

The Hypocrisy of Japanese Internment

December 7, 1941 is regarded by the United States as a day of infamy. On this day Japanese Air forces launched a surprise attack against Pearl Harbor and crippled the US Navy. After this day America officially declared war on Japan and entered World War II. However, in public opinion the war was viewed as a war against the Japanese and not against the nation of Japan. These sentiments led to the creation of internment camps where many Japanese-Americans, who had demonstrated no signs of treason or disloyalty, were imprisoned for many months until the end of the war. This action was viewed as necessary by many in the American public but when it was discovered that Nazi Germany were hosting Concentration Camps that gathered Jewish individuals and systematically executed them, the American populace cried injustice and forever remember those camps as the pinnacle of evil in the world. The Hypocrisy of these reactions and the supposed justification of these differing opinions will be explored.

The first question to be answered is why is a analysis of the two camps necessary or important in this day and age? The Internment Camps were not only a mistaken judgement of allegiance but they were a blatant violation of the Constitution. The camps ignored Americans right to a speedy trial and the right to be safe and secure in their belongings. The reason this is important is due to the fact that these violations were attributed to any appearance of danger but to the appearance of skin. The Japanese-Americans that were rounded up into camps were only seen as Japanese, this point is made apparent when considering the German-Americans that were seen as more dangerous to the country and yet were not rounded up in-mass to internment camps of their own. These dangers are ever present in the future as recorded in one article this conversation is “to pursue a full discussion of...the need to revise and create a nomenclature that

educates...about what really happened, and how it can happen agains, as we have seen in the wake of the terrorist attacks on ‘9-11’”(Words can lie or clarify 14). This need is reflected in the 2016 presidential race where candidate Donald Trump calls for a temporary ban of Muslims from the United States due to the recent terrorist attacks across the Globe. This call comes from the same line of reasoning as the Internment Camps: seeing the battle as one against a group of people rather than an organized group or nation.

The first aspect that will be looked at is the origin of the two camps. As referenced earlier, the idea of Japanese Internment Camps came in response to the Bombing of Pearl Harbor. After the attack, public surveys were collected and illustrated a general feeling “...that all should be watched, until we know which are disloyal, but a tendency to feel that most are loyal—if we could be sure which” (pollways). This sentiment was taken into account and resulted in President Franklin D. Roosevelt giving Order 9066. The order reads: “I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War... to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded,” (Order 9066). This order resulted in the Secretary of War marking much of the United States as off limits to Japanese-Americans and restricted their movements to 10 camps: the Colorado River (Poston) and Gila River Internment Camps in Arizona, Granada (Amache) Internment Camp in Colorado, the Heart Mountain Internment Camp in Wyoming, the Jerome and Rohwer Internment Camps in Arkansas, the Manzanar Internment Camp in California, the Minidoka Internment Camp in Idaho, and the Tule Lake Internment Camp in California. The Jewish Concentration Camps were first started when the Nazi party came into power in Germany. The first concentration camps were originally set up as detention centers to stop “enemies of the state” from speaking out against the party. The Nazi party continued to publish a

lot of publication naming many groups as enemies of the state among these were the communists, homosexuals, along with the Jews.

The two camps differed greatly in the treatment of the groups imprisoned in their camps. While both camps started as a restriction of the groups movement at night their paths quickly diverged from there. At the height of the Japanese Internment the prisoners were moved into hastily built camps with poorly built shelters and amenities. The camps were surrounded with fences and armed guards that occasionally shot those who tried to escape but other than these aspects the prisoners were allowed to occupy themselves. This resulted in baseball becoming a popular pastime with some declaring it as the only relief in the trying time as said by George Omachi, a Japanese prisoner, “Without baseball, camp life would have been miserable,” (Michael Beschloss). The height of the Jewish Concentration Camps, on the other hand, was much more intense. Forced hard labor further weakened the starving prisoners. These conditions killed off many Jews, but the most heinous condition was the systemized killing of all the prisoners. These prisoners were led in lines to be executed in various ways, the most infamous of which was the gas chamber.

In the America there were arguments both for and against the internment of the Japanese. The logic used to defend the action was the need to protect against espionage and sabotage by the Japanese-American populace. This was reaffirmed in the Korematsu Case when the Superior Court ruled that the need to protect against espionage trumped individual rights. Many Americans did not agree with the use of Internment camps as a way to protect against sabotage. In a letter to Franklin Roosevelt, the Secretary of the Interior said, “I do not think that we can disregard, as of no official concern, the unnecessary creating of a hostile group right in our own territory consisting of people who are engendering a bitterness and hostility that bodes no good

for the future.” This sentiment was also shared amongst the businessmen of Hawaii, they believed that in order to overcome the danger of making enemies of the loyal Japanese in America, the Internment Camps would have to be discontinued. This debate was not present in Nazi Germany due to the nature of the government. The Nazi party spread propaganda supporting the necessity and use of concentration camps while simultaneously silencing any voices that spoke in opposition. Although there is indication that the Allies knew about the camps they did not speak out against the camps publicly at the time. However, after the World War was won and the camps were revealed the camps were decried as the atrocities they are known as today.

The end of both camps came at the end of World War II although it was in different ways. The Japanese Internment camps were ended by Proclamation No. 2714. This was established when Gerald R. Ford said “Now Therefore, I, Gerald R. Ford, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim that all the authority conferred by Executive Order no. 9066 terminated upon the issuance of Proclamation No. 2714, which formally proclaimed the cessation of hostilities of World War II on December 31, 1946” (Words can Lie or Clarify 13). The Jewish Concentration Camps were ended by force. As the Allied forces took ground in Europe they liberated the populations imprisoned in the camps. However, this process was prolonged by the Germans; as the Germans retreated further into Europe they would march the Jews in order to take advantage of the slave labor for as long as possible.

The general attitude to the Internment Camps is one of regret but not serious thought. This is evidenced by the euphemistic terms that are used to describe it such as “internment, evacuation, and relocation.” There have been attempts to change this memory of these camps such as the 2009 Tule Lake Pilgrimage. This convention was used to discuss the perception and

the necessary changes to that perception of Japanese Internment Camps. This included preferred terms to the euphemisms that were included above, and further education about the camps at sites such as Manzanar and Tule Lake. These efforts were met with resistance from the Jewish populace resulting in headlines that read "...The Jewish-Japanese feud has become a tug-of-war between two successful ethnic groups, both trying to establish their status as history's victims.' (Words can Lie or Clarify 10).

These two camps have been shown to have many similarities and yet their legacies are completely different in the history books. The difference lies in the misconception of the concentration camps. Due to the extreme treatment and systematic killing of the Jewish population, the most appropriate names to the camps is "death camps." This makes the Japanese Internment camps a precursor to the horrors of the Holocaust. Both Camps had a racial component in the target population for the camps which makes the two camps more alike than most would care to admit.