

Ralph Lazo

born *November 3, 1924*
died *January 1, 1992*



“Ralph Lazo in a group photo at Manzanar” by
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Ralph Lazo was an American soldier, teacher, and human rights advocate. He is best known for being the only person to voluntarily relocate to the Japanese-American internment camps without being Japanese-American or the spouse of a Japanese-American prisoner.

In May 1942, 17-year-old Lazo made the decision to join his Japanese-American friends and neighbors as they were forcibly relocated to Manzanar. He was never questioned about his ancestry upon arrival and stayed until August 1944. During his time there, he was president of his class at school and entertained orphan children.

Lazo left the camp when he was drafted into the U.S. Army. A staff sergeant by 1946, he participated in the liberation of the Philippines and received the Bronze Star for heroism.

After the war, Lazo became a teacher, mentoring students with disabilities and supporting Hispanic students in attending college and voting. He also helped raise money for a lawsuit against the government in an effort to gain reparations for the Japanese-Americans forcibly detained by the United States. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 eventually did grant reparations as well as an apology for racial prejudice and mistreatment.

When asked about his voluntary internment, Lazo stated, “Internment was immoral... It was wrong, and I couldn’t accept it.”