

## Center of the American West Student Research Fellowship 2025-26

### Seo and Hirabayashi Families Symposium

*\*\*Paid Fellowship and Mentorship Opportunity — Seeking undergraduate and graduate students\*\**



(Photo by Dorothea Lange, The Bancroft Library's War Relocation Authority collection, WRA no. C-492)

In February 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. Roosevelt's action authorized the U.S. military to forcibly remove Japanese Americans living on the West Coast and near the Mexican border. Between 1942 and 1945, the federal government sent over 120,000 Japanese Americans to eight camps built in remote locales across the American West and two sited in Arkansas, while thousands more were incarcerated in dozens of facilities operated by the Army and the Departments of Justice. Two-thirds of those incarcerated were U.S. citizens, and most remained within barbed wire until 1945. They were never charged—let alone convicted—of any crime.

Japanese American incarceration reflected and reinforced broader racialized fears—perspectives that continued to shape life for Japanese Americans on their release from the camps at war's end. Japanese Americans also suffered huge economic losses due to their unlawful confinement, losing jobs and businesses they had worked hard to establish over the preceding years. Eight decades later, the history and experiences of Japanese Americans during this shameful chapter of our nation's past remain under-recognized and under-studied. The legacies of these events continue to reverberate today, shaping current policies and practices regarding race, immigration, politics, law, and memory. This has included the so-called War on Terror, the Trump Administration's ongoing push to deport non-citizens and deprive them of due process, and unprecedented challenges to birthright citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment.

This history and its continuing impacts raise questions that scholars, descendants, artists, jurists, and others have continued to explore and debate: How does the legacy of Japanese American incarceration continue to affect communities in the western U.S.? How does/should the United States reckon with painful and unjust histories? How have the legacies of Japanese American incarceration continued to shape U.S. law? How does the history of Japanese incarceration connect with contemporary policies and practices toward immigrant communities in the West as well as the United States more broadly?

CU-Boulder's Center of the American West is launching a new student fellowship program that offers a small cohort of students the opportunity to study a Western American issue or topic over the course of an academic year. Students will generate original scholarly or creative work under the mentorship of CU faculty, and they will receive a stipend for their efforts as well as access to funds supporting research travel.

For the 2025-26 academic year, the fellowship will focus on Japanese American incarceration in the American West. This opportunity is the brainchild of Eddie Seo, an Angeleno who was incarcerated along with other family members at the War Relocation Authority's camp at Heart Mountain, Wyoming. Inspired to promote greater awareness of this rich, controversial, and still exceedingly painful subject, Seo also wanted to honor Lane Ryō Hirabayashi. Hirabayashi, a former faculty member at CU-Boulder's Department of Ethnic Studies, was a pioneering scholar of Japanese American incarceration. Lane was also a nephew of Gordon Hirabayashi, who continued to exercise his rights as a U.S. citizen by fighting his arrest through legal challenges. In 1943, however, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Japanese American incarceration in *Hirabayashi v. U.S.*, which the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit finally vacated in the 1980s in response to decades of activism by the Hirabayashis and many other Japanese Americans who organized to seek redress from the federal government for the injustices prompted by Roosevelt's order.

Graduate students and undergraduates are both eligible to apply. Applications must include the following materials:

1. Resume/CV (one or two pages, including a list of relevant coursework at the university level, if any)
2. Cover letter in which you explain your reasons for wishing to participate as well as relevant courses and other experiences, if any
3. List of two or three references, with contact information (at least one reference should be from a university-level instructor who has some familiarity with your academic skills and preparation)

Students selected to participate in this selective program will choose a more specific area of study within this larger theme. Drawing on the questions above, this area of focus will enable students to conduct original research that illuminates lesser-known histories and experiences relating to the war-time confinement of Japanese Americans. It will also provide a forum in which students can discuss and develop their findings, culminating in a presentation, paper, teaching curriculum, or piece of creative work inspired and informed by their research. Each student chosen to serve as a Seo/Hirabayashi Fellow will receive a stipend of \$1,500 as well as access to up to \$1,000 of research funding.

The fellowship will kick-off with a fall symposium examining this egregious miscarriage of justice led by CU faculty and guest scholars from other institutions. Students will next meet directly with faculty to receive guidance on their projects. Students will then dig into their research project while meeting regularly with their cohort of students as well as faculty advisors. The fellowship will culminate with a student research symposium in spring semester as well as a May 2026 group field trip to the Amache National Historic Site and the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, both of which are in southeastern Colorado.

*The Center of the American West at the University of Colorado Boulder is a recognized hub for illuminating the role of the western United States in regional, national and global issues. We bring people together to explore the ongoing complexities of and challenges facing the western United States through education, research, programs, and projects. For more information on C&AW, please see our website at <https://www.colorado.edu/center/west/>.*