

[Intro Music]

Bianca Bruno: Family history can be painful. That's why many families often choose to leave the past in the dust. But what if the dust never settles? How can we prevent the worst parts of our collective history from being repeated? I'm Bianca Bruno, one of the co-hosts at Sidebar, a podcast by Courthouse News. In this episode, my Denver-based colleague Amanda Pampuro talks to some of the Japanese American survivors of one of the ugliest parts of American history: incarceration camps. You may have heard the 10 West Coast prison camps Japanese Americans were sent to after the attack on Pearl Harbor called internment camps, but that's a misnomer. Since the vast majority of the more than 110,000 people sent to the prison camps were citizens, not foreign nationals, they could not be interned. Instead, it's most accurate to state the plain truth: the United States government incarcerated thousands of its citizens, young and old. Just children when uprooted with their families during World War II, the survivors of Colorado's Amache incarceration camp, on the edge of the Dust Bowl, were left to make sense of what happened to their families while their parents wanted to move on. The next generation of Japanese Americans, the grandchildren of prison camp survivors, are now working to make sure their family's history and legacy are not left in the dust. Here's Amanda with the story.

[Ringtone]

Calvin Hada: Hello?

Amanda Pampuro: Hi, is this Calvin?

CH: Yeah.

AP: Good morning! It's Amanda Pampuro with Courthouse News. How are you doing?

CH: I'm good. How are you doing?

AP: Well, is the remediation going okay?

CH: Yeah, they're cleaning the carpets right now.

AP: Calvin Toro Hada is the president of the Nikkeijin Kai Society and lives in Louisville, Colorado. The town was devastated by a wildfire just before the 2022 new year. When I called him months later, he was still having remnants of smoke steamed out of his house. Could you see it from your house?

CH: Oh, yeah. I had to evacuate, I evacuated 20 minutes before the evacuation order was made just because the smoke was so thick.

AP: Where did you go, though?

CH: Uh, I just kind of drove around, you know, I drove out of the smoke plume and then I went north a little bit, so I could kind of see what was happening and then it was just mostly just driving around.

AP: Trying to figure out the next steps.

CH: Yeah.

AP: As I said in my email for Courthouse News, I'm looking into a story about Amache sort of in the context of it becoming a national park, but also because it's an important time in history and I love any story that allows me to help people tell their story.

[Strumming Guitar Music]

CH: I guess I should say I was raised in Lakewood, had kind of like a "Leave it to Beaver" suburban upbringing. So, I really just was like a kid growing up anywhere in the suburbs until I think I was about 14, and my dad dropped a book on my desk and said I should read it. It was a book by Bill Hosokawa called "Nisei: The Quiet Americans." And that was the first time I'd ever even heard about the incarceration of Japanese Americans. And I think that the reason he wanted us to be raised like any other white kid was because he had experienced a lot of anti-Japanese racism when he was growing up, but there came a time when he felt I needed to know about what had happened. So, I was pretty shocked. I was raised to be proud of my country and love my country, so it created a problem, a dissonance for me to know that my country had done that to my family.

News Clip: On December 7, 1941, Japan, like its infamous Axis partners, struck first and declared war afterwards. Costly to our Navy was the loss of war vessels, airplanes and equipment, but more costly to Japan was the effectiveness of its foul attack in immediately unifying America in its determination to fight and win the war thrust upon it and to win the peace that will follow.

AP: Three months after Pearl Harbor, on February 19, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, sanctioning the removal of more than 110,000 Japanese Americans and immigrants from the West Coast.

News Clip: Thereafter the American citizen Japanese and Japanese aliens made plans in accordance with orders. Notices were posted. All persons of Japanese descent were required to register. They gathered in their own churches and schools and the Japanese themselves cheerfully handled the enormous paperwork involved in the migration. Civilian physicians made preliminary medical examinations. Government agencies helped in a hundred ways. They helped the evacuees find tenants for their farms. They helped businessmen lease, sell or store their property. This aid was financed by the government, but quick disposal of property often involved financial sacrifice for the evacuees. Now the actual migration got underway.

