American Concentration Camps: A Teach-In

Friday, September 13
Levering Great Hall
12pm to 4pm

Sponsored by: Program in Racism, Immigration, and Citizenship

Co-Sponsors: Alexander Grass Humanities Institute, JHU,
Urban Landscape Humanities Initiative of Garden & Landscape Studies, Dumbarton Oaks

Lunch and Refreshments Will Be Served

Speakers:
Melisa Carolina Argañaraz, Sanctuary Streets Baltimore
Jonathan Katz, Author of The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster
Seth Michelson, Assistant Professor of Spanish, Washington and Lee University
N. D. B. Connolly, Director of the Program in Racism, Immigration, & Citizenship, JHU
Anand Pandian, Professor of Anthropology, JHU
Christy Thornton, Assistant Professor of Sociology, JHU

In August of 1938, President Franklin Roosevelt argued that, “every Japanese citizen or non-citizen...should be secretly but definitely identified and his or her name placed on a special list of those...first...placed in a concentration camp in the event of trouble.” Within five years, trouble arrived in the form of World War II, and Roosevelt’s administration orchestrated a three-year, race-based detainment effort of some 120,000 people, two-thirds of whom were American citizens. Japanese internment hearkened to the previous containment of North America’s indigenous people and, in the 1940s, mirrored practices afflicting Jews in Europe and African Americans decrying ghettoization in the United States. Today, events on the U.S./Mexico border have raised fresh concerns about “American Concentration Camps,” with observers and politicians highlighting family-separation and child detainment policies in American immigration facilities. And again, advocates of such policies cite national security as their chief concern.

As part of a year-long discussion about “Retrenchment” hosted by the Program in Racism, Immigration, and Citizenship, a group of journalists, scholars, and activists will offer a teach-in and consider the past and present of forced containment. What is the analytic purchase of casting detention and relocation facilities as “Concentration Camps”? What survival strategies have developed among incarcerated children and their advocates, past and present? What geographic continuities undergird American detention practices? How can a comparative analysis of U.S. immigration policy overcome exceptionalism? And what is to be done to alleviate the humanitarian crisis currently unfolding on the U.S./Mexico border?

See https://sites.krieger.jhu.edu/ric for more information.

Photo: Memorial Day Services at Manzanar Relocation Center in California, where Americans of Japanese ancestry were held during World War II. Circa 1942-1945. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/538504