

Japanese-American Internment Camps: Imprisoned in their Own Country

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Research Paper

1,539 Words

Did you know that almost 120,000 Japanese-Americans lived in internment camps during World War II?¹ The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 led to the removal of these Japanese-Americans from their homes into internment camps by the United States government. The people affected by this would struggle to receive just compensation for what they suffered through. This would become a festering issue for not only those who were unfortunate enough to experience these camps, but also for the American government, who acted rather impulsively by placing these people into internment camps. Some people believe that the internment camps were one of the most relentless violations of civil liberties in American history, causing a major conflict.

Japan and America have always had a unique relationship. Their correlations with each other started out peacefully. In 1854, Japanese and American trade began.² Up until the year of 1912, the relationship between the two countries still had little to no conflict, so Japan sent the United States 3,020 cherry blossom trees as a gift, displaying their friendship.³ Japan and the United States kept peace with each other, teaming up in 1917 as allies to fight the forces of Germany during World War I.⁴

In 1924, the United States of America put a law against immigration from Japan into place.⁵ From there, the relationship between the countries of Japan and America progressively got worse. In 1937, Japan began to invade and attempt to takeover

¹ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web.

² Bauschard, Emma. "History Between Relations of Japan and the US." *Sutori*. N.p., n.d. Web.

³ Bauschard, Emma. "History Between Relations of Japan and the US." *Sutori*. N.p., n.d. Web.

⁴ Bauschard, Emma. "History Between Relations of Japan and the US." *Sutori*. N.p., n.d. Web.

⁵ Bauschard, Emma. "History Between Relations of Japan and the US." *Sutori*. N.p., n.d. Web.

different parts of Asia.⁶ The United States did not approve of this. Japan became frustrated with America and their decision to not support Japan's idea of expansion. That heightened tensions between the two countries, eventually causing Japan to attack Pearl Harbor.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, the 32nd president of the United States of America, titled December 7, 1941 "a date which will live in infamy."⁷ What seemed to be a peaceful morning was soon interrupted by the attacking of 353 Japanese aircraft.⁸ The strike left 188 U.S. aircrafts destroyed, eight U.S Navy battleships damaged, 2,403 Americans dead and 1,078 others wounded.⁹ The attack also left countless Americans with feelings of fear and devastation. The following day, President Roosevelt requested for Congress to declare war on Japan.¹⁰

Around 1942, American prejudice against Japanese-Americans was quite common.¹¹ Farmers eager to make lots of money didn't like Japanese farmers, as they posed a threat to these farmers income and were seen as competition. Most of the public feared Japanese-Americans would sabotage American efforts to win the war against Japan or had suspicions that they were involved in the planning of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

⁶ Bauschard, Emma. "History Between Relations of Japan and the US." *Sutori*. N.p., n.d. Web.

⁷ "Franklin Roosevelt Infamy Speech: Pearl Harbor Transcript." *Time*. Time, n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018

⁸ Pearl Harbor Bombed." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

⁹ Pearl Harbor Bombed." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

¹⁰ Pearl Harbor Bombed." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

¹¹ Hill, Melody. "Special Interests and the Internment of Japanese-Americans During World War II | Melody Hill." *FEE*. Foundation for Economic Education, 01 July 1995. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

Because the majority of the population was so biased against the Japanese race, American politicians would often promote themselves by making unpleasant statements about this unpopular group of people. All of this led to the signing of Executive Order 9066.¹² That was the order that forced Japanese-Americans into the internment camps. Many people believe that President Roosevelt was pressured into signing the order by the many unhappy Americans.

The instructions to be followed by Japanese-Americans were posted in their communities.¹³ Every individual with at least “one drop of Japanese blood” was ordered to relocate to the camps.¹⁴ The order applied to everyone including the Japanese with American citizenship.¹⁵ That also included some World War I veterans that happened to be of Japanese descent.¹⁶ The signs posted informed future internees of where they were required to go and what they were required to do. To make sure that these Japanese-Americans didn’t move away without going to the camps, the government didn’t allow many of them to access the money in their bank accounts, making it almost impossible for them to move.¹⁷

¹² History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web.

