

How the bombing at Pearl Harbor destroyed the “American dream”

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The bombing at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941 helped shape the America we live in today. The bombing of Pearl Harbor ended the “American dream” by sending most of the men to serve in the war making it needed for women to start working. Not only that, Pearl Harbor put America in poverty because most of the money was sent to fund the war.

Let’s travel back in time to April 1935 in America. Some might say the time period was a renaissance because it was like America was reborn. The two-year mark passed since The Great Depression was wrapped up and America was exhilarated to start living the life they could only imagine in their dreams. But all of this would soon come to an end a few years later in 1941. The novice mistakes that ended all the “American dream” excitement fashioned by America was soon to be unmasked.

The Beginning of the “American Dream”

The bombing at Pearl Harbor came as a surprise to many Americans. Most American citizens expected that they would be able to stay out of the war that was going on between the Axis Alliance and China. The Axis Alliance is an alliance that was made between Japan, Germany, and Italy.¹ The reason the axis alliance came to be was because America used to be a main supplier of Japan’s oil and other resources including steel and iron, but America also did not want anything to do with the war that was going on.² China was a friend of America at the time, but America didn’t want to help China through the war in fear that they would inflame Japan. America just simply wanted to continue living their lives as they were. They were living the “American Dream”.

The American Dream started in March of 1933, the last month of what would be known as The Great Depression.³ The Great Depression was evoked on what used to be known as Black Thursday, when there was a breathtaking drop in the stock market. This came about when sixteen million shares of stock were sold as quickly as possible by distressed investors who lost hope in the American economy. But America slowly started to climb back up to the top after four years of this, starting the “American Dream”.

America was finally doing okay with their economy for the first time in what felt like forever and they feared that getting involved with the war would mean losing that. So, when they found out Japan was going to war with China, America cut off all ties with Japan to remain seen as a “divided” nation. Of course, America was against Japan’s ways but only peacefully protested the matter instead of taking a stand. But once Japan got involved in an alliance with Germany and Italy, America cut all ties with Japan, it would be too risky for them to continue providing for Japan.

In 1939, Germany invaded Poland by using military dominance.⁴ Germany made a nonaggression pact with Poland, but the pact only lasted a little while. A vast majority of Germans resented the fact that Poland received the former German provinces of West Prussia,

¹ “Pearl Harbor Attack.” *Pearl Harbor Reservations*, 7 Apr. 2018, pearlharbor.org/pearl-harbor-attack/.

² “Pearl Harbor.” *Khan Academy*, Khan Academy, www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/rise-to-world-power/us-wii/a/pearl-harbor.a

³ “The Great Depression (Article).” *Khan Academy*, Khan Academy, www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/rise-to-world-power/great-depression/a/the-great-depression.

⁴ *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/invasion-of-poland-fall-1939.

Poznan, and Upper Silesia under the treaty of Versailles. But Hitler only made the pact to lower the possibility of French-Polish military alliances against Germany. But Germany came to the realization that it would be much more beneficial for their country if they over ran Poland instead. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. After this invasion, Germany, Italy, and Japan formed an alliance known as the Axis Alliance. Once this formed alliance became known to the rest of the world, America cut off all ties with Japan, forming something worse than the Axis Alliance.

The Truth to Why America Did Not Want to Fight in Any More Wars

America was holding onto hope that their country would not need to be affected by the war. They wanted to isolate themselves as much as possible from the fight so much so, that when Japan made an alliance with Germany and Italy, America stopped associating themselves with Japan. They still isolated themselves from Japan regardless of the fact America provided Japan most of their iron, steel, and over 80% of oil.

The reason for this was because America stopped trying to get involved in wars after World War I, thousands of Americans were either killed or wounded during the battles. So, President Woodrow Wilson's plan to avoid more death and conflict was to isolate America from the wars, even if it meant ruining relationships with other countries, such as China. Wilson called it permanent peace through international cooperation,⁵ but Japan would not agree to their terms. Many Americans were in denial that they would have to get involved in any type of warfare anytime soon.

America didn't change their state of thought with isolating themselves when Adolf Hitler gained power, or during Japan's expansions across China in the 1930's. The general American population thought their nations best interests were served by staying out of conflicts from other nations and focusing on their own conflicts, like healing from The Great Depression. In the 1930's, congress passed a series of neutrality acts to try and prevent future wars with foreign countries. The countries way of doing this was by preventing future trades with other countries, refusing to loan other countries money, and traveling on foreign ships. But by the 1940's, the war had gotten a lot worse. Germany had annexed Austria, Czechoslovakia, and had conquered Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. Only one anti-Hitler European country was left standing, this country was Great Britain.

