“December 7th, 1941, a day that shall live in infamy,” were the words uttered by President Roosevelt during one of the most tragic events in the history of our nation, the attack on Pearl Harbor. The Japanese conducted a surprise attack at the naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The aftermath lead both to the US becoming increasingly cautious in terms of national security, specifically towards Japanese citizens and America entering World War II. America began interning Japanese American civilians into camps across the US; these camps introduced a harsh new way of life for the average Japanese American (Document A).

The attack lead to the American public retaliating against those they deemed responsible. Incarcerating Japanese Americans was the only thing to do in order to prevent any other attacks on American soil, at least in the eyes of the angry citizens. This lead to many Japanese citizens being forced to leave their previous life. They were relocated to internment camps, guarded to assuage the fears of both the public and the Government. The United States built a total of 10 camps to house 120,000 Japanese, most of them American citizens (Document B).

The internees were taken by trains, buses, and under military supervision. All of the Japanese on the West Coast were taken and put into temporary holding facilities until the Government can construct internment camps. The living conditions in the camps were horrid. The facilities were crowded, lacked ventilation, electricity, and sanitation. The living conditions was not the only thing that caused large amounts of issues, the food supply was low and usually spoiled (Document C).

Fear was the entire motivator behind these actions. The Japanese posed only a minor threat to the United States. There were only between 250 and 260 people from each district marked as possible threats, with only 50 or 60 believed to pose any danger. These low numbers do not carry enough weight to justify the housing of 120,000. The action taken was rather a reaction to the fear of another possible attack (Document B).

In 1944, Fred Korematsu, a Japanese American who refused to comply with military order to move, was tried on the Supreme Court. The Government held back information from the Supreme Court during the trial, resulting in Korematsu losing the case. Years later the case was reopened because the withheld information was released and Korematsu became recognized as a civil rights activist (Document D).

The time period in which Internment was the policy was an era of fear. Pearl harbor turned Japanese Americans into the enemy of the public eye. and as per usual, the public eye weighs in above the law. Under the court of public opinion, all Japanese Americans were sentenced to internment as though they were less than human.