AP: The U.S. government incarcerated them at 10 prison camps across the West, including the Granada Relocation Center in Southeast Colorado, commonly called Amache. Most of Calvin's family fled California early on, taking refuge in Fort Lupton, Colorado. His grandmother stayed behind in Sacramento to look after their boarding house until the FBI arrested her and incarcerated her at Amache for the rest of the war. She was so embittered by the experience she returned to Japan as soon as the camp shut down and the family never heard from her again.

AP: No one ever tried to track them down?

CH: Yeah, we did.

AP: Really?

CH: I was told that we did. I mean, this was long before I was born. You know, post-World War II Japan was in turmoil and my family on my father's side came from Hiroshima.

AP: Oh, wow.

CH: So, they had the problem of the atomic bomb. Yeah, they just never, ever heard from her again.

[Piano Music]

AP: From August 1942 to the camp's closure in October 1945, Amache detained 10,000 people. The population remained around 7,500 at any time. Nearly a quarter of the inmates were children. Ten percent ultimately enlisted in the Army, and none of them had committed a crime. On the dusty, desolate Eastern plane of Colorado amid extreme heat, cold and wind, the people incarcerated at Amache built their own town complete with a fire department, a beauty salon and schools. Think about your own life and how much can change over three years. High schoolers fell in love and shared their first dance, couples got married or were separated so long they forgot the sound of each other's voice. Babies were born. People died. Detainees raised crops, grew gardens and held festivals to honor the changing seasons.

Carlene Tanigoshi Tinker: I could have been a three-year-old anywhere else, so, I have nothing to compare it with. My name is Carlene Tanigoshi Tinker, I'm a third generation Japanese American. The name for our generation is *sansei*. I'll be celebrating my 83rd birthday on August 31 this year. I don't know what it feels like to be 83, but I feel pretty good.

AP: I know that you were very, very young, but do you have early memories during those years?

CTT: Yes, I do. One of the most poignant ones is my dad being very solicitous but always would try to protect me against the wind.

[Wind Sounds]

CTT: I don't know if you've been down to Amache or you've been on the plains. It's very sandy and very windy and sandstorms were, well, it's on the western edge of the Dust Bowl. So, when we went to go to dinner, he would place me up on his shoulders, put a scarf around my face so I wouldn't get pitted by the blowing sand. I can just see us standing in line at the mess hall line.

AP: *Issei* and *nisei*, first- and second-generation Japanese, rarely talked about incarceration. The Buddhist religion teaches you to move on.

CTT: But there are two principles that I guess are adapted or adopted from the Buddhist religion. The first one is, *gaman*, persevere. You do it, you got it, and that's it. You know, you persevere, you rise above the situation. And the other one is *shikata ga nai*.

Ken Kitajima: My father and mother never want to talk about the camp.

AP: This is Ken Kitajima, a 92-year-old survivor of Amache.

KK: A lot of the *issei*, or first-generation people that were in camp, our mothers and fathers and grandfathers, they had a habit of not talking about camp. They didn't like it. And, they had a Japanese saying for that: *shikata ga nai*. "Oh, it can't be helped." So, the young people, we were left out of any questions and so forth they wouldn't answer. Almost all Japanese families in that first generation have that attitude, it's a Japanese characteristic: it means it can't be helped so let it go, don't fight it, so they just went along with it. Those are kind of bad memories.

AP: Ken remembered being relieved when he moved away from the bullies of his elementary school in Santa Clara, California. He grew up in Amache and explored the plains with his friends.

[Plucky String Music]

KK: And they let me sneak out of camp on the fence and I was right next to the western side of the Amache camp. I used to go hunt for animals and so forth. And the field was next to us basically go hunting and Wolf Creek all the way down all to the Arkansas River. The Wolf Creek went through some farmland, went through the town of Grenada and off into the Arkansas. I used to love that because in the Arkansas River, they had a lot of large carp and a lot of trout would get trapped and we would block it off and we would catch huge trout, one to two feet long and put them in gunny sacks and bring them back and give it to the cook over there in our camps. Only bad part was they didn't share the carps with us, they ate it themselves. My mother didn't like the idea of me sneaking out of camp, even with the permission of the guard. I was hunting for rattlesnakes, hunting for tarantulas, centipedes, kangaroo rats and other insects. One of the things I used to do after I caught a tarantula and a centipede, I put them in a big mayonnaise jar that I got from the mess hall where we used to eat. And then we, two or three of our buddies, we bet on who was going to win, we put the tarantula and the centipede together. And, of course, we all pick the tarantula because they had these huge fangs. And the centipede, which is about four inches long, we didn't bet on them at all. And lo and behold, the centipede beat the tarantula every time. Of course, we learned a lot from that.