Now, all America had to do was figure out if putting their hand in the war would make things worse, or better. America's goal was to protect their country from fighting. However, they may have made things worse for their country in the long run. America was an isolated

⁵ *U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State, history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/american-isolationism.

country with no intention of entering the war. America believed that the war was a fight between foreign countries, and they had no need to get involved.

The End of the “American Dream”

Japan was furious once America cut off ties with them. Their country needed supplies too and America was a big supplier of a lot of Japan’s needed resources like oil, steel, and iron. As you can see, there were many little movements by the American country that made them an easy target for other countries to try to invade, like declaring themselves as an isolated country and cutting off Japan. Japan desperately needed the oil that America produces to be able to run their fighter jets, boats, and other vehicles.

So, on December 7th, 1941, Japan bombed the U. S’s naval base that held war ships that would be vital for the war that they would soon enter.⁶ These ships included the USS Lexington, the USS Enterprise, and the USS Saratoga. The three major ships that went down the day of the bombing were going to be very expensive and time consuming to rebuild. But at 7:55 a.m. when that first bomb dropped on Pearl Harbor, any hope of the American country staying out of war was shattered as fast as a glass vase shatters when dropped on concrete.

Over the next half hour, the only noises that could be heard all throughout the naval base was the exploding of bombs, gunfire, and screaming. The screams seemed to cause more ear damage than the bombs. America needed to be faced hand in hand with the reality that war is all around them at this point in history and there’s no way to not enter the war without killing their own country first. But this does not mean that the way that Japan attacked was a smart move on their count considering that America has more fuel, oil, weapons, and training than them.

Two-thousand three-hundred thirty-eight military officials died on December 7th, 1941. Adding another sixty-eight civilians, that would total to two-thousand four-hundred three people dead, not including the Japanese bombers. Now Japan with Italy and Germany as allies, they were strong. But not strong enough. Many Americans thought that it would be useless to go into war on the British side before Pearl Harbor was bombed. But after France fell and then the bombing of the Pearl Harbor Naval base, most Americans were on board to fight in the war on the British side against the Axis Alliance and Hitler.

⁶ [HYPERLINK "https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/attack-pearl-harbor-1941"](https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/attack-pearl-harbor-1941)
<https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/attack-pearl-harbor-1941>

The Effect the Bombing of Pearl Harbor Had

After the bombing, President Harry Truman declared war on Japan starting the official world war after he gave his speech about “*A Day That Will Live in Infamy*”.⁷ Almost every soldier and man eligible were drafted into the war to fight for their country, sending most women to work in the factories⁸ or to “do the work that the men left behind”. Women worked in factories that built car parts, weapon parts, tools, and much more.

Japanese Internment camps were made to hold Japanese Americans⁹ because they were considered a “threat to society”. The internment camps were a gated off section of a secluded area with housing. Most families had to share a house with a roommate not of their choice. The internment camps had a one room school where kids would go and learn the basic stuff that they would learn if they were just attending a regular school outside of the internment camps. You also had a choice determined on your age, gender, and health to draft into the war. Many families had elder sons and fathers/husbands who would draft themselves into the fight to prove that just because they are Japanese does not mean that they are anything like the Japanese bombers and fighters. Whereas some Japanese citizens believed that the internment camps were dumb and selfish and that they didn’t deserve to be treated the way that they were treated.

On the contrary, the Japanese were being treated with much more respect and hospitality than the Jewish in Germany, Poland, France, and Europe. Many Americans agreed with the government about holding the Japanese citizens away from everyone else because you never knew who could have been a threat, and everyone was jumpy and scared of any Japanese citizen and no longer held trust within them. We still don’t treat everyone with respect especially the Japanese because we still see Pearl Harbor in the back of our minds and can’t get past it.

⁷ Gorman Laks J. (2008). *Pearl Harbor A Primary Source History*. Great Britain: Gareth Stevens Publishing

⁸ “Striking Women.” *World War II: 1939-1945 | Striking Women*, www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/world-war-ii-1939-1945.

⁹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Japanese American Internment.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 3 May 2019, www.britannica.com/event/Japanese-American-internment.

The Aftermath

The war with Japan took four years to end. Japan housed two million strong soldiers on the Homefront of the island to guard against an invasion making it as good as impossible for America to get in, but this would not stop America. President Harry Truman sent an Allied demand to Japan for a surrender.¹⁰ The demand clearly stated that if Japan did not surrender, it would end in complete mass destruction of their home.

But Japan refused to give into the surrender with the state of mind that America no longer had the power to make a dent in their country. As a result of this, America sent out a plane called the Enola Gay almost immediately. The Enola Gay dropped a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima,¹¹ killing around seventy-thousand Japanese citizens. But even with this Japan still would not surrender.

