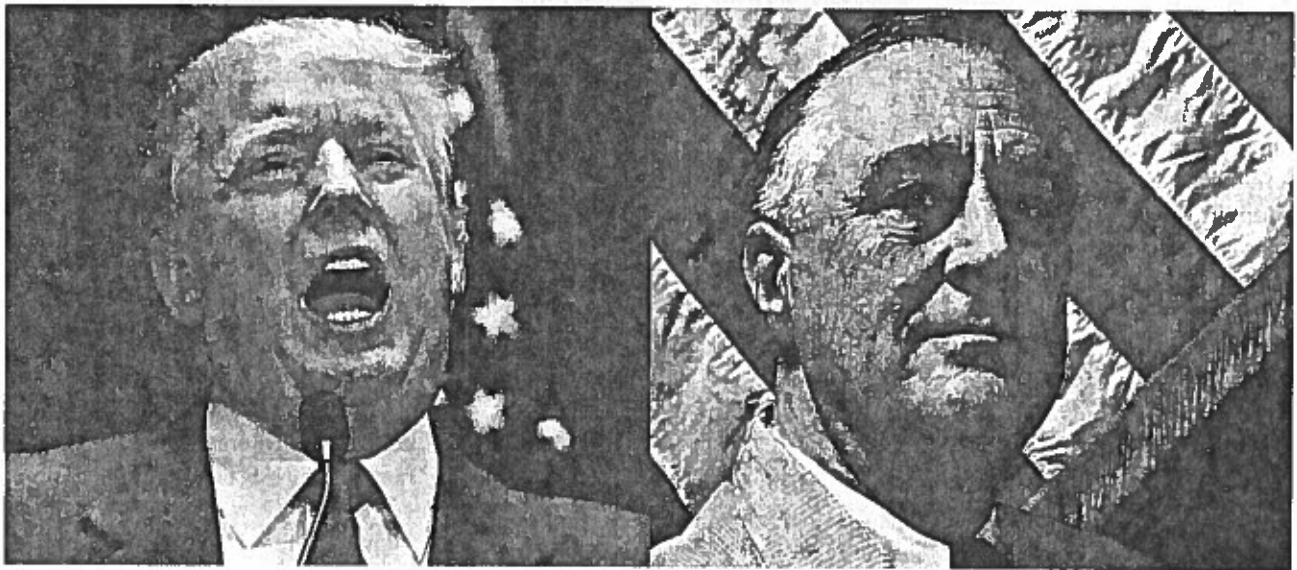


# Donald Trump & FDR



When the Republican presidential candidate suggested barring all foreign Muslims from the U.S., he cited Franklin D. Roosevelt's internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. Are there parallels? **BY JOSEPH BERGER**



Republican presidential candidate Donald J. Trump (left); and President Franklin D. Roosevelt (right) in 1943

It was an audacious statement for a presidential candidate to make, even in response to a grisly terrorist attack.

A few days after two Islamic radicals living in the U.S. (one of them a U.S. citizen) shot and killed 14 people at an office holiday party in San Bernardino, California, Republican candidate Donald Trump proposed barring all foreign Muslims from entering the country until the nation's leaders can "figure out what is going on."

Americans have expressed strong opinions about Trump's proposal. In a December poll, 6 in 10 Republican voters agreed with it. "You can't look at a Muslim and tell if they're a terrorist or friendly," Susan Kemmerlin of Charleston, South Carolina, said at a Trump rally that month.

But other Republican candidates and many Americans of both parties were shocked by the idea, saying it violated the nation's ideals. "This country was founded on freedom of

religion," says Nancy Morawetz, a professor at New York University School of Law who specializes in immigration, "so to try to put into law a religious test that if you're of this religion you can't come in, that's unprecedented."

## Pearl Harbor & WWII

Still, as Trump himself pointed out, his idea does recall actions taken in the past by American leaders in the name of national security. "Take a look at what F.D.R. did many years ago, and he's one of the most highly respected presidents," said Trump, arguing that the U.S. is now "at war with radical Islam."

During World War II (1939-45), Japanese-Americans—and to a lesser extent, people of German and Italian descent—were suspected of secretly sympathizing with America's enemies. They were rounded up and forced into detention camps, or faced relocations, travel restrictions,

Watch a video on a Japanese-American's return to an internment camp at [upfrontmagazine.com](http://upfrontmagazine.com)

curfews, property confiscations, and other indignities.

