



Internees at Honouliuli Camp.

When Japanese forces bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the surprise attack set in motion a series of events that would unfold tragically for people of Japanese descent throughout the United States. Just a few months later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, thereby clearing the way for the forced removal and imprisonment of roughly 120,000 Japanese immigrants and their descendants in isolated places like Jerome, Arkansas; Gila River, Arizona; and Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

This story of injustice and sorrow has been documented exhaustively by a range of people, from historians and filmmakers to political activists and community researchers. But while the resulting narratives have gone a long way towards addressing the transgressions of this bleak episode in American history, the intriguing story of O'ahu's Honouliuli Detention Camp has been largely untouched - that is, until now.

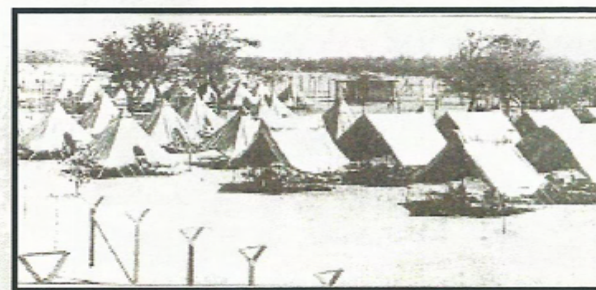
In the early 1940s, about 40 percent of Hawai'i's population was Japanese. Detaining such a sizable portion of the territorial workforce posed enough logistical and economic problems that the Islands were spared from mass incarceration. However, in

the decades prior, pervasive anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S. and Hawai'i's unique demographics resulted in years of covert government scrutiny and skepticism. With the attack on Pearl Harbor serving as the catalyst, the ensuing declaration of martial law opened the door for roughly 1,200 to 1,500 Issei and Nisei to be interrogated, detained, and imprisoned.

Those individuals - primarily community leaders, such as Buddhist and Shinto priests, language school officials, commercial fishermen, newspaper editors, and consular agents - had previously been identified by the government as Japanese loyalists and potential subversives. No charges were formally filed, but as Otokichi Ozaki, a Japanese language teacher who spent time in 10 different internment and detention camps in Hawai'i and the continental U.S., later attested, the harrowing experience was forever seared into their memories: "Dozens of armed soldiers surrounded us, and their guns glittered ominously in the rain. It flashed across my mind that they were preparing to execute us. We were ordered to walk. So we started walking in the cold rain through the barracks, fearing that we would be killed. Everyone looked so worn out, for we had been anxious and restless all through the night. I must have been a sorry sight, too; after all, I am just an ordinary man having had little mental training for a situation such as this."

The majority of Hawai'i's detainees were confined to one of five main sites: Kalaheo Stockade on Kaua'i, Haiku Camp on Maui, Kilauea Military Camp on the Big Island, and Sand Island and Honouliuli on O'ahu. Honouliuli, which was located on 160 acres of barren land in the central part of the island, opened on March 1, 1943 and was the largest and longest running of the five

camps. Though its 3,000-person facilities never held more than 300 internees at any one time, the perpetual heat and swarms of mosquito that besieged the site prompted its Japanese residents to refer to it as *Jigoku Dani*, or Hell Valley. Quartered alongside those captives were about 100 German and Italian Americans, as well as several thousand prisoners of war. Together, they were left to ponder several burning questions behind the camp's ominous barbed-wire fences: Why were they there? What was happening to their families? When would they be allowed to leave? Would their lives ever be the same? When Honouliuli closed in 1945, it literally faded from the public eye, as unchecked foliage turned the private land where the

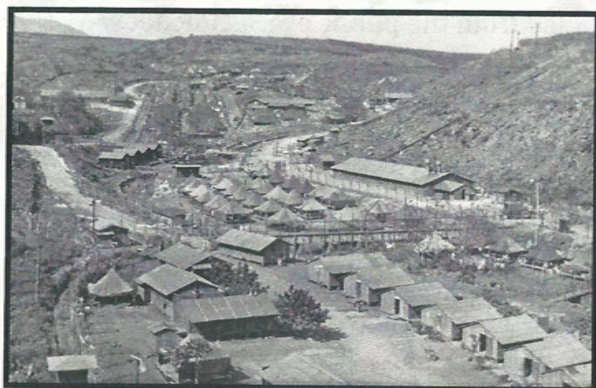


*Sand Island Camp housed detainees in tents for six months until barracks were built.
Photo: U.S. Army Museum of Hawai'i*

