

Japanese Internment

Japanese internment is a highly controversial topic in American history. The government questioned Japanese-Americans' loyalties during the war. However, racial prejudices also seem to be a deciding factor in confinement legislation. Although the American government claimed internment resulted from military necessity, the underlying cause appears to be racism.

The U.S. government considered Japanese-Americans a military threat. A newsreel from 1943 explains that after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, suspicions arose that the Japanese migrants' loyalty was to their native governments, not the U.S. Assuming this, the American Government decided the best course of action was to relocate this group further inland, away from Japan. This video, obviously released by the American government, showed the effectiveness of their new system, as it portrays the Japanese-Americans as docile people willing to uproot their entire lives for Americans' peace of mind. The video segment does not reveal the harsh realities of being forced into containment, and therefore its information must be evaluated with caution. Another piece of evidence that cites national security as the cause of internment is the Korematsu Supreme Court ruling. In this ruling, the Supreme Court states that, under the current conditions of World War II, all safety precautions must be taken to ensure the safety of the American people. The Supreme Court, however, most likely wanted to side with the majority of Americans to appease their fears.

Though the government claimed military concerns, the evidence suggests a racial motivation. In the "Munson Report," representative Curtis Munson, tasked with investigating the loyalty of the immigrants, arrived at the conclusion that, because the Japanese were such simple people as farmers and fishermen, they could not possibly be of any threat to national security. Munson also claims that the ethnic group's distinct appearance makes them easy targets for suspicion. However, this report was released in November 1941, a month before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The origin of this attack, the Japanese, surprised most Americans because their simple lifestyle implied that they were incapable of such violence. Another source, Harry Paxton Howard's "The Crisis," openly wonders why internment camps do not exist for Americans of German or Italian descent, even though they are also Axis powers. Their recognizable physical features made the Japanese easily identifiable as the enemy. A civil rights author in the 1940's, Paxton is well aware of the effects of segregation on a targeted ethnic group. Lastly, the Commission's report, "Personal Justice Denied," specifically states that the internment policies were not militarily necessary, but rather racially motivated. This was the government's official recognition of race as a underlying cause of internment policies.

Overall, while military necessity was cited as the primary cause of internment, a key factor also in play was racial prejudice. Therefore, while the system may have provided some Americans with peace of mind, it ultimately was a direct result of ethnic bias.