The internments began in February 1942—two months after Japanese warplanes bombed the American naval base Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, prompting America to declare war against Japan and its Axis allies, Germany and Italy. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which forced nearly 120,000 people—all Japanese immigrants and their American-born children—to leave designated areas along the West Coast, including all of California, and surrender their homes and possessions. (Believing the West Coast was the most likely target for a second Japanese attack, military leaders feared that Japanese-Americans would aid the enemy.) They were limited to one suitcase per person, and eventually transported to 10 Army-run outposts scattered on Indian reservations and federal lands in bleak terrains of Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming (*see map, p. 18*).

Surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers, they lived in flimsy barracks, slept on cots, queued up for meals of canned wieners and boiled potatoes, and shared communal latrines.

The actor George Takei, who later played Sulu on the original *Star Trek* TV series, was 5 when two soldiers with bayonets marched up to the front door of his Los Angeles home and dispatched his family to a temporary shelter at the Santa Anita racetrack. They were later moved to a camp in Arkansas.

“We were housed in the horse stables,” he recalled in a recent *New York Times* article about the Broadway musical *Allegiance*, inspired by his family’s wartime experience. “Can you imagine, for my parents to be taken from a two-bedroom home in Los Angeles, with their three children, and to sleep in this smelly horse stall?”

Military leaders and advisers had expressed fears—most of them unsubstantiated, as it turned out—that some Japanese-

## SCENES FROM INTERNMENT

About 120,000 Japanese-Americans were sent to internment camps during World War II.



A government notice that people of Japanese ancestry in the western U.S. must evacuate their homes, 1942 (top, left); Japanese-American citizens show their loyalty on their way to an internment camp in 1943 (top, right); Japanese-American evacuees at a relocation center in San Bruno, California, 1942 (bottom).

Americans might spy or commit sabotage to aid Japan. Roosevelt had also been egged on by long-simmering animosity toward the Japanese. Newspaper headlines and neighborhood conversations were filled with slurs about "yellow dogs" and "nips."\* Much of the hostility stemmed from selfish motives. Growers of fruits and vegetables, for example, had been chafing for years over competition from Japanese-owned farms. Though those farms made up 1 percent of California's cultivated land, they produced 40 percent of the crops.

### Immigrants & 'Enemy Aliens'

German-Americans and Italian-Americans were also treated with suspicion, but they were ultimately handled far more gently. According to the 1940 Census, 1.2 million people in the U.S. at that time had been born in Germany, and 11 million had either one or two German parents. Of that group, 11,507 were detained—almost all German immigrants who had been automatically classified as "enemy aliens" upon America's declaration of war. Their cases were examined individually, and those who were flagged, sometimes because of rumors or reports by neighbors, wound up in internment camps. An additional 254 were evicted from their homes because they lived near vulnerable shipyards and defense plants.

Eberhard Fuhr was a star athlete at Woodward High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, when FBI agents showed up at his school and arrested him, leading to his internment for four years.

\*This ethnic slur derives from *Nippon*, the Japanese word for Japan.

"There was a lot of fear, a lot of suspicion, especially in places like Cincinnati," Fuhr told a Cincinnati newspaper in 2007 at age 81. "The vast majority of these people had no political connections; they were just ordinary working people caught up in the times."

### 'There was a lot of fear, a lot of suspicion' of Germans too.

Of the 695,000 Italian immigrants or nationals living in the United States in 1942, 1,881 were taken into custody, most of them diplomats, businessmen, international students, and merchant seamen. Some were sent back to Italy, but 250 were interned for up to two years. The rest were forced to register as "enemy aliens" at local post offices, fingerprinted, photographed, and made to carry identification cards at all times.

Why were so many fewer Italians and Germans detained than Japanese? The government said detaining so many assimilated Americans of German and Italian descent would have been daunting. But Peter J. Spiro, a professor of immigration and constitutional law at Temple University in Philadelphia, thinks the country's historic preference for white Europeans was at play.

"I think it's a pretty clear racial motivation," says Spiro.

Indeed, America had a long history of excluding Asians. In the mid-19th century, thousands of Chinese were brought to the U.S. to build the railroads. But when the economy slumped and jobs became scarcer, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which ended up barring all Chinese laborers for the next 60 years. Subsequent laws passed in 1917 and 1924 excluded immigration from eastern Asia and blocked

## WORLD WAR II INTERNMENT

Japanese-Americans, and German and Italian immigrants, were detained around the U.S.