camp once stood into a modern-day jungle. Many of the detainees attempted, to varying degrees of success, to regain a sense of normalcy, though few talked about their incarceration to family or friends. Indeed, Honouliuli's memory was all but forgotten until 1998, when a local television station contacted the JCCH for help finding the site. The query sprung volunteer Jane Kurahara into action and, in 2002, a watershed moment occurred when a three-hour exploratory expedition resulted in the discovery of the former detention facility.

Interestingly enough, what kept the site hidden from the public also preserved it for scholarship. Resting beneath a canopy of monkeypod trees and miles of overgrown grass was a treasure trove of standing buildings, concrete foundations, well-preserved artifacts, rocks walls, fence remnants, an aqueduct, and even an underground sewer system. "It was history coming alive," Kurahara recalled. "It all hit me. The things you read in books... The books hit your head. This hit your heart."

Archaeologists from the National Park Service and National Forest Service eventually came



Honouliuli Camp: foreground -- men's barracks; background -- prisoner of war tents.

to the same conclusion: Honouliuli was one of the best-preserved detention sites in the nation. In response, the JCCH formed a committee in 2005 specifically to help the area become a public historical park. That effort was buoyed in 2006, when President George W. Bush signed the Camp Preservation Bill, which authorized \$38 million in funding to preserve World War II-era confinement centers and specifically mentioned Honouliuli. One year later, Monsanto Hawaii acquired the former camp grounds as well as the surrounding 2,140 acres of land. The company has since co-sponsored two pilgrimages and assisted with school tours to the site;

in addition, Monsanto has also expressed a willingness to donate the land to the National Park Service so that the public can visit Honouliuli regularly and discover this cautionary tale from Hawai'i's past.

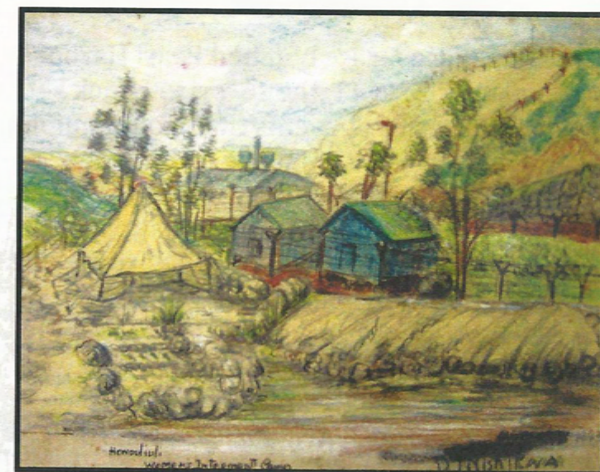
Today, Honouliuli is an ever-growing hub of research activity. Each summer, the University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu provides students with the opportunity to conduct hands-on archaeological fieldwork at the site. The JCCH, likewise, with the volunteer leadership of Betsy Young, Jane Kurahara with the dedicated Resource Center volunteers, continues to document the Honouliuli story through primary resources, and recently collaborated with the state Department of Education to develop an internment-based curriculum for high school students. Several schools have adopted the curriculum and have already experienced heartfelt results. "The actual excavation in Honouliuli was deeply humbling for me," said one Kapolei High School senior. "There really is no substitute for being here. I was able to visualize the kind of community that was there and the people that were interned. When we actually started unearthing relics and building foundations, there were moments when I had to take a step back and say, 'Wow...' It felt so surreal."

As Honouliuli continues to evolve from a historical afterthought into a living resource for all of Hawai'i's residents and visitors - both young and old alike - what once gained its strength from oppression is now thriving as a warning against injustice, a testament to courage, and a lesson in forgiveness.

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The Hawai'i Internment Experience



*Honouliuli Women's Internment Camp
Dan T Nishikawa, 1943*



Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i
2454 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96826
Resource Center: (808) 945-7633, ext. 42
resource.center@jcch.com

For more about World War II Internment in Hawai'i, visit www.jcch.com and click on the Sharing Our Future box.