

## WORLD WAR II ALIEN ENEMY CONTROL PROGRAM CURRICULUM GUIDE AND LESSON PLANS

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### LESSON PLAN SIXTEEN: “*THE WHITE LINE: A One-Act Play*”

APPROPRIATE GRADES/COURSES: 8-14, U.S. History; Civics, American Government, Political Science, Drama

#### TOPIC BACKGROUND SUMMARY:

(See Lesson Plan One for a general overview of the WWII Alien Enemy Control Program. What follows is a summary of the program as it applied to the Italian American community.)

Italian immigration to the West Coast, which began as early as the Gold Rush, reached full force around the turn of the century. By the 1930s the Italian population was at its peak: Italian Americans comprised the largest immigrant group not only in San Francisco, but in the entire United States. The 1930s were not easy for these immigrants, either politically or economically. The Depression caused financial hardship for most. In addition, Italy under Mussolini was split between those who favored Il Duce's totalitarian policies, and those who opposed them. Fascists battled anti-fascists both under and above-ground. The battle crossed the ocean with the many anti-fascists who fled to exile in America.

Italian communities like those in North Beach in San Francisco engaged in these disputes, not least in their newspapers. For the most part, however, the immigrant generation supported Mussolini. He seemed to have gained the world's respect for Italy by turning the old country into a disciplined modern nation. Much of the world press, including the major organs in the United States, portrayed him as a hero--the first modern leader to lead his nation out of post-World War I chaos and Depression.

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the U.S. declaration of war on all three Axis powers, Italian Americans, and the formerly pro-fascist newspapers, hastened to affirm their loyalty to their adopted country. It made little difference. The measures to come made many immigrants feel that they were being blamed for where they had been born.

The internment of “dangerous” aliens began on the night of December 7, 1941. All enemy aliens were required to register with the government. Restrictions were placed on their possessions and their freedom to travel. An 8:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. curfew was strictly enforced. By late January, thousands of enemy aliens, including Italians, were being told to evacuate “prohibited” or “restricted” areas on the West Coast. Failure to comply with any of the government's actions against enemy aliens led to arrest and detention.

The government considered coastlines and harbors especially critical defense areas, and in some California coastal communities, like Eureka and Santa Cruz, the white traffic line down the middle of the street marked the line beyond which enemy aliens could not go. The line not only separated aliens from their citizen families, it separated them from their places of business. In Eureka, an alien father who owned a pool hall had to stand on one side of the street and shout business directions to his citizen son on the other. In Santa Cruz and elsewhere, the wharf was off-limits and Italian fishermen were separated from their fleet of boats and a critical means of livelihood.

In late February of 1942, fears of a Japanese invasion of the West Coast ran wild. A Japanese submarine surfaced just offshore in Santa Barbara and ineffectively shelled an oil refinery. Meanwhile, plans had been set in motion by the United States Navy to commandeer West Coast fishing boats, which would be re-equipped by the Navy as subchasers for coastal duty.

THE WHITE LINE is a one-act play which dramatizes the U.S. government's seizure of Italian fishing boats during World War II. A class reading of the script will take approximately twenty-five minutes.

ESTIMATED TIME OF COMPLETION OF LESSON PLAN: One Day

As part of the unit of study for enemy alien issues, teachers may elect to devote from one-to-three periods to in-class readings of the scripts included in the Curriculum Package. The other one-act plays are entitled ZIP (see Lesson Plan Fifteen), and THE MASTER TAILOR'S WIFE (see Lesson Plan Seventeen). Each script takes approximately twenty-five to thirty-five minutes to read.

Instead of focusing on a single play, teachers may also elect to break the class into three groups and have each group responsible for presenting a reading of one play to the rest of the class. This approach, involving some in-class rehearsal time, followed by presentations of all three plays and then discussion, might involve two-to-three periods of class time.

The scripts are to be considered primarily educational material. They are not copyrighted nor otherwise restricted regarding public performances. The scripts are available at no fee to any school drama department, as well as amateur and professional theater companies.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES:

Review and understand the various amendments of the Constitution covering issues of due process.

Be able to discuss the presence or absence of those provisions of the Constitution in events dramatized in "The White Line."

