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Topaz: Japanese-American Internment

I’ve been reading information and watching documentaries about the World War II. It is unbelievable all those injustices and cruelties made for people among that time. I’ve been wondering if that situation was investigated. Was capture the person who Did all this things? This is a question with no answer. Japanese-American imprisonment in camps was unconstitutional. Like this horrible situation there was a time in America were thousands of people were humiliated and concentrated in camps. They were called the “Japs” a term for those Japanese people who were living in America around 1941. One of these camps was in Delta, Utah. Around 2 hours from Salt Lake City. The University of California tells it best in its internet portal, “On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. The next day, the United States and Britain declared war on Japan. Two months later, on February 19, 1942, the lives of thousands of Japanese Americans were dramatically changed when President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 .This order led to the assembly and evacuation and relocation of nearly 122,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry on the west coast of the United States”( Relocation and Incarceration).

These camps were the nightmare of most Japanese American people who were segregated inside these camps. Most of this Japanese people were US citizens from the west coast.

For decades in the US history discrimination and prejudice have been in our everyday life, but no other actions have scaled on the grade and intensity than Japanese Americans discrimination did. Actions made against Japanese people were inhumane and were fearless action, which is a critical state for a nation that was drive through the path of injustice among this time.

At the end of 1941, Japan attacked the American pacific fleet in Perl Harbor, Hawaii. In this horrific attack a lot of people died and some were injured, “ 2,403 Americans were killed and 1,178 others were wounded”( Attack on pearl Harbor). The United States entered into the World war II, fear of security was clearly stated in American daily life by that time and questions such as: How an attack life this could have occurred? Were in people’s heads. This question was answered in the worse way that could’ve existed. Japanese people were spies of the Japanese government in America. This idea rapidly ran all over the nation by media. This answer was what American people were waiting to feel safe again, after of this horrible attack against their nation, and now they’ve found the authors of this attack.

Before this episode of World War II, around 14.0000 Japanese were living in America (Topaz). It is important to understand the background of this action to understand the consequences in the future. Most of Asian people were of owners of farms or working in it. In children of the camps we can find that, “The need for cheap agricultural labor led to the recruitment and immigration of Japanese from Hawaii and Japan” (Children of the camps, 11). Their labor was really cheap so, it was an advantage for American people to bring them here and just pay half or less of the normal salary to Asian people. Also, Asian people were converted The central valley of California, a fertile land and with hard work they were raising success in their properties. This idea, was seen by Americans as a “serious economic threat” (Children of the camps, 11). This is unbelievable how this Asian people came to help Americans to build The US economy, and how easy was for Americans to throw them into camps just because fear. Also, the institutional racism was reflected during the world war II against Asian people, specifically the anti-Asian legislation propose laws against Asian people such as,” Federal immigration and naturalization laws, anti-miscegenation laws, the alien land law and the segregation of public schools” (Children of the camps, 12) Asian racism was shaped by misunderstood and stereotypes.

On February 19, 1942 was created an executive order 9066 by President Franklin Roosevelt, “his order authorized the evacuation of all persons deemed a threat to national security from the West Coast to relocation centers further inland.”…” They were then evacuated to and confined in isolated, fenced, and guarded relocation centers, known as internment camps.” (Document for February 19th: Executive Order 9066: Resulting in the Relocation of Japanese) Part of this Japanese from all the west coast people were relocated in Delta, western Utah an isolated place.

Japanese American communities were move from their homes by the police and taken to temporary centers. The exclusion order called for evacuation of “alien and not alien”. The government gave Japanese just 2-10 days to take their belongings and prepare to leave their houses. Most of the sold their houses and properties as fast as they could. Tanforan in California was an assembly center to hold Japanese people (Including American Japanese citizens). American citizens who had rights, and were violate. According to Topaz the documentary “The government spent just 30 cents per day per Japanese”. Later, they were relocated to other camps; one of them was Topaz in Delta, Utah. This camp was away from population center, was isolated. They were taken there; children, women and man were separated from each other. They were treated as prisoners.

Japanese people nowadays call this segregation as an “Holocaust of mind and spirit against Japanese people” (Topaz). All the incarceration aspects have a similarity with the Jewish holocaust. Most of Japanese were victims of physical illness, also they got sick because of the food. They were exposed to extreme wheatear changes, in summer hot weather was a torture for them and in winter cold and low temperatures frizzed their bodies. In addition, Topaz was surrounded by guards and barbed wire. Guards were not pointed outside, they were pointed inward, and opposite idea was made by the government: “ the camps were made to protect the Japanese people” (Topaz) .

Prisoners inside Topaz were forced to forget about their culture, they were trying to transform Japanese people into Americans without cultural background from Japan. Those Japanese prisoners who did not pass the “loyalty exam” were sent to an isolation center to rebels in Old Moab (topaz). If Japanese were “disrespectful” with the authority was sent there. These centers were way worse than Topaz, or other normal reclusion center. These prisoners were living in a bad condition. They were victims of extreme brutality.

In January of 1945 the government declared that the threat was past and in summer of the same year Topaz was closed. Japanese people found that their properties were destroyed and they didn’t have anything to go back to. But, most important of this entire segregation act was a huge psychological damage, for Japanese who were born in America and it was their home, their land, their life. They felt they didn’t fit anymore in American society. But this nightmare for Japanese didn’t end here. After they were giving freedom Japanese people were a target of racism from white Americans.

After Jewish segregation, and then Japanese segregation I wonder, how can something like this happen today? I think it is happening right now. American history has shown among the years that this country has thrown the responsibilities of their acts to different ethnic groups, such as Latin people, Asian people and now we can see Black people. Racism have been present in American history and I can connect this hatred and dehumanized behavior with Milton Bennett denial of difference. This country had had the tendency of dehumanize outsiders just because they are different. This path guides us to crimes against humanity. If you ask someone if this inhumane situation will happen again they think it will not. Intolerance and ignorance usually invade someone’s mind and make them take the worst decisions. We all should learn from our past and try to not repeat it. It is what Confucius said ““Study the past if you would define the future.”

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