

As a historian of preservation and teacher of graduate students, I found the exhibit rich. So have my students. I suspect it would be ideal for school groups—especially high schoolers who would get the pop/high culture slyness of the curation, as well as be sophisticated enough to appreciate how smartly basic science is applied to the questions of conservation in a way that honors the artistic, cultural, and historic values of the objects.

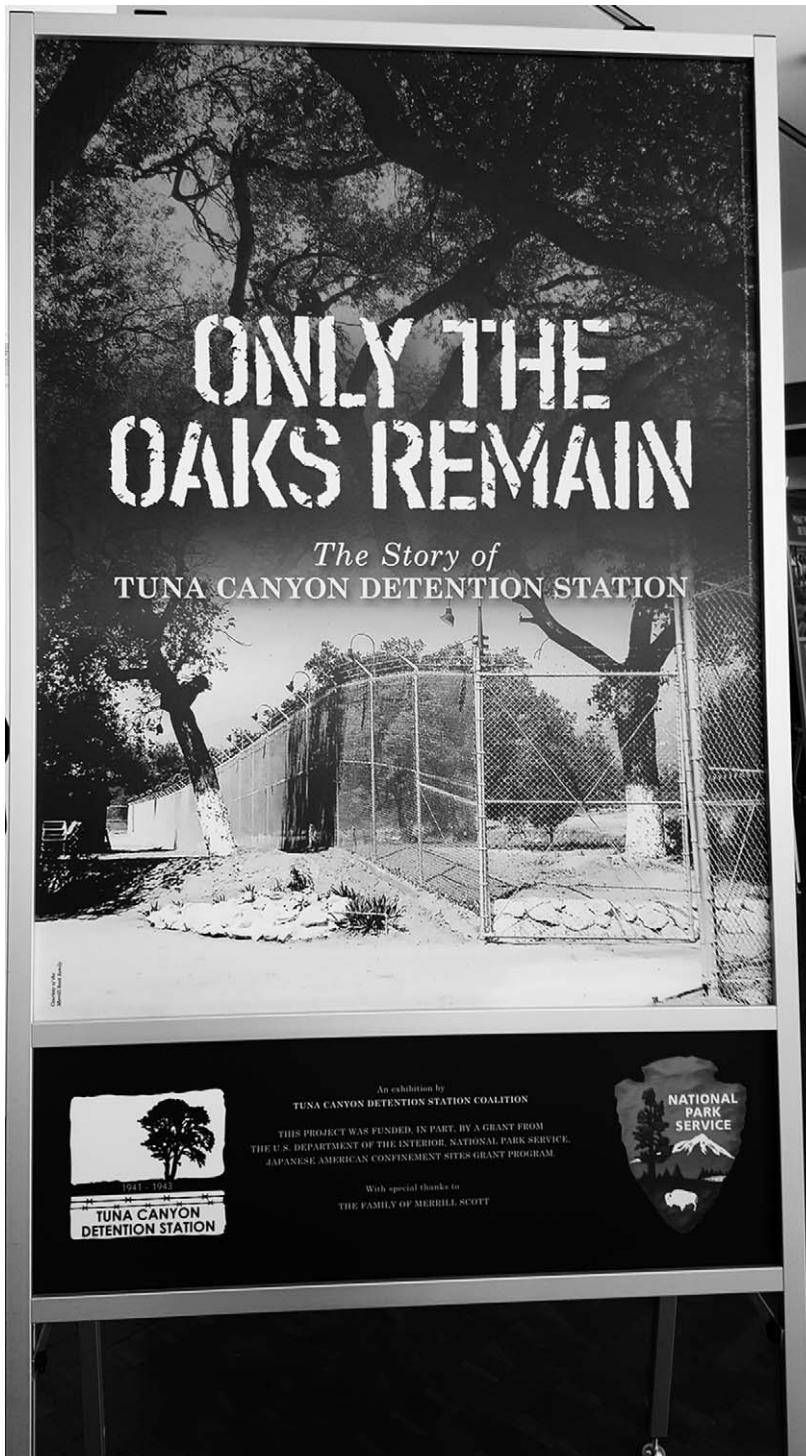
Randall Mason, University of Pennsylvania