¹³ Letters from the Japanese American Internment." *Smithsonian Education - Japanese American Internment*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

¹⁴ Letters from the Japanese American Internment." *Smithsonian Education - Japanese American Internment*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

¹⁵ Letters from the Japanese American Internment." *Smithsonian Education - Japanese American Internment*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

¹⁶ Letters from the Japanese American Internment." *Smithsonian Education - Japanese American Internment*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

¹⁷ Letters from the Japanese American Internment." *Smithsonian Education - Japanese American Internment*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

EXECUTIVE ORDER

AUTHORIZING THE SECRETARY OF WAR TO PRESCRIBE
MILITARY AREAS

WHEREAS the successful prosecution of the war requires every possible protection against espionage and against sabotage to national-defense material, national-defense premises, and national-defense utilities as defined in Section 4, Act of April 20, 1918, 40 Stat. 533, as amended by the Act of November 30, 1940, 54 Stat. 1220, and the Act of August 21, 1941, 55 Stat. 655 (U. S. C., Title 50, Sec. 104):

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, and Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War, and the Military Commanders whom he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated Commander deems such action necessary or desirable, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military

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Because the executive order was signed so soon, the government had not finished building all of the camps by the time the Japanese-Americans were required to arrive.¹⁹

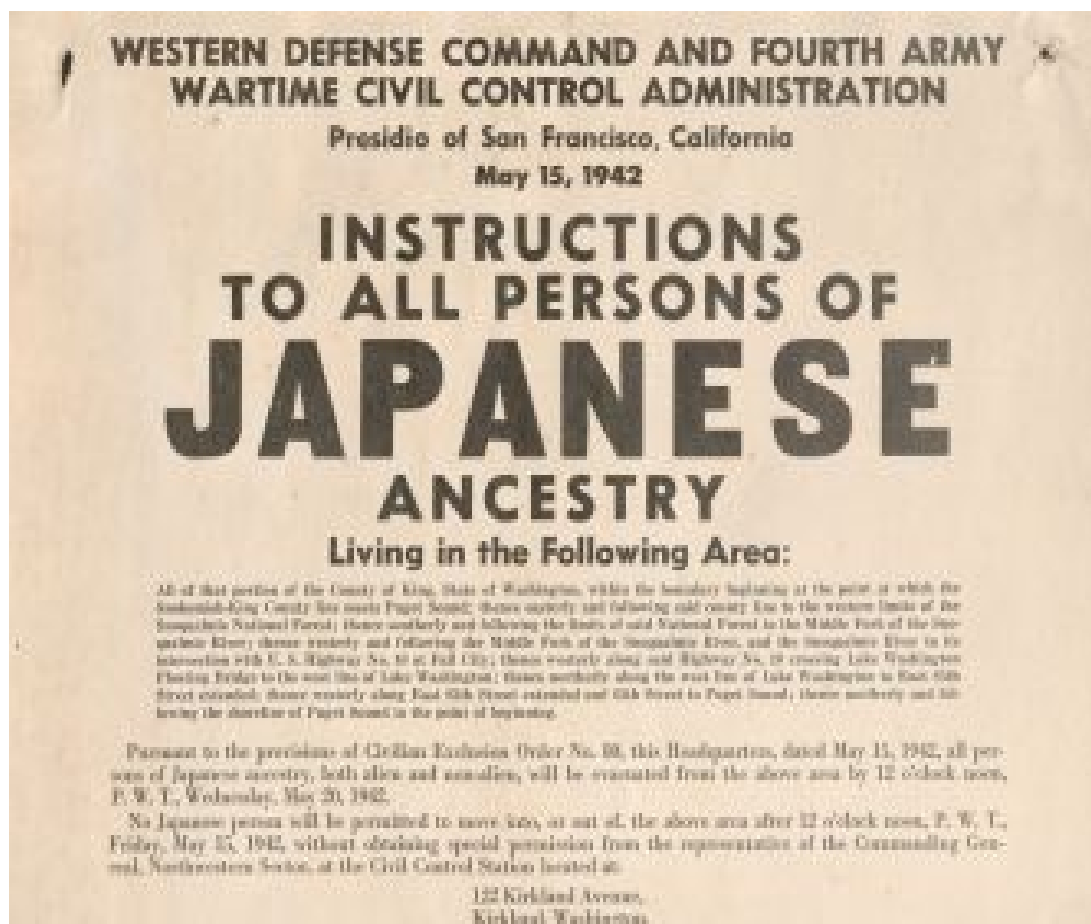
That meant that the internees had to temporarily live in local shelters such as the stables in racetracks with the one bag they were allowed to bring with them.²⁰ When the

¹⁸ This is the Executive Order of 9066. Executive Order. No. 9066, 1942.

¹⁹ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web.

²⁰ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web.