AP: After the war, detainees received \$25 and a bus ticket. Many met racist "No Vacancy" signs when they returned to the West Coast. Others stayed in Colorado or migrated east.

KK: What happened to the 120,000 Japanese incarcerated in camps mostly in high desert areas, under terrible conditions: they lost a lot. More than two thirds were American citizens. And they put American citizens behind barbed wires. I call them concentration camps because that's what they were. The nicest word for them are internment camps where they interned Japanese. The correct term is concentration camp. When you have barbed wire fence and guards every so often and machine guns and search lights and military with rifles on top of the guards, that's a concentration camp.

[Harp Music]

BB: While the parents of Japanese prison camp survivors wanted to leave the past behind, the most recent former presidential administration dusted off the racist policies and legal decisions which kept the camps open. The 1944 U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding Roosevelt's executive order to incarcerate Japanese Americans resurfaced when the Trump administration instituted the so-called "Muslim Ban," precluding travelers from several Muslim majority countries from visiting the United States. In this segment, legal experts explore the impact of the decades old Korematsu Supreme Court decision on modern day immigration policies and priorities. Here's Amanda again.

AP: Amid inhospitable cacti and sagebrush, the detainees grew so many beans, corn and grain that they helped feed the nine other prison camps. As tempting as it is to get lost in the story of perseverance, let's not forget what this place was and why armed guards surrounded these people: we sent them there. We, the people of the United States of America, caved into racist fears and capitalistic opportunism. Here's the truth: none of these people ever posed any risk to national security. In the 1982 report to Congress that resulted in war reparations awarded to survivors, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians wrote: "Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions which followed from it—detention, ending detention and ending exclusion—were not driven by analysis of military conditions. The broad historical causes which shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership." The U.S. was also at war with Germany and Italy, but fewer than 14,000 Germans and Italians were arrested. Interestingly, Japanese people in Hawaii, where the Pearl Harbor attack took place, were not subject to roundups. Japanese people were an easy target in California where they made up 2% of the population, but in Hawaii they made up a third of the populace. Japanese faces were familiar in the Aloha State, not foreign, so manic Yellow Fever never really took hold there. A few brave people protested the incarceration all the way up to the Supreme Court — and lost. On December 18, 1944, in a 6-3 decision, the Supreme Court upheld the president's ability to incarcerate an entire race of people in times of war.

Richard Primus: *Korematsu* is a case that I always teach when I teach introductory constitutional law. It's an important caution to remind ourselves about the fact that our courts can fail in very important ways. I'm Richard Primus, I teach constitutional law at the University of Michigan. The way that courts and lawyers have used *Korematsu* since the 1950s is not as authority but as anti-authority. Say a lawyer walks into court and says what the other side is doing, that's like *Korematsu*. And if you can convince the judge of that, you win.

AP: The only thing keeping *Korematsu* a negative reference point is our ever-tenuous social contract.

RP: So, here's the thing about shared understandings. They work really well until they don't work anymore. Over time they can change if people start challenging them and disagreeing, and there's no way to predict whether that will happen. It's a matter of public opinion and professional opinion over time. Between 2017 and 2021, we had a presidential administration that was deeply hostile to non-white immigrant groups. If we have more administrations like that, and more and more government lawyers who are called upon to represent that set of views, there's nothing that says that sometime in the future what's now a shared understanding that *Korematsu* is toxic might not dissolve. That could, of course, happen.

AP: *Korematsu* resurfaced in 2018, when the Supreme Court heard arguments on the Trump administration's travel ban against Muslim majority countries. Up and down the campaign trail, Trump promised to ban Muslim immigrants and then penned an executive order that did exactly that, without the heated political rhetoric.

