

## Why Is the Tuna Canyon Detention Station Important?

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As Dr. Lloyd Hitt points out in his finely textured history that appears in this program, the land upon which the Tuna Canyon Detention Station (TCDS) once sat bursts with stories to tell. In many respects, it is a microcosm for much of suburban Los Angeles. It began as the indigenous land of the Tongva people, later witnessed successive colonization and occupation by Spain, Mexico, and the United States. The land remained generally untouched until after World War II, when residential incursions eroded much, but not all of, the region's small-town and rural flavor. But, of course, unlike surrounding neighborhoods, the Sunland-Tujunga area was the home to one of the least studied World War II detention camps. Although the history of TCDS is only now becoming more and more a part of the public consciousness, it offers important lessons for us today.

For many, it is probably very difficult to believe that there was an "enemy alien" camp where they have enjoyed a round of golf or relaxed over a beer and cheeseburger. Commuters who zoom between the San Fernando Valley and Crescenta Valleys on the 210 freeway likely do not think about the past stillness of the Tujunga corridor that magnified the sense of isolation for the detainees at TCDS. And, even the most well-meaning teachers in our schools probably do not think of Sunland-Tujunga when they prepare their curricula on World War II.

In general, we might think that the exigencies of war are far removed from us in terms of both time, but also space. The better-known sites of wartime mass incarceration and detainment – think Manzanar, Heart Mountain, or Rowher – were deliberately constructed in desolate deserts or other harsh and unforgiving landscapes. They were, and remain, far removed from the tenor of daily life for most Americans. Yet, the land upon which Tuna Canyon Detention Station once existed is nestled up against homes and a living, breathing community. As such, TCDS reminds us that history – even its most abhorrent parts – exists in our very backyards. We must then make every effort to uncover all of those histories that deserve to be told, whether we find them in amidst dusty archives, the depths of the Internet, or in stories shared over a kitchen table. We must excavate the stories of the pain and shame, but also the minute details of life in the camp, as well as the ways in which detainees and descendants make sense of the whole experience in general.

Armed with knowledge about that incredible past, we must remember, however, that history is not a product to be shelved at the end of the day. Rather, it is a dynamic process that guides us and ultimately compels us to act boldly and grapple with the knotty, messy, and complex society in which we live today. The historical contexts that gave rise to the Tuna Canyon Detention Station were a landscape of contradictions: the war empowered many through new opportunities for economic mobility and social citizenship, just as it stripped others of any sense of normalcy and basic dignity. To this end, we must apply the lessons of the past to today to stand against the forces that paint entire communities with broad brushstrokes with various

punitive policies and actions. Let us ask ourselves, “Who among us are wrongly targeted or wrongly detained?” Tuna Canyon Detention Station offers what is often called a “usable past” and it is up to each one of us to take its legacy and work for a world filled with justice and equity.