---

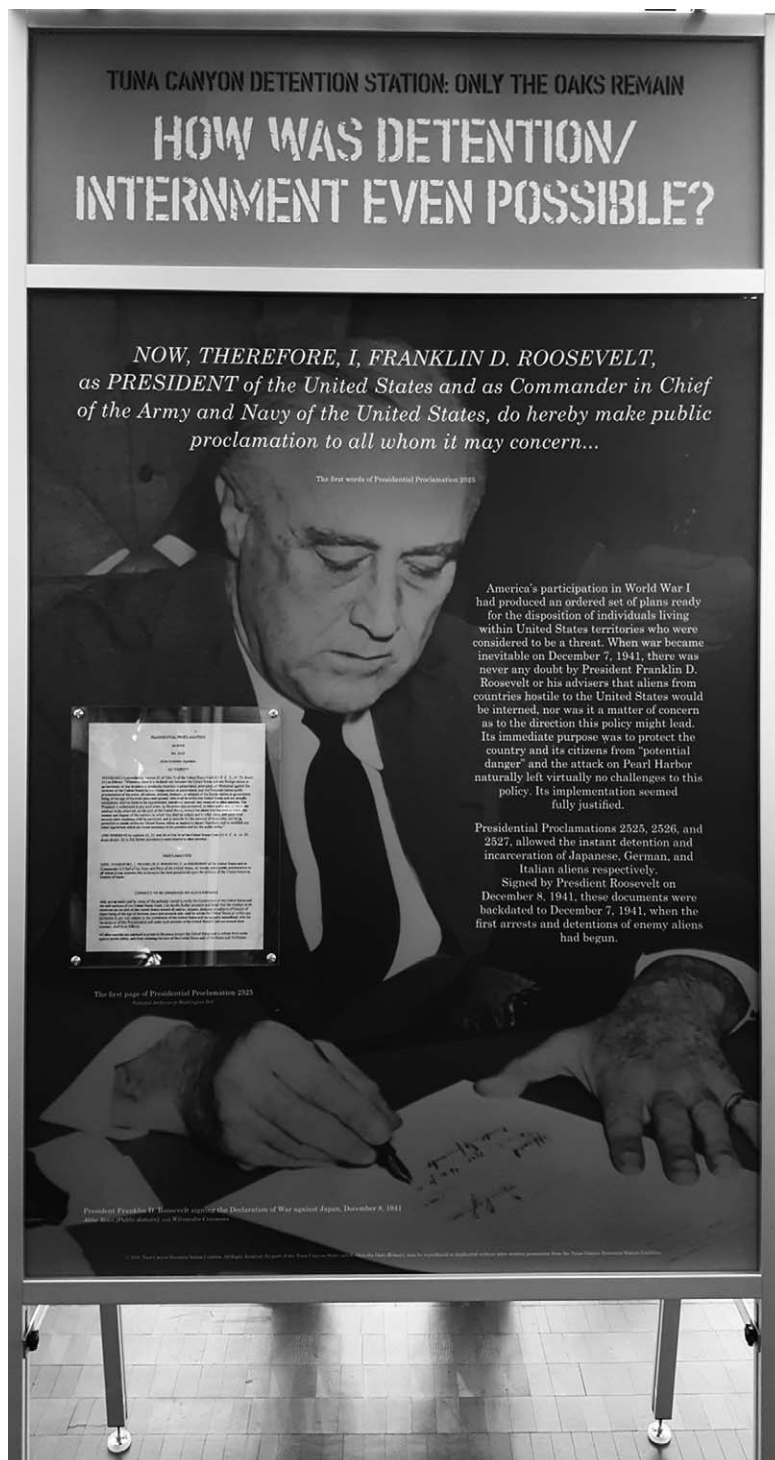
*Only the Oaks Remain: Stories of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station.* Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA. December 10, 2016–April 9, 2017. <http://www.janm.org/exhibits/tuna-canyon/>.

The United States' incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II is an episode of US history that is not widely known by the general American public, nor is the number of incarceration sites that spread across the United States like sores that were symptomatic of the larger cancer called racism. Historians have spent years unpeeling the layers of this experience and have devoted many volumes of work to addressing the nuances of the incarceration, but there are still stories that are being uncovered seemingly every day. The San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center wanted to tell the relatively unknown story of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station in the outskirts of Los Angeles that held over two thousand people of Japanese, German, and Italian descent, as well as Japanese Latinos who were kidnapped from Latin America by the United States government. Located in Tujunga, California, this site was a converted Civilian Conservation Corps camp and became one of the first incarceration sites established by the US government following its entrance into war. *Only the Oaks Remain: Stories of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station* is the result of that desire to tell this story. The fundamental mission of this traveling exhibit was to create a museum-grade exhibition to commemorate the history of the site and to continue to explore the layers of confinement during WWII. This exhibit was made possible by a grant from the National Park Service Japanese American Confinement Sites grant program.

