



THE NEW JERSEY ITALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION



Italian Americans and World War II Detention Camps

Grade Level: 9-12

Can be adjusted to accommodate for grades 6-8

Subjects: United States History / New Jersey History / Language Arts / World Languages

Categories:

Immigration and Prejudice / History and Society / Arts and Sciences

Standards:

Please see page 11 of the lesson plan for New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

Objective:

Students will be able to:

1. explain why some Italian nationals and other resident aliens were placed under custodial detention by the United States Government during World War II.
2. determine why the American government required the registration of all resident enemy aliens during World War II.
3. analyze primary sources and elucidate why the United States had made plans to detain Italian nationals prior to Italy's declaring war on the United States in December 1941.
4. speculate whether the United States government ever has the moral authority to detain aliens deemed threats to national security.

Abstract:

The United States' government treatment of Italian Americans during World War II, was unknown until 1942. Approximately 1.2 million Italian Americans served in the United States armed forces during the war, yet, in 1942, 600,000 were labeled "enemy aliens." Most were elderly Italians who had not become American citizens.

Students will examine the rationale for this paranoia, the records of which were sealed until 1990.

Key Terms:

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|---------------|---------------|---|
| Enemy Alien | | A foreign national of an enemy country. |
| Espionage | <i>French</i> | The act or practice of spying or of using spies to obtain secret information, as about another government or a business competitor. |
| Fifth Column | | A subversive group that supports the enemy and engages in espionage or sabotage; an enemy in your midst. |
| (a) National | | A citizen of a particular nation. |
| Nationalist | | Devotion to the interests or culture of one's nation. |
| Sabotage | <i>French</i> | Treacherous action to defeat or hinder a cause or an endeavor; deliberate inimical subversion. |
| Subversive | | In opposition to a civil authority or government. |

Background:

Prior to the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson had to face strong opposition to American entrance into the War from German immigrants, along with immigrants from other nations such as Ireland. The Germans did not want to go to war against their ancestral homeland. Likewise, many Irish did not want to see the United States allied with the British Empire, an Empire that had maintained complete domination of their island homeland for generations. Once Wilson had Congress declare war on Germany, the government began to round up persons of German extraction whom they suspected of disloyalty. They also arrested many Irish nationalists who were actively hostile to Britain, along with Americans who publicly disapproved of America's involvement in the war.

Twenty-two years later, the Franklin Roosevelt administration faced a similar situation. Germany had invaded Poland, and the Allied Powers of Britain and France declared war on Germany and their Axis ally, Italy. At the time, there were large Italian and German populations in the United States, and Roosevelt believed that the United States would shortly be drawn into the war on the side of the Allied Powers.

Within less than a month of Britain's declaration of war on Germany, President Roosevelt ordered the FBI to compile lists of aliens and citizens "on whom there is information available to indicate that their presence at liberty in this country in time of war or national emergency would be dangerous to the public peace and the safety of the United States."

Upon mutual declarations of war between the United States and Italy, those non-citizen Italians (in addition to Germans and Japanese nationals) living in the United States become legally classified as enemy aliens. In 1941, U.S. military authorities were concerned with the threat of *fifth column* (sabotage, espionage, subversion) operations that could be carried out by Italian, German, and Japanese nationals. Enemy aliens, as well as Italian Americans, German Americans and Japanese Americans suspected of being sympathetic to the Axis cause or suspected of subversive activities, were placed in internment camps or held in detention centers.

Procedures:

1. Have students read: WW2 Internment in the United States

<http://www.foitimes.com/internment/chrono.html>

2. Once they read the article, have students answer the following questions:

- I. Why did J. Edgar Hoover want a list of citizens and aliens whom might be dangerous to the public peace and safety of the United States government?
 - A. *The FBI had been ordered to compile a list of possible threats to the United States government coming from Italian and German nationals, once Germany had invaded Poland and Britain had declared war on Germany.*

- II. Why did Franklin Roosevelt ask the FBI to make plans to detain citizens and place them under custodial detention?
 - A. *Roosevelt wanted to be sure that all Italians and other Axis nationals would not create a "fifth column" of Axis loyalists in American cities.*

- III. Where did the government decide to house detainees from New Jersey and New York?
 - A. *Arrangements were made to house detainees on Ellis Island.*

