Japanese Relocation

In 1941, Europe was being ravaged by the war. On the other side of the Atlantic, America was sitting idly. On December 7, though, that idea changed. The Japanese Empire was going into full swing, it had been expanding its territory for years, and now its sights were set on the Hawaiian Islands under the United States. The attack on Pearl Harbor dragged America fully into the war, a war on both coasts, one with the Germans and Italians, the other with the Japanese. America quickly decided that descendants of these countries should be seen as suspects and should be relocated to less critical parts of the country. This act is known as the Executive Order 9066, which President Roosevelt issued to prevent any descendants of the enemy from being able to endanger the American populace. Due to the potential security threats by the Japanese Empire and the racial differences between the Japanese and Americans, the main reason the Japanese were placed in internment camps was racism.

The Japanese Empire had become a threat; its territory expansion had turned towards the United States Pacific territories. This was a huge concern for the U.S. As a precaution against potential Japanese attacks, President Roosevelt sent Curtis Munson, a representative of the State Department, to evaluate the threat of the Japanese-American citizens in the west coast area. In Munson’s Report, Document B, he stated that the Japanese people were practically harmless: with only 300 suspect citizens per district, only about 50 of these citizens were actually considered a threat. According to Munson, If the Japanese intended to attack America, it would be done through the hands of a foreign agent, not an uneducated farmer like most Japanese Americans were. The idea of potential foreign attacks raised the citizen panic level, which in turn lowered the trust in political leadership. During this time, the U.S. Military stepped in in an attempt to exercise Executive Order 9066. This Military Control removed all the Japanese residents on the West Coast, and transported them to inland Military Camps across the Country.

According to Harry Paxton Howard, the reason for this relocation was solely based on the Japanese ethnicity. He also claimed that German and Italian Americans were not taken in because they were Caucasian. According to the Executive Order 9066, however, President Roosevelt gave permission to the Military to intern all Americans that had Axis country blood in their veins, including Germans, Italians, and the Japanese. However, thousands more Japanese were interned, because of the fear of potential attacks from the Japanese empire. This lead to the Supreme Court Case involving a man named Fred Korematsu who was arrested for not going along with the internment process. This sparked an argument between the needs of the many and the needs of the few. The Court ruled that National security outweighs the needs of the individual, resulting in the justification of the internment process.

It was the fear of potential attacks against the US and the high level of racism against the Japanese that drove the Military to enforce Executive Order 9066, effectively locking many Japanese-Americans in Military Camps. This frame of mind was kept until 1983, when Congress investigated the necessity and legality of the order through the Commission on Wartime Relocation. The US discovered that while there was a minor security risk, the main reason for the relocation was due to war hysteria driven fear and racism towards the Japanese.