*Why were Japanese Americans interned during World War II?*

December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy, spoken to Congress by President Roosevelt are words that will forever immortalize the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. American emotions across the continental USA such as fear and paranoia ran high when the unprecedented attack became reality and the enemy became known to all. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued executive order 9066 that commanded a countrywide internment on people of Japanese decent on American soil. (Document E) In order to maintain a sense of safety for all of the American people including Japanese Americans and trying to keep widespread distrust and fear from sweeping the nation it was deemed best practice to institute Japanese interment camps. This action was designed to prevent the possibility of the nation slowly dividing.

Unlike other immigrants in our nation Japanese Americans were more identifiable giving rise to the notion of nativism due to a major distrust and fear of them by the rest of the country. To keep the nation safe from future attack all Japanese Americans were being monitored. “The Intelligence Services are generous with the title of suspect and are taking no chances.” (Document B) In the end, simply monitoring them wasn’t enough to make Americans feel secure.

By Roosevelt passing executive order 9066, he was able to separate the Japanese Americans from the other Americans, dissipating many of the possible disputes between the groups. The fear of the nation being divided was a great one because of the strong opinions of everyone involved. The United States was protecting its people not only from an external threat, but from within its own borders as evidenced in the Korematsu Ruling, “But when, under conditions of modern warfare, our shores are threatened by hostile forces, the power to protect must be commensurate with the threatened danger….” (Document D)

Over forty years later, Congress created a commission for the relocation for interned civilians, where Congress stated “The broad historical causes which shaped these decisions 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.” (Document E) Because of the hysteria running rampant throughout the people of the United States, it was imperative that the United States not only take external action, but internal as well to soothe the worries of the people. By taking action the United States government was able to show strength in both political power and leadership.

Internment camps were not designed for punishment. Camps were primarily designed to ease the minds of concerned Americans, provide safety, and to prevent our nation from dividing once again. Although many people from many different backgrounds have varied opinions on the actions concerning Japanese relocation after the attack Pearl Harbor, no matter your background, it is very clear that the internment camps were to protect rather than punish.