*Only the Oaks Remain* explores the intricacies of how the United States began the surveillance on immigrants in the United States prior to the war and how after its entrance into WWII the United States began incarcerating civilians in the Tuna Canyon Detention Station, an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) camp, from December 1941 to October 1943. The exhibit brings to light the individuals who were imprisoned at Tuna Canyon and incorporates the story of Tuna Canyon into the larger context of the mass removal of Japanese Americans during WWII. This exhibit touches on many key points of the Japanese American incarceration experience to tie it into the existing narrative and elevate the story of this particular



Welcome panel to introduce visitors to the exhibit. (Photo courtesy of the author)



Panel describing President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Presidential Proclamations 2525, 2526, and 2527, which allowed for the detention of Japanese, German, and Italian immigrants. (Photo courtesy of the author)



Visitors viewing the exhibit at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California, on January 8, 2017. (Photo courtesy of the author)

INS camp in a manner that honors the story and the lives that were impacted during this traumatic event.

This is a traditional exhibit that is didactic in nature to expose social injustice. The designers incorporated a modest amount of technology to bring the story to life. It features many collapsible A-frame stands, which create an industrial feel, and sturdy standalone units that are great for traveling. These A-frame components feature interpretive panels on both sides, allowing visitors to walk between them and to lean in close to the panels to experience them. The space that the Japanese American National Museum chose to place this exhibit was a bit constricting during high visitation. When more than a handful of visitors were reading the panels, exhibit traffic disrupted visitor flow patterns.

This exhibit has six themed sections including an honor roll. Five of the sections posed questions that the exhibit sought to address: What was Tuna Canyon Detention Station? How was detention/internment possible? Who was at Tuna Canyon Detention Station? What was it like being an enemy alien? Could detention/internment happen today?

Some visitors who explored this exhibit may have known little or nothing about Tuna Canyon. Thus the designers carefully crafted the interpretation to take the visitors on a journey to learn more about this time in history. The narrative is well thought out and accessible without overwhelming visitors with too much information, putting the history into the context of what led to this violation of civil liberties. The exhibit starts with an introduction to the attack on Pearl Harbor and then the subsequent entrance of the United States into World War II, after which



Visitor reviewing the names of people incarcerated at Tuna Canyon. (Photo courtesy of the author)

the FBI began to round up people of “suspicion.” The physical site is described with historic images of the camp and of people who were incarcerated at Tuna Canyon.

Next, the exhibit breaks down the policies that were implemented to create a more holistic view, using primary documents to explain how the detention came to be. Binders with copies of historic documents outlining the government’s planning and decisions to develop the site for a prison camp allow visitors to see how meticulous the United States government was in identifying this site, taking into account everything from the types of buildings that were on site to the seventy-five dollars a month spent for leasing it. There is a prewar document from the FBI in July 1940 that suggested that a minimum of 18,500 people should be incarcerated in twenty-two “internment” camps.

The exhibit panels featuring the themes of “Who was at Tuna Canyon Detention Station?,” “What was it like being an enemy alien?,” and the “Honor Roll” were the most powerful sections of this exhibit. The humanizing aspect of introducing the visitors to the prisoners as people rather than as the caricatures found in history textbooks connects the audience to the exhibit. Learning about the diverse groups incarcerated, from first-generation Japanese immigrants who were barred by law from becoming naturalized to Japanese Latinos who were kidnapped from South America only to be traded by the United States to imperial Japan as prisoners of war, allows the visitor to get an insight into the governmental policies during WWII. The section titled “What was it like being an enemy alien?” peeled back another few layers of the WWII home front incarceration experience with its mention of the German and Italian prisoners at Tuna Canyon. Excerpts from journals of the



Visitors viewing the exhibit. (Photo courtesy of the author)

imprisoned allow the visitor to glimpse into the past through the eyes of a prisoner. The fear, anxiety, and uncertainty that prisoners expressed can echo through time. The Honor Roll is a striking wood panel that evokes the notion of the oak trees that are the only remnants at the site today that identify the two thousand people who were incarcerated at the Tuna Canyon Detention Station.

*Only the Oaks Remain* provokes the thought that something similar could happen today. Throughout the exhibition, the narrative touches on the subject of civil liberties' violations and how presidential proclamations and military policies can affect legal residents and citizens. The most poignant quote in this exhibit is on the last panel: "Lessons from the past, including those from Tuna Canyon Detention Station, are important to prevent abuses of power against specific groups, such as those that occurred during World War II. We should never repeat these mistakes."

This story, and the larger story of Japanese American incarceration, is relevant within the current political climate. The fear and war hysteria that were exhibited during World War II are prevalent today. We must never forget this chapter in American history nor lose sight of how fragile our civil liberties are in time of war.

Hanako Wakatsuki, National Park Service

Facts and views in this paper are the responsibility of the author and do not reflect the opinions or policies of the National Park Service.