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# Photographs Of Manzanar

## Photographs of Manzanar



Ansel Adams



## Synopsis

Manzanar was one of ten relocation centers formed by an executive order issued by President Roosevelt in early 1942, just a few months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. About 110,000 people of Japanese descent were interned in these camps; of those, over 60% were native born American citizens. There were no charges of disloyalty, no trials, and no hearings. While the internment is almost universally recognized today as unjust, at the time it was strongly supported by most Americans, especially on the west coast. In 1983 a commission established by the US Congress called the internment "unjust and motivated by racism rather than real military necessity" and reparations were paid. The US Supreme Court never explicitly ruled the internment unconstitutional. The following is from the Library of Congress website: "In 1943, Ansel Adams (1902-1984) photographed the Manzanar War Relocation Center at the suggestion of its director, his good friend and fellow Sierra Club member, Ralph Merritt. Adams wanted to contribute to the war effort while at the same time show the loyalty of the Japanese-Americans interned at Manzanar, located in Inyo County, California, approximately 200 miles northeast of Los Angeles. In 1944, some of these images were published in [Adams's] book *Born Free and Equal*. The book had a limited circulation, perhaps due to the political climate of war-time America. When offering the collection to the Library, Adams said in a letter, 'All in all, I think this Manzanar Collection is an important historical document, and I trust it can be put to good use...The purpose of my work was to show how these people, suffering under a great injustice, and loss of property, businesses and professions, had overcome the sense of defeat and despair by building for themselves a vital community in an arid (but magnificent) environment.'" Beginning in 1965, Adams gave 241 original negatives and 209 photographic prints to the Library. Adams printed the photographs in the 1960's. By this time, his outstanding darkroom style produced prints with rich tonalities. The Library's Duplication Services does not attempt to duplicate [Adams's] printing style. Adams often cropped his images and his prints are frequently much darker than those printed by the Library's Duplication Services, so patrons ordering prints will not receive ones exactly as Adams would have printed them. "There are 244 images in this collection on the LoC site, and all of them appear in this book, along with his original captions (complete with misspellings). The notation "[in book]" at the end of a caption indicates that the image was in *Born Free and Equal*.

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The Manzanar War Relocation Center located in Inyo County, northeast of Los Angeles, was one of ten remote camps established in 1942 by Executive Order of President Franklin Roosevelt, to which some 100,000 Japanese, including more than 60,000 native-born American citizens, were relocated from their homes on the West Coast and elsewhere. At the time, details of this forced relocation, other than that it was ordered in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines, were not familiar to the public. In 1943, Ansel Adams, already a well-known photographer, especially of the western landscape, arranged to visit and photograph the Manzanar Center believing that the American public deserved to know more about these places and the people interned there. Mark Rochkind's collection of Ansel Adams' 1943 photographic essay depicting life at the Manzanar War Relocation Center reintroduces the 243 photographs, some published in Adams' long out of print book: *Born Free and Equal*. In 1965 Adams donated to the Library of Congress all the photographs, including 241 negatives and 249 photographic prints. The Library of Congress has scanned these prints thereby allowing Mr. Rochkind the opportunity to re-create them in a close approximation to the originals and make them available to the public. It is a fascinating example, not only of the life of the internees but of Adams' style of selecting and printing images. Looking at these images, only some of which Adams had selected for inclusion in his book, viewers will be able to understand something of the people who were forcibly interned there and also to speculate about why some photographs made the cut and others didn't.

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