SOURCES: NATIONAL JAPANESE AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY; GERMAN AMERICAN INTERNEE COALITION; ARTHUR D. JACOBS

JIM McMAHON

JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES

A fa

se

cit:  
in t  
imr  
abo  
grat  
I  
Gila  
ban  
Am-  
size  
125  
dus  
T  
pro  
tal  
taki  
The  
car  
I  
con  
Inm  
by  
wh  
allo

in places  
 2007 at  
 ople had  
 ordinary  
 "nations  
 81 were  
 its, busi-  
 n. Some  
 70 years.  
 cal post  
 identifi-

ed than  
 militated  
 'e been  
 nd con-  
 nks the  
 play.  
 piro.  
 ans. In  
 ght to  
 umped  
 hinese  
 hinese  
 n 1917  
 locked



**A family of Syrian refugees fleeing civil war arrives in Louisville, Kentucky, in December.**

**117,000**

NUMBER OF  
 Japanese-Americans  
 put into internment camps  
 during WWII.

SOURCE: THE U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES  
 AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

**33,000**

TOTAL NUMBER OF  
 Japanese-American men who  
 served in the U.S. military during  
 or just after WWII.

SOURCE: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**60%**

PERCENTAGE OF Republican voters  
 in a December 2015 poll who  
 supported Trump's proposal to  
 bar foreign Muslims from  
 entering the U.S.

SOURCE: POLITICO

**100,000**

NUMBER OF immigrants  
 from predominantly Muslim  
 countries who become  
 permanent U.S. residents each year.

SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

citizenship to people of Japanese descent, except for those born in the U.S. (In 1952, Congress eliminated racial restrictions on immigration, and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act abolished country preferences, which led to increased immigration from many parts of the world, including Asia.)

During World War II, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited the Gila River Relocation Center in Arizona at the request of her husband, who heard reports of festering bitterness in the Japanese-American camps. She saw 12,000 people, enough to fill a fair-sized suburb, living in a desert where temperatures could reach 125 degrees in summer and 30 below zero in winter. Swirling dust left their hair white, their eyes red, their clothes gritty.

The first lady was impressed by the inmates' ingenuity and productivity. They had set up nursery schools, barbershops, dental clinics, and newspapers, and 25 percent of the adults were taking classes in everything from cabinet making to U.S. history. They were growing enough livestock and vegetables to feed the camp and staffing a camouflage-net factory for the war effort.

Despite the can-do spirit of the families she met, Roosevelt concluded that the Gila River camp was essentially a prison. Inmates were demoralized by the loss of their livelihoods and by the breakdown of traditional family structure in places where only citizens—who were mostly younger people—were allowed to hold positions of authority. Her reports prompted

her husband to thin out the 10 camps, allowing inmates to join the army—3,600 of them did—or get permits to work on outside farms or factories.

Today, the U.S. internment of Japanese-Americans is widely regarded as a stain on the nation's history. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill providing some restitution to those who had been interned.

### Is Barring Muslims Constitutional?

Yet for all the parallels between Japanese internment during World War II and Trump's proposal, the comparison is hardly exact. The U.S. had declared war against Japan, Germany, and Italy. The U.S. hasn't declared war against the Islamic religion, though it is trying to figure out how to defeat terrorist groups like ISIS, which is intent on establishing a strict Islamic state in the Middle East and destroying its perceived enemies in the U.S. and the rest of the West.

The Trump plan is aimed at Muslims hoping to enter the U.S., while the Japanese internments targeted people who had already set down roots in America, two-thirds of them U.S. citizens. Another difference, according to Spiro, is that excluding immigrants by ethnicity or religion may in fact be constitutional: Courts have ruled that as shapers of foreign policy, Congress and the president have broad powers over immigration and naturalization.

Despite its potential legality, Spiro says, the Trump plan would be hard to enforce, requiring officials to figure out a foreigner's religious beliefs—a murky area.

"It's not something that's stamped on someone's forehead," Spiro says. "It would involve all kinds of intrusive inquiries and fuzzy lines."

The numbers officials would have to examine are staggering: Each year the U.S. grants permanent residency to 100,000 immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries, according to the Pew Research Center.

When people feel embattled and fearful, they sometimes seek out solutions to feel protected. Trump's proposal no doubt has that appeal for some Americans. But it's also gotten Americans debating how to best handle the growing threat of terrorist groups abroad and lone actors at home carrying out terrorist attacks like the one in San Bernardino.

Tom Herold, a Trump supporter from Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, disagrees with the Republican candidate about barring all foreign Muslims from entering the U.S. But he does think the U.S. should adopt more-stringent policies about who's allowed in—and apply that extra scrutiny to everyone, not just Muslims.

"If you're going to do it to one person, do it to all," he says. "I think everyone should have the same treatment." ●

*Joseph Berger is a former reporter for The New York Times; additional reporting by Jonathan Martin of The Times.*

JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES

JIM MCMAHON

SOCIETY,  
 JACOBS