- IV. Where was the greatest concentration of Italian nationals located in northern New Jersey?
 - A. *Eighty-eight percent of the Italian nationals were located in Bergen, Essex, Union, and Hudson counties.*

- V. How many Italian and German aliens did the government anticipate detaining each month?
 - A. *The government planned to detain 200 Italians and 600 Germans each month.*

- VI. How long did the government plan to detain Italian and German nationals?
 - A. *The government planned to detain aliens for two-week terms.*

- VII. How long did it take for the government to begin arresting aliens, once Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor?
 - A. *The government began detaining Italian and German nationals on the following day, December 8, 1941.*

- VIII. At first, did the government arrest American citizens of Italian and German descent?
 - A. *No, the government was only concerned with resident aliens, unless they had specific reasons to suspect citizens.*

- IX. FBI agents placed Italian and German nationals into the custody of what agency?
 - A. *Aliens were turned into the Immigration and Naturalization Service.*

X. Did the United States government begin to arrest Italian and German nationals before or after Italy and Germany had declared war on the United States?

A. *The United States began arresting Italian and German nationals on December 8. Italy and Germany declared war on December 11, 1941.*

XI. Did the government take care not to arrest American citizens of Italian and German ancestry?

A. FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover told the Assistant Attorney General to make sure the FBI was not arresting citizens.

3. Once students have answered the questions, ask them whether detaining foreign nationals or the actual internment of enemy aliens during wartime is ever justified?
4. Then, ask students to create a policy for the United States, regarding the treatment of foreign nationals during a time of war or a serious threat to national security.

Assessment:

- Have students react to the following resolution:
 - *Resolved, nations should not restrict the movement or freedom of foreign nationals of enemy countries living within the nation's own borders.*
- For an oral assessment, use a teacher-made checklist.
 - For a written assessment, use the *New Jersey Registered Holistic Writing Rubric* for scoring.

Extension:

Rose Scudero was a minor, age twelve, living with her enemy alien mother when President Roosevelt's executive order barred aliens from military restricted areas on the American West Coast. Rose was obligated to go with her mother, even though Scudero's father was an American citizen.

In the article (attachment below), Lisa Hayden writes; "*Italian-Americans don't want financial compensation.*" Instead; Rose Scudero told Hayden, "*We...,*" (Italian-Americans) "*...want a public apology from the White House.*"

Read the article: ['Secret' of WWII Italian-Americans Forced to Move](http://www.cnn.com/US/9709/21/italian.relocation/index.html)
<http://www.cnn.com/US/9709/21/italian.relocation/index.html>

Have students write a letter to their U.S. Senator either supporting an apology to the California Italians because the government had violated their civil liberties , or a letter requesting that the government not apologize because the detentions were necessary for national security. Make sure the students give salient reasons for their positions.

Use the *New Jersey Registered Holistic Writing Rubric* for scoring.

Supplemental Information

Italian Americans and World War II Detention Camps

In September 1939, when Britain and France declared war against the Axis nations of Germany and Italy, President Franklin Roosevelt immediately asked FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to compile a list of persons to be arrested in case of national emergency. Names placed on this Custodial Detention List would include pro-Communists, anti-fascists, pro-fascists, pro-Nazis, and even some Jewish refugees. Roosevelt also wanted a list of all German and Italian citizens living in the United States and a list of American citizens of Italian and German ancestry, who may have shown support for the Nazis or for Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime in Italy in the past.

The authority for these arrests came from Title 50 of the U.S. Code, based on the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts. These Acts had given the government power to detain and deport aliens in times of emergency. The United States Government has restricted the rights of "enemy aliens" and citizens during times of national emergency many times in the past. Numerous modern accounts record that Federalist politicians enacted the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 to censure political criticism coming from Thomas Jefferson's Republican Party. To an extent this was true, but the main cause of the Acts was to protect the government and the nation during a time of war with France. France, during the late eighteenth century, was the most powerful nation on Earth. America's naval war with them was undeclared, but it was war nonetheless, The Federalists watched the French republicans brutalize their political opponents during their infamous "Reign of Terror." They firmly believed that the Jeffersonian Republicans wanted that type of government in the United States. They ardently feared that the Jeffersonian Republicans would aid a French attack on America, in order to take power for themselves.