Rudy Giuliani: When he first announced it, he said "Muslim Ban." He called me up, he said put a commission together, show me the right way to do it legally. And what we did was we focused on instead of religion, danger. The areas of the world that create danger for us.

Trevor Noah: Hey Donald, I know you don't actually write or read any of those boring papers, so let me explain to you what you did. You banned everyone from seven Muslim countries from entering the United States.

AP: That was attorney Rudy Giuliani and “The Daily Show’s” Trevor Noah speaking in 2017. The Roberts’ court upheld the travel ban, 5-4. In her dissent, Justice Sonia Sotomayor said the majority opinion, quote, “Redeploys the same dangerous logic underlying *Korematsu*, and merely replaces one gravely wrong decision with another.” Chief Justice John Roberts countered that *Korematsu* has nothing to do with this case, distinguishing between the forced removal of American citizens and limiting entry for non-citizens.

RP: Chief Justice Roberts said something that sounded like an overruling of *Korematsu*, and it was intended to be a signal so that everyone should understand that the court thinks that *Korematsu* is terrible. And it was especially important for the chief justice to try to make sure that everyone understood that *Korematsu* is terrible because it was so easy in that case for people to say, hey, this thing that the government is doing, it smells kind of like *Korematsu*. But technically, the *Trump vs. Hawaii* case does not overrule *Korematsu*, it can't for this very simple reason: when you have a case in which the government wins, that case can only be overruled in a later case where the government loses.

[String Music]

AP: Other scholars are satisfied that Roberts closed the book on *Korematsu*.

Gabriel Chin: I think *Korematsu* was overturned in *Trump vs. Hawaii*. I'm Gabriel J. Chin, a professor of law at the University of California Davis School of Law, and I write about Asian American legal history, criminal law, immigration, things like that. They said we're overruling, okay, and I think that's great. I'm glad they overruled it, but they reveal themselves in what they do, so, they say racial classifications are suspect and subject to the most exacting scrutiny, the most rigid scrutiny, alright. But then they uphold the “Muslim Ban.” So, obviously it's not a very rigorous test.

AP: For decades, Professor Chin studied how U.S. law limited opportunities for Asians, one thread in the nation's great tapestry of racist law.

GC: The key document in my view is the 1790 Naturalization Act, and I bought a copy of it on eBay 20 years ago from an old newspaper. It was signed by George Washington as president, John Adams as vice president and Thomas Jefferson as secretary of state, and it limits the privilege of naturalization to free white persons. This racial restriction remained in effect until 1952 in one way or another. You know, the founders of the country signed it in 1790, which was the first Congress they're doing the, you know, they're starting the basic framework of the government. And one of the first things that they do is say free white persons is who we want to make citizens.

AP: What is different today that would make it so something like the Japanese internment camp couldn't happen today? Are we a better country?

GC: Well, sure. Yeah. Yeah. We're a better country. Of course, we are. But could it happen today? Also yes. So, we don't have racial discrimination in immigration anymore, other than by application, other than in discriminatory enforcement. But the law itself is race neutral and the law itself has largely race neutral results. There's no racial restriction on who can become a citizen in means of segregation. So, I think there was a lot of racial discrimination, racism as an attitude was in the sinews of the country. But then we changed the law and I think the attitudes have changed a lot too. I think it takes a long time for culture to change. And I don't think that racism against non-white racial groups has dissipated, but I

think in 2022, we're talking about something different than we were talking about in 1954 or 1965. But I also think that these attitudes are there in many people, consciously or subconsciously, as with the Wuhan flu, China virus, comes out under pressure, economic pressure, social pressure, like the pandemic, in some people it's still there.

AP: I struggle with this question of whether we're better people today, whether America as a country would know better today and make a different decision than it would've in 1942.

GTT: Yeah. Amanda, we all wish that. And I think about, you know, anti-Asian treatment now. I don't live where that's happening, but like in San Francisco, Oakland where older women, older men are being physically assaulted. I mean, that's just appalling.

AP: Carlene Tanigoshi Tinker.

