

## Japanese Internment

Focus Question: Why were Japanese-Americans interned during World War II?

Directions: Use the following sources to better understand the government's decision to intern over a hundred thousand Japanese Americans during WW II. Think about this decision not only as a wartime strategy but also as a national civil rights issue. Highlight or underline evidence from each source that could support an answer to the focus question.

**The Munson Report:** This report was delivered to President Roosevelt in November of 1941, a month prior to the attack at Pearl Harbor. The excerpt below is from the 25-page report.

There is no Japanese 'problem' on the Coast. There will be no armed uprising of Japanese. There will undoubtedly be some sabotage financed by Japan and executed largely by imported agents...In each Naval District there are about 250 to 300 suspects under surveillance. It is easy to get on the suspect list, merely a speech in favor of Japan at some banquet being sufficient to land one there. The Intelligence Services are generous with the title of suspect and are taking no chances. Privately, they believe that only 50 or 60 in each district can be classed as really dangerous. The Japanese are hampered as saboteurs because of their easily recognized physical appearance. It will be hard for them to get near anything to blow up if it is guarded. There is far more danger from Communists on the Coast than there is from Japanese. The Japanese here is almost exclusively a farmer, a fisherman or a small businessman. He has no entree to plants or intricate machinery.

1. According to this report, what threat did Japanese Americans pose on the coast?

### Textbook Information

"...the plight of some 110,000 Japanese Americans, concentrated on the Pacific Coast. The Washington top command, fearing they might act as saboteurs for Japan in case of invasion, forcibly herded them together in concentration camps, though about two-thirds of them were American-born U.S. citizens. This brutal precaution was both unnecessary and unfair, as the loyalty and combat record of Japanese Americans proved to be admirable. But a wave of post-Pearl Harbor hysteria, backed by the long historical swell of anti-Japanese prejudice on the West Coast, temporarily robbed many Americans of dignity and basic rights; the internees also lost hundreds of millions of dollars in property and foregone earning. The wartime Supreme Court in 1944 upheld the constitutionality of the Japanese relocation in *Korematsu v. U.S.* But more than four decades later, in 1988, the U.S. government officially apologized for its actions and approved the payment of reparations of \$20,000 to each camp survivor."

- *The American Pageant*, p. 822-823

2. According to the textbook, why were Japanese Americans interned during the war?

**Government Newsreel**: This film was made by the government sometime in the middle of 1942 to explain the government's reasons and strategies for interning Japanese Americans.

3. What were some of the reasons for internment offered in the newsreel?
4. Describe how the newsreel portrays internment? Is internment positive or negative experience? Use examples from the video in your answer.

**The Crisis**: Henry Paxton Howard, "Americans in Concentration Camps," *The Crisis*, September, 1942. Founded in 1920, *The Crisis* is one of the oldest black periodicals in America. The publication is dedicated to promoting civil rights. This excerpt is from an editorial that appeared soon after the establishment of internment camps.

Along the eastern coast of the United States, where the numbers of Americans of Japanese ancestry is comparatively small, no concentration camps have been established. From a military point of view, the only danger on this coast is from Germany and Italy...but the American government has not taken any such high handed action against Germans and Italians – and their American born descendants – on the East coast, as has been taken against Japanese and their American born descendants on the West Coast. German and Italians are "white."

Color seems to be the 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.

5. According to this article, why is the U.S. taking action against the Japanese and not against other enemy nations?

**Commission on Wartime Relocation:** In 1980, Congress established the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians to investigate the detention program and the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066. The passage below is an excerpt from that report.

The Commission held 20 days of hearings in cities across the country, particularly on the West Coast, hearing testimony from more than 750 witnesses: evacuees, former government officials, public figures, interested citizens, and historians and other professionals who have studied the subjects of Commission inquiry. An extensive effort was made to locate and to review the records of government action and to analyze other sources of information including contemporary writings, personal accounts and historical analyses...

...Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions which followed from it—detention, ending detention and ending exclusion—were not driven by analysis of military conditions. 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. A grave injustice was done to American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry, who, without individual review or any...evidence against them, were excluded, removed and detained by the United States during World War II.

6. Describe the findings of this report.

**In Defense of Internment:** Michelle Malkin is a Filipino American syndicated columnist and Fox News commentators. In her 2004 book, *"In Defense of Internment: The Case for Racial Profiling in World War II and the War on Terror,"* Malkin argues that internment was justified by intercepted intelligence about a West Coast Japanese spy network. This passage is an excerpt from that book.

In time of war, the survival of the nation comes first. Civil Liberties are not sacrosanct (too valuable or important to be changed)...No one was exempt from the hardships of World War II, which demanded a wide range of civil rights sacrifices on the part of citizens and non-citizen, majority and minority alike. Ethnic Japanese forced to leave the West Coast of the United States and relocate outside of prescribed military zones after the Pearl Harbor attack endured a heavy burden, but they were not the only ones who suffered and sacrificed. Enemy aliens from Axis nations – not just Japan – were subjected to curfews, registration, censorship, and exclusion from sensitive areas. Thousands of foreign nationals from Germany, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and elsewhere were deemed dangerous, interned and eventually deported.

7. What justification is provided by Malkin for the internment of Japanese Americans?