A few years later when Thomas Jefferson was President, he had the Embargo Acts passed to avoid war with Britain. In doing so, he also violated the rights of many American citizens. Numerous merchants were driven into bankruptcy as a result of Jefferson's policies. Those who violated the policy were promptly imprisoned. Roughly sixty years later, during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln suspended Habeas Corpus, though the Constitution explicitly gives that power to Congress, not the President. He also closed newspapers and arrested opponents of the War. Fifty some years later, in another time of

national emergency, during World War I, Woodrow Wilson had the Espionage and Sedition Acts passed. He immediately proceeded to bar certain newspapers from the mail, and he had socialists, antiwar dissidents, German nationals, and Irish republicans living in America, arrested.

At the outbreak of World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt had signed into law a series of presidential orders which identified all Italian-born nationals as "enemy aliens" - alien citizens of an enemy nation. The presidential orders compelled subjects of the Italian Crown, living in the United States, to register as enemy aliens. Roughly 600,000 did so. The orders also authorized the FBI to arrest and/or relocate enemy aliens to

internment camps, if they were ever deemed at threat to national security by the American government. As a result, more than ten thousand Italian nationals living in America at the beginning of World War II were evacuated from their homes and places of business.

Because of a long history of suspending or curtailing individual rights during times of national crises, very few Americans objected, once Roosevelt started to arrest Italian, German, and Japanese nationals. In addition, most Americans did not oppose the President moving all of the Japanese from the West Coast, regardless whether they were subjects of the Japanese Emperor or U. S. citizens. Nor, did they object to restricting Italian nationals from going to certain areas on the West Coast. In the name of national security, most Americans had little desire to challenge President Roosevelt's actions.

Under Roosevelt's orders, hundreds of Italians were arrested in the months immediately after Pearl Harbor. About 250 of those individuals were interned for up to two years in military camps in Montana, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. By June 1942, 1,521 Italian aliens had been arrested by the FBI, many for curfew violations alone. Though most of the latter were released after short periods of detention, the effects on them and others in the community were devastating.

The major internment sites for Italian nationals were Fort George Meade in Maryland, Camp McAlester in Oklahoma, Fort Sam Houston in Texas, and Camp Forrest in Tennessee. Italians were also sent to Fort Missoula, Montana, and any one of the forty-five other internment camps used by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Provost Marshal General's Office, including Ellis Island and sites in Gloucester City, New Jersey and outside of Glassboro, New Jersey.

Most of the arrested Italians were first shipped by train to Fort Missoula, Montana, where over 1,000 Italian subjects had previously been interned since May, 1941, seven months before the United States went to war with Italy. These Italians were merchant marines whose ships had been impounded at Atlantic ports after Italy's war with Britain had begun in 1939.

In Montana, the interned enemy aliens received pro forma hearings before boards of military officers and American citizens. The aliens were not informed of the charges against them, nor were they represented by legal counsel. Evidence before the boards came entirely from FBI reports, some of which had errors, and misinterpretations of innocent acts.

Some of these interned Italians had been visitors to the United States. Merchant marines, waiters working at the New York World's Fair, and sailors on visiting cruise ships were interned. Also, Italians who had lived the United States for decades, without violating any laws or without giving the government any factual basis for designating them as enemies, were relocated. Some internees were editors of Italian newspapers who had shown support for Mussolini in the past and some were bankers who had conducted business with the Italian government. Nevertheless, most of these men remained extremely loyal to the United States, despite accusations. Many of these same internees also had adult children serving in the United States military, fighting against Axis

nations, including Italy.

The Roosevelt administration greatly restricted Italian nationals' movement on the West Coast. Lieutenant General John DeWitt of the Western Defense Command vigorously enforced President Roosevelt's Order because the government believed that the coasts of the United States were vulnerable to communication with the enemy. As many as 52,000 Italian nationals on the West Coast had their daily travels confined to "exclusionary zones" and were subject to strict curfews. Even legendary baseball great Joe DiMaggio's father (while Joe was fighting for the American side) was not permitted to visit his son's restaurant on Fisherman's Wharf because it lay inside a restricted zone. Many Italian fisherman and sailors lost their livelihoods, and in some instances had their boats seized.

