

Example of literature review on the internment of japanese americans

[War](#), [World War 2](#)



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Introduction

The United States of America has one of the most multicultural societies in the world. The nation is home to people from all races. In recent decades, the nation has become very democratic and racially tolerant. However, this has not always been the case. The United States has historically had a tendency of suppressing racially unique groups through racially motivated policies. The first example of this was the loss of liberty and land of the Native Americans to white settlers. The other action that comes to mind is the Jim Crow laws that enforced segregation between blacks and whites. There is also the Chinese Exclusion Act that intentionally barred members of the Asian community from entering into the United States. However, one of the greatest exemplification of racial bias in modern times is the internment of the Japanese during the Second World War. Various justifications have been given in regard to this historical injustice, but all the available evidence seems to suggest the action was not in any way justified and hugely tainted the image of the nation and it would years for the nation to rebuild it. This paper will look at some of the sources that have discussed the issue and compare their arguments as well as the consistency of these arguments.

Most of the primary documents show that the internment of the Japanese Americans was set in motion by the Pearl Harbor attacks. The primary document ‘ The War Relocation Authority and The Incarceration of Japanese-Americans During World War II’ from Truman online Library indicates that after the attack on the Pearl Harbor which took place in December 1941, the attitude of the Americans towards the Japanese changed significantly. Although hostility towards Asian foreigners like the Chinese and the Japanese had been ever present in the American society, it reached new magnitude after the Pearl Harbor. This argument is further proven by the primary document “ Executive Order 9066 Japanese Relocation Order’ which was put to effect roughly two months after the attacks on the Pearl Harbor.

“ The War Relocation Authority and The Incarceration of Japanese-Americans During World War II” seems to indicate that the internment of the Japanese was based on malicious claims while “ Executive Order 9066 Japanese Relocation Order” appears to justify the mentioned actions against the Japanese. For instance, the former suggests that envy and jealousy from the rest of the society seems to have played a role in the internment of the Japanese Americans. The author of this primary document states the Japanese had immigrated into America in large numbers through the latter half of the 19th Century and the early 20th century. Most of them had settled in Hawaii and along the western where they endeavored in various economic activities including farming, fishing as well as the operation of small business. There was a lot of ethnic tensions and consequently most Japanese people preferred to organize themselves into ethnic enclaves where they built schools, worship center and cultural and economic institutions. The bombing

of the Pearl Harbor sent the United States into a state of desperation and hysteria. The Japanese were economically prospering, and there was a lot of envy from the rest of the Americans. This was coupled with an increasing distrust over racial and cultural separateness as well as anti-Asian racism and when the Pearl Harbor was attacked, many viewed as a justification for the long-standing racial hatred and suspicion exhibited towards the Japanese and this is potentially what set off the massive internment of this group of people. “ The War Relocation Authority and The Incarceration of Japanese-Americans During World War II” goes to show how the administration tried to justify its actions, for instance, in the initial days, the FBI maintained that only a select groups of aliens was to be detained and investigated, this was however proved not be the case as the coming days saw the detainment of massive number of Japanese aliens along the west coast.

On the other hand, the “ Executive Order 9066 Japanese Relocation Order” lists the prevention espionage as well as sabotage of defense material as some of the reasons for the relocation of the great number of Japanese Americans. The indication from this statement is that the government feared that the so called “ Japanese Americans would potentially turn against the nation. The evacuation of the Japanese officially commenced after this Executive Order 9066 was declared by President Franklin Roosevelt in February 19, 1942 (Executive Order 9066 Japanese Relocation Order, 1942). This order gave authority to the military to evacuate all individuals who were considered a threat to the security and peace of the nation from the Western Coast and move them into inland relocation centers (Executive Order 9066 Japanese Relocation Order). The order was officially implemented

on March 21, 1941 by the Congress and in following six months, more than 122, 000 individuals were evacuated from their areas of residence alien the West coast and were moved into assembly centers. These people were then taken to internment camps where they were fenced, guarded and isolated from the rest of the society (The War Relocation Authority and The Incarceration of Japanese-Americans During World War II, n. d).