Japanese-Americans were informed about the camps, many of them rushed to sell their homes, land and businesses because they were unsure if they would be able to return to them.²¹ Because the properties went up for sale almost immediately with little time before the internees reported to the camps, most of them were sold at extremely reduced prices.²²



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²¹ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web.

²² History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web.

²³ This is a photograph of a sign with instructions for those who were required to attend the camps. History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2009, www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/japanese-american-relocation.

The executive order separated many families. The internment camps were controlled by the War Relocation Authority (WRA).²⁴ Aside from those camps, there were also relocation camps. These camps were run by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.²⁵ Over 7,000 Japanese-Americans who were seen as “dangerous alien enemies” were sent there.²⁶ The internees of the relocation camps were required to follow more strict rules than those in the internment camps. Some of the people that occupied the relocation camps were teachers, newspaper editors, or leaders of a Japanese religious or cultural organization.²⁷ They were separated from their families. They would have a hearing, where they were categorized as dangerous and sent to a Army Prisoner of War camp, or not dangerous and could be reunited back with their families at the WRA camps.²⁸

Since most of America’s Japanese population lived on or near the Pacific Coast, camps were located in Western states.²⁹ The government kept remote areas in mind

²⁴History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

²⁵ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018. History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

²⁶ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

²⁷ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

²⁸ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

²⁹ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

when they selected the locations of the ten internment camps. The climate of the selected locations truly kept internees uncomfortable. Many complained about the high summer temperatures and of the low winter temperatures.³⁰ That also meant it was extremely difficult to harvest decent crops in the area, forcing the unlucky Japanese-Americans to relatively stick to a diet of military grub style food.³¹

The living conditions of the internment camps were extremely poor. The camps were surrounded by barbed wire fences.³² If an internee made an attempt to escape the camp, they would be shot by one of the many guards that worked around the clock. The people held in the camps were also forced to wait in line often. There were lines that were typically long to receive food or to use the restroom because the camps were relatively small, considering the amount of people they held. Although it was not required, adults could work for a salary of 5 dollars per day if they chose to.³³ Children, with little to do, attended school or played games like baseball to pass the time.

³⁰ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

³¹ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

³² "What Was Life like in Internment Camps? - Internment Camps." *Google Sites*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Feb. 2018.

³³ "What Was Life like in Internment Camps? - Internment Camps." *Google Sites*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Feb. 2018.

The Supreme Court was having trouble deciding if sending the Japanese-Americans to internment camps was really the best thing to do. In December 1944, President Roosevelt repealed Executive Order 9066.³⁴ From there the government slowly started to release some internees that they were positive were loyal to America. The last camp closed down in March of 1946.³⁵

In 1976, a formal apology was finally given from the United States government. This apology was what appeared to be the best option for a compromise at the time. The acknowledgment came from President Gerald R. Ford, the 38th president of the United States of America. He stated that sending the Japanese to internment camps was a “setback to fundamental American principles.”³⁶ Every internment camp victim received twenty thousand dollars in compensation.³⁷ But, that money was sent out in 1988, meaning that not everyone who went to the camps lived long enough to receive the money that most Americans today agree they deserved. It is estimated that only

³⁴ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

³⁵"Japanese Americans: The War at Home." Scholastic. N.p., n.d. Web.

³⁶President Gerald R. Ford's Remarks Upon Signing a Proclamation Concerning Japanese-American Internment During World War II." *Remarks Upon Signing the Proclamation Concerning Japanese-American Internment During World War II*, www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/speeches/760111.htm

³⁷History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

around 78,000 internees of the 120,000 that were placed in the camps received this payment.³⁸

When the Japanese-Americans were released from the internment camps, they faced just as much racism as before the camps, if not, more. Just because the United States government had decided that these people were safe enough to return to society, did not mean that the rest of the Americans citizens did. Displeasing signs could be found in multiple areas around American towns and cities. Some businesses would display signs that read phrases similar to “we don’t want any Japs back here...ever”.³⁹

America’s enemies in World War II were Japan, Italy, and Germany. As people of Japanese descent were placed in these internment camps, people of Italian and German ancestry never extensively were. One of the clearest explanations for this was provided by the Presidential Commission when they admitted that the “broad historical causes were ... race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership. Widespread ignorance of Japanese Americans contributed to a policy conceived in haste and executed in an atmosphere of fear and anger at Japan.”⁴⁰

³⁸ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

³⁹ Hallett, Miranda. "Internment, Immigrant Detention, and the Imagined Imperiled Whiteness of U.S. Citizenship." *KCET*. N.p., 02 Mar. 2017. Web. 16 Feb. 2018.