The Soviet Union declared war on Japan after the bombing of Hiroshima. Two days after the first bomb dropped, a second nuclear bomb was dropped on Nagasaki killing eighty-thousand Japanese citizens. With all this destruction of Japan, the country eventually surrendered on August 14, 1945, five days after the second bomb was dropped. Some American citizens claimed that America had no right to drop the nuclear bombs because Japan was practically “on their knees” and that Harry Truman was being racist because he would have never used the nuclear bombs on a “white” country.

The “American Dream” was a widely known topic and was hyped up to the point where it was a devastating tragedy when it all came to an end. The reality of the situation was that war was all around the world during 1941, and by declaring ourselves as an isolated country, it made us appear weak and vulnerable, making America an easy target. If Japan didn’t attack Pearl Harbor, then some other country would have tried wiping America out completely.

America was in no way ready for the attack on Pearl Harbor. American’s thought that by isolating themselves, they were making their country stronger and it left a mark once they were hit with a hard dose of reality. The bombing at Pearl Harbor was a wakeup call to the fact that the beloved “American Dream” would no longer be happening. Men were drafted to fight in the war that began on December 7, 1941. And in order to live what was considered the “American Dream”, women were to stay at home and cook, clean, and be in on the neighborhood gossip. The men would go to work, come home, and repeat. This was considered

¹⁰ “Today in History - December 7.” *The Library of Congress*, www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/december-07/.

¹¹ “The Decision to Drop the Bomb.” *Ushistory.org*, Independence Hall Association, <https://www.ushistory.org/us/51g.asp>.

happiness, but sadly, America didn't get to live "happiness". Afterall, the "American Dream" was just a dream.

Appendix A



Moorhouse, Roger. "The Invasion of Poland in 1939: How It Unfolded and Why the Allies Failed to Respond." *History Hit*, History Hit, 22 Oct. 2019, www.historyhit.com/the-invasion-of-poland-in-1939-how-it-unfolded-and-why-the-allies-failed-to-respond/.

This image was taken during the invasion of Poland. Germany is marching through the streets of Poland demanding peace between the two countries. They did this because there were rumors that Poland was going to try to fight Germany in the war, and Germany wanted to stop any future fighting to use their resources on countries that were considered a real threat.

Appendix B



“Second Sino-Japanese War.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 5 Jan. 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Sino-Japanese_War.

This is an image of Japan invading China and this is a really good source for me to be able to see. The reason this is a good source for me to use is because I never really knew what invasions actually looked like. I thought they were of Japan attacking right away not riding through to warn of an invasion.

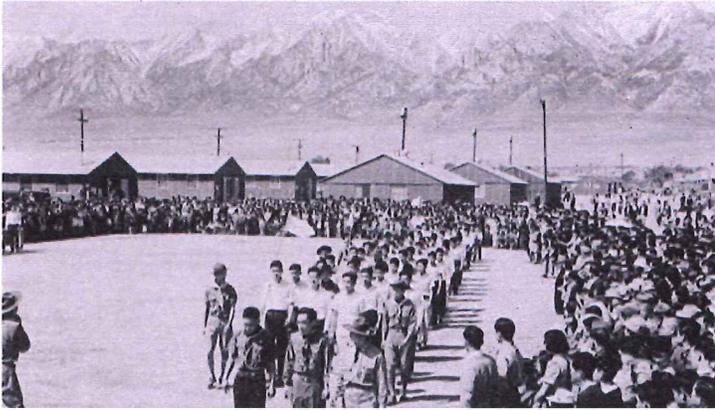
Appendix C



“Pearl Harbor.” *Khan Academy*, Khan Academy, www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/rise-to-world-power/us-wwii/a/pearl-harbor.a

This is an image that was taken during the bombing at Pearl Harbor. The Japanese flight bombers have hit the ships in hopes to weaken the American economy. It appears Japan is a much stronger country than we thought. America thought that by not sending Japan supplies that they were going to weaken the Japan economy, but instead they made Japan angry and gave Japan a reason to attack Pearl Harbor.

Appendix D



“Never Again’ Japanese Internment Panel Will Discuss Strategies to Avoid Repeating History.”
Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 13 Apr. 2017, www.latimes.com/socal/daily-pilot/news/tn-wknd-et-japanese-internment-20170413-story.html.

This is an image of Japanese Americans lining up to enter the internment camps where they would stay for who knows how long. In this image, the Japanese are getting lined up and assigned houses for their families. They would have to share their house with another family though, there were limited houses and more Japanese families than houses.