Unlike the primary sources that indicates that collective government action was responsible for the internment, there is significant evidence, particularly from secondary sources that some specific individuals played a huge part in this massive injustice. For instance, Fox (1988, p. 407), states that “ From January to May 1942, various local, state, and federal officials demanded that all enemy aliens and their families be interned for the duration of the war”. Fox (1998) then goes on to look at one of greatest advocate for this interment; an American Lieutenant General named John L. Dewitt (Fox, 1988, p. 408). Dewitt was the commander general of the Western Defense Command (Fox, 1988, p. 408). Dewitt was known for his massive push for Italians and Germans to be interned together with the Japanese. According to Fox (1988, p. 408), Dewitt held a very peculiar logic; that aliens were simple faceless relatives of the enemy who had been removed from their home places and herded into secure areas in America. Dewitt was so committed to his push for internment that he publicly announced his willingness and readiness to the take charge of the internment program from the Justice department which was in charge of the program at this time. When the evacuations started, it was in fact Dewitt who gave the order that excluded people of Japanese ancestry from some designated areas along the

American west coast (Fox, 1988, p. 425). Throughout the internment duration, Dewitt continued to be actively involved but perhaps his most distinctive characteristic that distinguished him from other advocates of the internment was his feeling and constant advocacy that the Germans and the Italians be evacuated together with the Japanese.

Another secondary source “ Opposition to Internment: Defending Japanese American Rights During World War II” by Shaffer (1999) focuses on the implications of the war on the image of the nation and also looks at the opposition movement against the war. According to Shaffer (1999), the intentional racially motivated action exposed the ugly sides of the US administration. The nation was ridiculed for its action given that it had for long declared itself to be one of the most democratic nations in the world. In addition, the nation was at war with Hitler, who was notorious for his racially motivated attack in minority communities and many suggested that by taking such a drastic action, the United States was no different than Hitler and the general American attitude towards the Japanese some of who were legal American citizens was likened to the Nazi attitude towards the Jews (Shaffer, 1999).

There was however a lot of opposition to the internment of the Japanese especially from leftist liberals in the nation (Shaffer, 1999). Most of them were from Protestant denominations who had previously interacted and worked with Japanese community along the West Coast. There was also a lot of opposition to the forceful evacuation of the Japanese community by missionaries, socialist and pacifists.

Shaffer (1999) also states that there was a lot of opposition to the move by

college students. For example, the University of Washington students were very vocal in their renunciation of the discrimination and injustice exhibited by the American administration towards the Japanese (Shaffer, 1999). There was also other individual citizens who exhibited their displeasure and opposition to this move, and these included Robert Obrien, a sociology professor, Floyd Schmoe amongst many others (Shaffer, 1999).

Unfortunately, the opposition and activism did not do much as the national government went ahead with its plan and evacuated hundreds and thousands of Japanese Americans. Perhaps this is why the other sources do not mention much about the opposition towards the internment.

In fact, not much literature related to opposition towards the internment exists. This is perhaps a suggestion that opposition movement were not very effective as the government maintained a strong arm in making decisions and crushed any opposition towards its policies as much as it could.

Conclusion

The internment of the Japanese during the Second World War was one of the darkest moments in recent American history. Some of the sources analyzed in this show that this was indeed a dark moment for nation. Except for the source titled “ Executive Order 9066 Japanese Relocation Order” that fully justifies the actions against the Japanese, all the other sources seem to show that the internment did more harm than good. The nation rashly, unjustly and arrogantly acted on one of the communities making up its largely multicultural society. However, this action was a catalyst for the intensified advocacy for equal human rights. It led to the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, for

instance, which removed racial and ethnic bars to immigration and consequent naturalization (The War Relocation Authority and The Incarceration of Japanese-Americans during World War II, n. d). While it meant that new immigrants could become naturalized, it also meant that those aliens of Japanese descent who had been living in the nation for many years and who had been residents of the internment camps could also become naturalized citizens (The War Relocation Authority and The Incarceration of Japanese-Americans During World War II, n. d). Currently, the United States is one of the most culturally and racially tolerant nation in the world, and all citizens regardless of race have equal rights. However, the events following the World War II will never be forgotten.

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