

WWII Internment Camps NOT “Fake News”

Opinion by Michael Ego published by Stamford Advocate

During the presidential campaign and also in the weeks after November 8, the subject of registering Muslims in the United States has been raised as a means of tracking both current U.S. residents and incoming immigrants who are Muslims. As potential approaches or strategies to implement a plan for a Muslim registry have been considered, there has been reference made to the Japanese American internment camps of World War II.

In 1980, Congress passed Public Law 96-317 that established the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) and it directed the Commission to review the facts and circumstances surrounding Executive Order 9066 and the impact on American citizens and permanent resident aliens. At the conclusion of the Commission's activities in 1983, in a report titled *Personal Justice Denied*, it states the following: “The broad historical causes that shaped Executive Order 9066 were race prejudice, war hysteria, and failure of political leadership.”

President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, in the aftermath of the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Imperial Government. It mandated that approximately 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry (almost 2/3 were American citizens) to be incarcerated in ten internment camps throughout the United States. All persons of Japanese ancestry in designated areas on the West Coast of the United States were targeted by EO 9066 to be removed and relocated to mostly desolate areas of the United States. The basis for this decision was military necessity to prevent sabotage and espionage by the Japanese American population on the West Coast.

There were no hearings or rights of due process granted to the 120,000 persons of Japanese American ancestry. The Japanese-American internment camps were often nothing more than makeshift barracks, with families and children cramped together behind barbed wires. Most of the internees were U.S. citizens from the West Coast who were forced to abandon or liquidate their businesses when war relocation authorities escorted them to the camps. There was not one incident of disloyal action or sabotage by Japanese Americans reported when the war ended.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act to compensate more than 100,000 people of Japanese descent who

were incarcerated in internment camps during World War II. The legislation offered a formal apology and paid out \$20,000 in compensation to each surviving victim. The law won congressional approval only after a decade-long campaign by the Japanese-American community.

As a son of one of the internees and a university professor, I am able to share the personal as well as the scholarly viewpoints about what happened during World War II. My colleagues in this area of scholarly domain will confirm what happened as a result of EO 9066, but there is an ongoing dialogue about "can it happen again in America?" The conclusion of the CWRIC report in 1983 is the most compelling - race prejudice, war hysteria, and failure of political leadership as the reasons for the incarceration of Americans of Japanese ancestry in 1942. The forthcoming days will determine if the lessons of 1942 will be heard as it pertains to a Muslim registry.

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