The Shocking Truth About Japanese Internment Camps of WWII

What does it feel like to be pulled from home, stripped of everything, and forced into somewhere completely unknown? Thousands of Japanese-Americans during WWII knew exactly what this felt like. People now know how terrible it really was, but none know better than the ones who were there. Why would the United States government betray its citizens in this way? Japanese-Americans were placed into internment camps because of wartime fear and racial discrimination.

Although the United States government claimed that it was a safety measure to use internment camps, war time fear was the catalyst for the camps. The U.S. Office of War Information publicized a Japanese Relocation film to justify the relocation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast to internment camps further inland.The film stated that the West Coast could become a potential combat zone. More than one hundred thousand persons of Japanese ancestry were living within the potential combat zone. According to the film, Japanese Americans could spy on naval ship deployments and sabotage the war effort. (Document A)” The film was trying to make people feel better about what they had done to make the general population safe.

In the 1942 Munson Report, racial discrimination was clearly known to the public as seen in the following sentence,“The Japanese are hampered as saboteurs because of their easily recognized physical appearance.(Document B)” It is obvious that at least some people knew this segregation of the Japanese Americans was not just, but due to the war time panic people were just concerned with their own personal safety. As a direct result, they were easily persuaded to overlook the violation of the personal rights of their fellow Americans.

Another serious issue that contributed to the decision to send the Japanese-Americans to internment camps was racial discrimination. In the publication “The Crisis,” author Harry Paxton Howard states, “Color seems to be only possible reason why thousands of American citizens of Japanese ancestry are in concentration camps. Anyway, there are no Italian-American, or German-American citizens in such camps.(Document C)” While Howard may be a biased writer, he makes a valid point. It is obvious that being citizens of color is the only reason for the American citizens of Japanese ancestry to be placed in the concentration camps. The modern American government concurs with Howard’s view. “The broad historical causes which shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership.(Document E)” It is clear that the government feels that its stance in WWII was faulty. Although at the time some people thought that the decision was just an “analysis of military conditions,” the decision was really based on the Japanese-American’s skin color and other racial differences.

The Japanese-American internment camps of WWII were a shocking choice for the US government to make. As Americans, we expect our government to protect us as a group, and also as individual citizens. It is a horror to realize that our own government would use an entire group of people to ease wartime fear because of the racial prejudice that caused them to be seen as second class citizens. The Japanese were victimized heavily, and at the time, the country was in shock, but that is no excuse for the reaction of the US government.