

Berkeley OLLI 2019 Winter Syllabus

From Internment to the Present: Lessons in Democracy

Week 1:

In this first session, we'll examine the historical events that led to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and analyze the popular belief that the forced removal and imprisonment of Japanese Americans during WWII was a direct result of that attack.

Week 2:

The heart of the matter: In Session 2 we'll look at life in America's concentration camps and discuss how this could have happened: why did Japanese Americans not resist? How did the government justify its policy? Who was responsible? We'll also examine the way in which the Army imposed its authority over a segment of the population in the absence of martial law as a way to skirt constitutional concerns.

Week 3:

This session will address issues of loyalty and resistance by Japanese Americans as we examine the broader implications of the question of loyalty (the fundamental basis for the imprisonment policy) and the lasting affect it has had on Japanese Americans even to the present, over seventy years later. A guest speaker during the second hour will discuss the role of Japanese Americans and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the most highly decorated unit in the history of the U.S. military.

Week 4:

Session 4 will focus on the psychological impact the internment had on Japanese Americans and examine how cultural values played an important role in sustaining them through their wartime experiences, and how those same values eventually led to the battle for redress. A guest speaker during the first hour will present an analyses of the impact of the incarceration, and in the second hour, we will begin a discussion of the Japanese American redress effort.

Week 5:

This session will provide a detailed and in-depth examination of the redress campaign, an insider's look at what it took to get the United States Congress to examine an issue they found offensive and, in an unprecedented action, to acknowledge a past injustice. It was a campaign of American idealism and one that no one in America believed could possibly succeed... but did!

Week 6:

The parallels between Pearl Harbor and the terrorist attacks on 9/11 were striking, and the country once again stood on the brink of repeating its WWII policies as it focused on the Arab and Muslim communities. Japanese Americans played a key role in preventing that from happening, which will be one focus of our discussion in this session. But in the world of the post-2016 elections and the bizarre politics of America today, will the administration's promulgation of intolerance and hatred against an identifiable minority threaten to once again render the constitution meaningless?

So where are we today? Do we really learn from mistakes of the past? The philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," reflecting on Hegel's belief that "We learn from history that we do not learn from history."

