

## The Japanese-American Incarceration

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The ascendancy of equality over discrimination is the paramount destination. This destination, although sought, has been impeded throughout history. In a war crisis, countries become defensive of their citizens and fear blossoms on a national scale. When fighting another country, hatred for that country and their people blooms among citizens. In reaction to fear, information and opinions are spread. War demands presidential rationality, but often nonsensical decisions are made. The United States exemplified this in 1942 during WWII. A flagrant decision was made; to send Japanese-Americans into internment camps solely because of their ethnicity. This event was one of the biggest abuses of liberal rights in Constitutional history. I question whether America has learned from this event.

The internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII forced many United States citizens to leave their homes for internment camps. Order 9066, issued by President Roosevelt, plotted the relocation of Japanese-Americans to remote camps in rural locations (Foner). Those being evacuated had about one week to remove their children from school, sell their property, pack their belongings and say goodbye to their homes (Jardins). The vacant land once owned by Japanese-Americans was highly beneficial to farmers since the land was profitable (Foner).

The Japanese-Americans were sequestered for one incontestable reason. Isolation occurred *because* the people were of Japanese heritage. With territorial fear for their country, Americans rumored that the Japanese were committing treason. Both the military and farmers endeavored to eliminate this racial competition and pressured Roosevelt to issue order 9066 (Foner). Two thirds of those relocated were American citizens. At this time, our nation lacked promising

authoritative figures, resulting in scant political leadership regarding the incarceration. Copious prejudice lingered throughout the country.

The repugnant camps were bleak. No rooms had plumbing and conditions were harsh. For example, temperatures fluctuated exceedingly from winter to summer. Winter temperatures were as bitter as 35 degrees below zero and summer was no less painless. Heat ascending beyond 115 degrees above 0 melted the spirit of those interned. Encompassing the barbed wire perimeter were armed guards. (Children of the Camps).

Small living spaces were allotted for large groups of people. Those interned slept in tarpaper barracks in a room shared with multiple families. Some rooms were as small as 20 by 20 feet occupied by a whole family. The camps had a mess hall, recreation hall, buildings for showers, and an area set aside for toilets (Smithsonian education). These new camps, however, would soon grow more similar to regular than before.

Cultivation of land was arduous. Arid soil surrounded the 10 camps scattered across Arkansas, California, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Colorado and Wyoming. Shockingly, the Japanese occupying the Arizona desert managed to cover 3,000 acres of land with their own crops and flowers. Children played sports and were encouraged to go to school. This made the camps more favorable than before. Diminutive payments were offered for small work and most men began woodworking and construction (Smithsonian Education).

Removal of the Japanese from the internment camps was an emotionally long process. Families who did not sell their land were apprehensive to return home. "Those with property are wanting to go back, but wondering how the sentiment will be. Of course we know that good friends like you would be glad to have us back but others who do not know us or understand us

may not be as glad to see us," wrote Fusa Tsumagari. These trepidations were well-founded. On the West Coast, crimes such as arson and violence were committed toward the Japanese Americans. Lands were deserted due to negligence of the land bought out by farmers (Exploring the Japanese-American Internment).

Families who sold their land had no home awaiting their arrival (Smithsonian Education). Many Japanese-Americans were peripatetic and had no place to permanently stay. In the 1950's, employment and housing discrimination was directed towards these people. Japanese-Americans shared cluttered spaces with friends while becoming sleuths for work (Exploring the Japanese-American Internment).

In 1948, internees were indemnified a fraction of the property they owned prior to the exodus. It was not until four decades later that apt reimbursement was formally apportioned (Smithsonian Education). In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act. Congressional approval of this act, however, took a decade to be completed (Children of the Camps).

After time, the dearth of poor leadership ceased. On October 1, 1993, Bill Clinton sent a sincere apology letter to the survivors of the camps. "Today, on behalf of your fellow Americans, I offer a sincere apology to you for the actions that unfairly denied Japanese Americans and their families fundamental liberties during World War II." In order to learn from the incarceration, America had to recognize the sordid behavior. 46 years after the incarceration, this letter was issued. This was when political leadership took place, and recompense followed. The legislation offered \$20,000 to Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II.

The indemnification did not heal all wounds. Emotional and psychological scars followed the children of the camps. Third generation Japanese-Americans lived through constant anguish as they and their parents faced consequence for their heritage. Those interned endured life-long trauma (Internment History).

The Japanese-American Incarceration was arguably the biggest abuse of constitutional rights. It is an understated event that is treated as if it were frivolous. The signature of the President stole citizens from their homes on their own soil and moved them to perfidious camps. Decades later, a pecuniary reimbursement was issued to those interned. This abhorrent event is treated flippantly as it is missing from communal knowledge among many citizens in America.

I question whether America has learned lessons from the incarceration of Japanese Americans. It is generally known that Arab-Americans are more scrutinized by agencies of the government after the events of September 11th, 2001. Racially motivated crimes, also known as hate crimes, take place throughout the country. Towns such as Ferguson, Missouri face racial quarrel regarding African-Americans. The degree to which law is enforced toward certain ethnic groups has been debated after police shootings within the past two years.

America has learned to abide by constitutional laws after the incarceration, demonstrated by the absence of another similar event. In today's time, no overt constitutional abuses take place. Glaring abuses such as the mistreatment of Native Americans and Japanese-Americans, regulated by the government, no longer occur. If America had entirely understood true equality from the Japanese-American incarceration, the United States would not treat all members of a certain ethnic group as though they are enemies, even when some members are.