Understand the various provisions of the WWII Alien Enemy Control Program, especially provisions for relocating Italians, Germans, and Japanese from "prohibited" or "restricted" military areas and zones.

Understand how national security measures collide with issues of due process and human rights during times of war.

Understand and appreciate how World War II affected ethnic Italians in the United States.

#### MATERIALS:

Printed copies of the text of the play **THE WHITE LINE**, dramatizing the seizure of Italian fishing boats in Santa Cruz, California during WWII. The script is included at the end of this disk, under the file “**THE WHITE LINE: A One Act Play.**” No royalty or copyright payments are necessary for readings, stagings, or theater productions of **THE WHITE LINE**. A class reading will take approximately twenty-five minutes.

Printed copies of the **Topic Background Summary** (see above)

Printed hand-outs defining **Key Terms/Concepts** (see Lesson Plan One)

Printed copies of the **Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendments** (see Lesson Plan Three)

Printed copies of the **Alien Enemies Act** (See Lesson Plan One, or Three)

Printed copies of the **Reading List/Online Sources** for this Lesson Plan (see below)

Printed copies of the **Online/Media Resources**. (See Lesson Plan One)

#### TEACHER PREPARATION:

The script for **THE WHITE LINE** is written as “Reader’s Theater.” In Reader’s Theater, the scripts are mostly read, not acted, and the staging is minimal. Reader’s Theater scripts lend themselves perfectly to classroom reading. For those teachers who choose to present **THE WHITE LINE** outside the classroom, the script calls for minimal staging--the picture of a small town main street with a white line down it projected onto a backdrop screen.

**THE WHITE LINE** calls for six readers. A seventh reader can be added by assigning a student to read the stage directions. Readers for all parts can be either male or female. For full class involvement, teachers are encouraged to change readers during the course of the play.

#### PERIOD ONE: CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

##### For the teacher:

Distribute photocopied materials

##### For the Teacher and students:

Assign/select parts for class reading of **THE WHITE LINE**

For the students: last half of period  
Read THE WHITE LINE

Student homework

Pretend you are a newspaper reporter from a major newspaper who was assigned to cover the events dramatized in THE WHITE LINE. Write the story as you would expect to see it appear in the newspaper for which you work. Report only the events and background that strike you as an important part of the story. For your story, use at least two of the sources listed in your **Reading List/Online Sources** or the **Online/Media Resources** handouts. Your editor has given you a space requirement of exactly 600 words.

KEY TERMS/CONCEPTS:

See “Keys Terms/Concepts” in Lesson Plan One.

READING LIST/ONLINE SOURCES FOR STUDENTS:

DiStasi, Lawrence, ed.: *Una Storia Segreta: The Secret History of Italian American Evacuation and Internment During World War II*, (Heyday Books, 2001). *Una Storia Segreta* includes the essay “Mala Notte: The Relocation Story in Santa Cruz,” by Geoffrey Dunn.

Fox, Stephen, *The Unknown Internment: An Oral History of the Relocation of Italian-Americans during World War II* (Twayne Publishers, 1990)

“*Una Storia Segreta: when Italian Americans were ‘enemy aliens’*,” by Lawrence DiStasi. [www.segreta.org/](http://www.segreta.org/)

“Prisoners Among Us: Italian American Identity & World War II”  
[www.prisonersamongus.com](http://www.prisonersamongus.com)

National Archives: [www.archives.gov/genealogy/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview](http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/immigration/enemy-aliens-overview). This site, run by the National Archives, presents a brief overview of the Alien Enemy Control Program, and there is a handy guide for locating and requesting documents in the National Archives.

“Here In America: The Assembly on Wartime Relocation & Internment of Civilians.” This DVD provides a succinct overview of the AWRIC event and the witnesses who testified at the Assembly, including scholars and witnesses from the Italian community. A complimentary copy is enclosed in the Enemy Alien Curriculum Package. For more information and to order additional copies of the DVD or the accompanying report, contact the National Japanese American Historical Society, 415-921-5007, [njahs@njahs.org](mailto:njahs@njahs.org). Running time of the CD is approximately fourteen minutes.