⁴⁰ "Japanese Americans: The War at Home." Scholastic. N.p., n.d. Web.

Japanese-Americans did not have the same rights as virtually anyone during World War II. Even after the war was over, it was still not legal for a person who was born in Japan to become a naturalized citizen of the United States until 1952.⁴¹

World War II was one of the most inconsiderate times in the United States' history. It was an event that upset many people. Japanese internment camps essentially made circumstances worse. The camps also made things way more complicated than they should have been. They frustrated the Japanese-Americans who were forced to struggle to get their lives back to the way they were, or as close to their lives as they could become after experiencing something with the amount of relevance the camps had on their lives. The internment camps negatively impacted over 120,000 innocent Japanese-Americans.⁴² These internment camps took away freedom, families, and the unity of the United States of America during this dreadful period of time.

⁴¹ History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

⁴² History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

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Bauschard, Emma. "History Between Relations of Japan and the US." *Sutori*. N.p., n.d. Web.

I included a sort of written timeline in my paper for the purpose of giving readers information about World War II before I began to talk more about the Japanese internment camps.

Hallett, Miranda. "Internment, Immigrant Detention, and the Imagined Imperiled Whiteness of U.S. Citizenship." *KCET*. N.p., 02 Mar. 2017. Web. 16 Feb. 2018.

I chose to use a quote from one of the signs that were displayed at the time of the camps because I believe helps reader imagine how much racism these Japanese Americans actually dealt with.

Hill, Melody. "Special Interests and the Internment of Japanese-Americans During World War II | Melody Hill." *FEE*. Foundation for Economic Education, 01 July 1995. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

This source was important because it gave me more information to apply about the camps and how the people inside them were treated.

History.com Staff. "Japanese Internment Camps." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

I used History.com because it's a reliable website that informed me of the number of citizens who were involved in the attack on Pearl Harbor. I also used it to find out more about how the camps were ran.

"Internment Camps." *Japanese American Internment Camps*. N.p., n.d. Web.

I found out information about how the camps treated their internees from this source.

"Japanese American Relocation and Internment Camps." *Atomic Heritage Foundation*. N.p., 20 July 2016. Web.

I found information about the way people were forced into camps from this reliable source.

"Japanese Internment Camps Facts." *Math*. N.p., n.d. Web.

I found out lots of interesting facts about the camps on this Website, including how the camps were perceived by the public.

"Japanese Relocation During World War II." *National Archives and Records Administration*. National Archives and Records Administration, n.d. Web.

I discovered even more information about how the Japanese were placed into these camps from this Website.

"Japanese-American Internment." *Ushistory.org*. Independence Hall Association, n.d. Web.

I learned about how the presidents dealt with the camps when I used this source.

"Letters from the Japanese American Internment." *Smithsonian Education - Japanese American Internment*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

I read about people that survived the Japanese internment camps and found out more about how many people received money from the government for the camps.

"Pearl Harbor Bombed." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2018.

I read about the amount of people effected by the bombing of Pearl Harbor and how they dealt with it from this source.

"What Was Life like in Internment Camps? - Internment Camps." *Google Sites*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Feb. 2018.

I got an idea of what the internment camps looked like from the inside with this source. That helped me write about the types of food these people ate and what they did.

Wills, Charles. *Pearl Harbor*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Silver Burdett, 1991. Print.

I read more about the cause of the bombing of Pearl Harbor in this book.

"World War Two - Japanese Internment Camps in the USA." *History*. N.p., 16 May 2017. Web.

I learned about the effect the Japanese-American internment camps had on WWII from reading this source.

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“A Date Which Will Live in Infamy.’ Read President Roosevelt’s Pearl Harbor Address.” *Time*,
time.com/4593483/pearl-harbor-franklin-roosevelt-infamy-speech-attack/.

I chose to use this source because I believe Roosevelt’s words give the reader an idea of how tragic the attack on Pearl Harbor actually was.

Executive Order. No. 9066, 1942.

In my paper, I display what Executive Order 9066 looked like because I wanted to show how real the Japanese Internment Camps were, and the reason behind them.

History.com Staff. “Japanese Internment Camps.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2009, www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/japanese-american-relocation.

I used History.com because I believe that website has lots of reliable, important information included in it.

“President Gerald R. Ford's Remarks Upon Signing a Proclamation Concerning Japanese-American Internment During World War II.” *Remarks Upon Signing the Proclamation Concerning Japanese-American Internment During World War II*, www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/speeches/760111.htm.

I chose to include Ford’s words in my paper because they prove that the internment camps were not a good thing for America.