CTT: Well, in recent years we have after 9/11, we have people who are Muslims are treated similarly. There were talks of rounding up people and putting them into camps. Look at the Mexicans at the border, you know, they're trying to amass them into camps. So, the story is: this is what happens when you have a group that has been misidentified as the enemy for no reason other than the fact that they look like the enemy, not for what they did.

AP: Time and time again, survivors and descendants recognized the shadows of the fear that led to their incarceration.

Erin Tsurumoto Grassi: When I was in college, the author of "Farewell to Manzanar" came and spoke. Well, I actually ran out of the room because I was sobbing. So, my name is Erin Tsurumoto Grassi, I am the granddaughter of two individuals actually who were imprisoned during World War II. My grandmother was detained at Topaz and my grandfather's family was imprisoned at Amache. I left thinking, okay, I need to go learn more about my family's history. What I ended up doing was going to the Japanese American History Museum so I could learn about it, but I ended up going May 1, 2006, when there were massive immigration protests, right, going on across the country because of anti-immigrant laws.

AP: Millions of Americans demonstrated against Bush-era immigration reform aimed to stop Latinos from crossing the Southern border. The Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act would have classified undocumented immigrants as felons. It passed the House but failed in the Senate.

ETG: And I had not, you know, prior to that, I hadn't really paid attention to that issue. It wasn't an issue that impacted my family directly in that moment, but to get to the museum, we had to drive through million-person protests in LA. But for me, the thing that I remember first was reading about anti-immigration laws, right. Our immigration laws in our country that, that were targeting Asian Americans. Right, you know, starting with you know Chinese Exclusion, Gentleman's Agreement, alien land law acts, Johnson-Reed, all the way to the point creating this environment to the point where something like internment could happen. And in that moment, right, as I'm reading about all these anti-immigrant laws, I could still hear the protest outside. So, for me, it was a moment of clarity that if I didn't want what happened to my own family to happen to another family, I needed to pay attention to what was happening with immigration and immigrant rights.

AP: I am curious, what do you think has changed between your grandparents' generation and your generation where they wanted to bury this part of history and you are actively working to make sure that it's influencing the present day?

ETG: My mother would probably tell you that it's because we've become more American. I think one of the things my sister and I are realizing, I think my mother is starting to realize too, is that you know, we have the opportunity to heal from this. We have been fortunate to have seen civil rights movements and to be able to be part of or benefit from a lot of the civil rights movements from other groups. And I think that has helped.

BB: The next generation of Japanese Americans doesn't want to leave their history in the dust. For decades, Amache survivors and their families have been visiting the site of the former prison camp in an annual pilgrimage. Academic researchers and students have worked with the survivors to uncover and preserve their history. Their work was recognized nationally this year, becoming the newest national park this past March. Amanda takes us on a visit to the site.

AP: The story of preserving Amache is just as important as how it came to be. If it weren't for a group of survivors who began making annual pilgrimages in the 1970s, if not for a group of high school students in the early 1990s, if not for a University of Denver archaeology class in the mid-2000s, this place would've long been buried beneath bramble, thistle and thorn.

Bonnie J. Clark: My specialty is historical archaeology and I've always really been interested in how people like, kinda live out their identity on a daily basis, you know, in terms of what clothes do you wear and what house do you live in and what do you feed your kids.

AP: Professor Bonnie J. Clark teaches anthropology at the University of Denver.

BJC: And especially when your identity is under siege, you know, when those physical markers become something that people read, the fact that the people were at this camp and they've been singled out for their ancestry, and yet they were bringing with them Japanese ceramics and they were building Japanese style and American style gardens. It just seems like such an amazing place to be able to follow this longstanding research interest of mine while also providing, you know, an opportunity, an amazing opportunity of my students to be able to work on a site that really mattered to people. And, you know, you just don't often have archeology being funded by the people who lived at that site.

