of Representatives, and three by the Senate. Your assignment is to stay as neutral as possible. You will assess the facts of the issue in making important decisions.

Thoroughly consider each person/group's position regarding the U.S. government's involvement and the kind of redress that would be appropriate. Carefully consider each person/group's justifications on their positions as you evaluate the facts and make recommendations as a group.

rethinking schools

This lesson was previously published in [Rethinking Schools magazine](#).

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As a teacher and researcher, I rely on *Rethinking Schools* for information, insight, and inspiration. — Sonia Nieto, Professor Emerita, University of Massachusetts Amherst

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