Most of the San Francisco internees were members of the *Ex-Combattenti*, the Federation of Italian War Veterans in America. As veterans of World War I (when Italy and America were co-belligerents against the Central Powers), they were singled out because the group was on the FBI list of "dangerous" organizations. During the thirties, the veterans' main project had been collecting and distributing funds for war widows and orphans in Italy. By 1941, the State Department determined that those agencies in Italy receiving money from America were too "closely identified" with Mussolini's regime and that the continued disbursement of monies to the *Associazione Nazionale Famiglie dei Caduti in Guerra* in Italy (National Association for Families of War Dead) was a violation of the 1939 U.S. Neutrality Act. The FBI was ordered to begin surveillance of individual *Ex-Combattenti* members. FBI files, however, do not reveal any illegal or "subversive" activities.

Italian nationals on the Atlantic coast registered as enemy aliens in large numbers. They were required to possess a travel booklet at all times and were subject to inspection and search on demand. Many Italian nationals had their homes searched for flashlights and radios or any devices that might be used to communicate with enemy agents, submarines or warships off of the Atlantic coast.

Italy's unconditional surrender on September 8, 1943 brought about the release of most of the Italian internees by year's end. Some internees had been paroled months after "exoneration" by a second hearing board. In 1999, as a result of lobbying by the Italian American community, the United States Congress addressed the treatment of Italian nationals during World War II, which resulted in House Resolution 2442, acknowledging that the United States violated the civil rights of Italian nationals during World War II. The bill was passed in the House of Representatives in 1999, the Senate in 2000, and signed by President William Clinton in 2000.

Sources:

Umberto Benedetti, *Italian Boys at Fort Missoula, Montana, 1941-1943*. 1991.

Lawrence Distasi. "Internment: Selective Internment of 'Dangerous' Aliens." *Una Storia Segreta*. <http://www.segreta.org/>

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Stephen Fox. *Uncivil Liberties: Italian Americans Under Siege During World War II*. 2000.

Gary Glynn. *Montana's Home Front During World War II*. 1994.

Lisa Scottoline. "Fact Sheet on the Internment of Italian Americans During World War II: Executive Summary." *Italian by Nature and Italian by Nurture*.
<http://scottoline.com/internment.html>

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, *All The Laws But One; Civil Liberties in Wartime*. Random House 1998.

Carol Van Walkenburg, *An Alien Place, The Fort Missoula, Montana, Detention Camp, 1941-1944*. 1995.

Name: _____

Date: _____

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9. FBI agents placed Italian and German nationals into the custody of what agency?

10. Did the United States government begin to arrest Italian and German nationals before or after Italy and Germany had declared war on the United States?

11. Did the government take care not to arrest American citizens of Italian and German ancestry?

New Jersey Student Learning Standards Social Studies

6.1.12.A.11.c Determine if American policies regarding Japanese internment and actions against other minority groups were a denial of civil rights.

English Language Arts

RI.9-10.1. Accurately cite strong and thorough textual evidence, (e.g., via discussion, written response, etc.) and make relevant connections, to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RI.9-10.2. Determine a central idea of a text and analyze how it is developed and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.9-10.3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

RI.9-10.6. Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetorical devices to advance that point of view or purpose

RI.9-10.7 Analyze various perspectives as presented in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

RI.9-10.9 Analyze and reflect on (e.g. practical knowledge, historical/cultural context, and background knowledge) documents of historical and literary significance, (e.g., Washington’s Farewell Address the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech, King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”, Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, etc.), including how they relate in terms of themes and significant concepts.

RI.11-12.1 Accurately cite strong and thorough textual evidence, (e.g., via discussion, written response, etc.), to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text, and analyze their development and how they interact to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

RI.11-12.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

RI.11-12.9 Analyze and reflect on (e.g. practical knowledge, historical/cultural context, and background knowledge) documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes and rhetorical features, including primary source documents relevant to U.S. and/or global history.

SL.9-10.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

SL.9-10.1c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

SL.9-10.3 Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

SL.9-10.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. (See grades 9–10 Language standards 1 and 3 here for specific expectations.)

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SL.11-12.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English. (See grades 9–10 Language standards 1 and 3 for specific expectations.)

RH.9-10.1 Accurately cite strong and thorough textual evidence, to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

RH.9-10.2 Determine the theme, central ideas, key information and/or perspective(s) presented in a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas

RH.9-10.3 . Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; draw connections between the events, to determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

RH.9-10.8 Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claims.

RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

RH.11-12.2 Determine the theme, central ideas, information and/or perspective(s) presented in a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events, ideas and/or author’s perspective(s) develop over the course of the text.

RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various perspectives for actions or events; determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author’s claims, reasoning, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other sources.