

Chronological: The Attack on USA September 11, 2001, 2001-09

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers
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By Senator Daniel K. Inouye

September 11, 2001, is a date that Americans will remember, hopefully, for a long, long time. Today as we review the death and destruction that occurred on that date, many find it convenient to refer to another date, December 7, 1941, and suggest that the events of that earlier date are similar to the events of last Tuesday.

Yes, there are similarities. In both cases, the death and destruction came as a surprise. The resulting emotions are very similar: anger, hate, vengeance, and patriotism.

But there are differences. In the case of December 7, we immediately knew who dropped the bombs. On the more recent date, no one stepped forward to claim responsibility. However, the President of the United States indicated the prime suspect is Osama bin Ladin and his umbrella organization, the Islamic World Front, which includes the al-Jihad.

In the case of the Pearl Harbor attack, our nation suffered the loss of more than 2,500 brave sailors, soldiers, marines, and airmen. In the recent attack upon the World Trade Center, most of the casualties were innocent, non-military civilians -- clerks, secretaries, business managers, waiters, fire fighters, and police officers.

However, there is one major difference. Soon after that attack on Pearl Harbor, our citizens began to demonstrate and express their anger in strange ways. Many Asian Americans pinned cards on their dresses and shirts that simply read, "I am not a Jap. I am Chinese." No one condemned or dissuaded these citizens from doing that. In fact, the government of the United States seems to have encouraged such actions. There were some who cowardly threw bricks into store front and residential windows. No one was arrested. Again, the government seems to have looked the other way.

One month after the attack, the government of the United States, issued a directive that Japanese Americans were unfit to serve in the United States military and declared that we were 4-C, the designation for "enemy alien." A few weeks later, the United States government instructed the military to build 10 concentration camps and place Japanese Americans, most of them citizens, into these camps. They were incarcerated without due process of law. We now know that no one was ever arrested for committing a crime, and that no one ever committed an act of sabotage. However, it should be noted that in 1988, this great nation of ours admitted its mistakes of 1942 and publicly apologized to Japanese Americans who were wrongfully incarcerated in camps.

I hope the experiences of 1942 and the duration of World War II taught us a few lessons. The paramount lesson is the need for powerful national leadership. When the ugly head of bigotry rises, we should immediately condemn and stop it. We should not tolerate any violence against our good neighbors who may be Arab or followers of the Islamic faith. If we lower ourselves to that level, we grant the perpetrators of the obscene acts of death and destruction on September 11 a victory they do not deserve.

We may have been injured, and we may have suffered the loss of friends and fortunes, but we should not let that intimidate us. Above all, we must remember that we are Americans first. We know our way of life and our Constitution have been attacked in the past. This, too, we shall overcome. An attack by barbarians does not justify a barbaric response.

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