[Footsteps]

AP: Every May, survivors and descendants return to Amache. They honor the 120 who died there with flowers and prayer. This year, more than 200 journeyed the 3 ½ hours from Denver, through a spring snowstorm, past 200 miles of oil wells, grazeland and farms. Bumpy, dirt roads transect Amache labeled with white wooden signs explaining what things like the hospital once did and how staff got paid \$19 a month while the white teachers from town made \$100. Aside from spiny desert scrub and the occasional sign warning of rattlesnakes, there's nothing to stop you from wandering out to explore the concrete foundations of 500 demolished barracks. Gone are the shady trees they planted to keep the dust outdoors, gone are the gardens and koi ponds. And the site is currently kept neat by a local high school. But since the town is donating the land and Congress passed a near-unanimous bill designating Amache a national park, the National Park Service will take over. They're in the early stages of planning,

but it's easy to imagine simple luxuries like a paved road and an outhouse making the site more accessible.

[Footsteps]

Mitch Homma: There's this huge group of people, you know the National Park system has the National Park passports, right, where you get a stamp. Well, I guess there's these different regional groups that try to one-up each other, where they have 16 members have every single stamp, they've visited all 424 national parks, right, and you have a stamp and all that stuff. I'm Mitch Homma from San Diego, California. Three days after it got announced that President Biden signed the bill, John Hopper down there in Grenada started getting calls asking if they've got their National Park stamp yet, it's like the ink's not even dry, but he's getting calls from New Jersey and Pennsylvania and Florida where people want to come out and get their 424th stamp. So, this is actually really fast. There's actually groups that have tried for like 10 years. And so, I certainly didn't think we were gonna pass the Senate in the first shot.

AP: Why not?

MH: Because Congress can't get anything done nowadays. I just thought, I don't know, with everything going on I just thought, you know, the Republicans won't support a Democratic anything, just because even though was a bipartisan bill, I just I don't know. I thought we were in for a long Senate fight.

AP: Do you have any thoughts of why Amache was so easily given National Park status this year?

MH: I think just a lot of things fell into place with the Covid and the anti-Asian hate and National Park Conservation Association, you know, organization being behind this big push, you know, really, really helped, you know, just the timing was right and a lot of things fell into place.

AP: Let me ask, what does it mean to you that Amache is being named a National Park? Why is that something that survivors and descendants have pushed for?

BJC: You know, this history was in the shadows for so long, and having it be a park really is an honor to the people who were there. And, whether for, you know, the sort of dwindling number of survivors or for their descendants and I think, especially when I hear the descendants talk about it becoming a park, they just get so choked up about the honoring of their parents. You know, for me as an archeologist, the National Park Service, part of their mission, the bedrock of their mission is preserving, like they choose these places because they should be preserved for the generation. Which means that idea at this site will be preserved in perpetuity is like a dream come true for me as an archeologist. It's amazing. It's what we would all hope for our sites. You know, I can rest assured that at some point I'll be able to stop spending every other summer at Amache and it's gonna be okay.

AP: You're worried that if you stop, the work will stop with you.

BJC: Well, you know, when it's a grassroots kind of thing, yeah. But there will be people whose job it is to watch over this site and to preserve it, to interpret it. And that's, that's amazing.

AP: What I wanna know is what do we do now? Survivors told their stories and donated their family heirlooms to museums. Descendants heard the call and now the National Park Service will preserve the site as a public place, because all that isn't the end of the story. The story of the past is the story of the

present. The burden is now on we the people to learn from this, it's up to us to know better when tempted with fear and hate, it's up to us if we want to see peace prevail. I want to thank everyone who shared their family history with me for this piece and others in the past. *Domo arigato gozaimasu!* None of this would be possible without you.

[Sweeping Orchestral Music]

BB: To read Amanda's story on her visit to Amache, visit courthousenews.com. And don't forget to follow her reporting along with other stories by Courthouse News reporters on Twitter @CourthouseNews and @sidebarCNS. It takes constant work to ensure American history doesn't remain under layers of dust, creating distance between the racist policies of our past and allowing that unpleasantness to rear its ugly head. Thank you to the Amache families and experts for keeping the not-too-distant history alive in a time when there has been a resurgence of anti-Asian American hate crimes. And thanks to our listeners for tuning in. You won't want to miss our next episode, where we explore the living, breathing beasts made up of a small group of people who decide a party's fate in court: Juries. What could possibly go wrong? See you next time.

[Outro Music]