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World History Honors

### Why did Japan attack the U.S. at Pearl Harbor?

December 7, 1941, "a date that will live in infamy," according to former president Franklin D. Roosevelt, was the day Japan attacked the United States. Japan had planned a surprise attack to damage United States aircraft and warships, which had to shock the military unexpectedly. In order to keep their element of surprise, Japan zig-zagged their way through the Pacific Ocean for about a week and half until they could anchor their aircraft carriers that would later report to the island of Oahu. It was an early and peaceful Sunday when Japan reached their target of Pearl Harbor. The United States's naval base was calm; servicemen were either resting, eating breakfast, or getting ready for church. The attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese was a result of growing conflict and competition between the two nations.

The disagreements between the two contradictory nations started long ago, dating back to 1924 when the U.S. imposed the Immigration Act of 1924. The purpose of this bill was to limit the amount of immigrants that were allowed acceptance into the United States, specifically ones of Japanese descent. The Japan Times and Mail published an article called *The Senate's Declaration Of War* expressing the humiliation felt by the new law. According to the article, the amendment "is a most humiliating one to the Japanese race." This also led to beginning of rough tension, which was considered "a wound that will hurt and rankle for many generations," by the Japan Times. This harsh amendment was not necessarily foreshadowing the attack of Pearl Harbor, but definitely added yet another reason to promote the attack.

The United States publically humiliated Japan as Japan was also striving to the main and most powerful order throughout the world. The U.S. and their allies, such as Europe, were seen by Japan as an obstacle to their goal and implemented these ideas into Japanese pupils. *The Way of the Subjects* was a published book that was considered a mandatory reading throughout Japanese high schools and colleges. This literature stated, "an old order is now crumbling," referring to the American and European nations. Japan also made an effort to showcase their emperor as a protagonist by saying, "the ideals of Japan ... are represented by the principle that the benevolent rule of the Emperor may be extended as to embrace the whole world." The 'whole world' included the United States and Europe, which provided a sturdy barricade between Japan and their goal and yet another reason for Japan to take action.

The United States was also slowly cutting off Japan's access to necessary war materials, such as aircraft parts, petroleum, steel, and scrap iron. An article taken from Suzuki Akira showcased the gradual decrease of Japanese imports from America. From 1937 to 1941, the amount of petroleum imported from the U.S. went down by about three million tons while steel lowered by an enormous 400 million tons. The importation of U.S. aircraft parts also came to a complete stop in 1939. Japan's Prime and War Minister said in November of 1941 that, "We

(Japan) will have no petroleum for military use. Ships will stop moving." The U.S. even went through the trouble of "freezing all Japanese assets and bank accounts," in July of 1941 according to a timeline taken from Akira Iriye. The same chronological report states that in the following month, America stopped all oil exports to Japan.

Japan took action, resulting in 2,403 American deaths, and successfully surprised Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The following day, president Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress to be brought into World War II by announcing war on the country of Japan. The conflict between the two countries was undeniable due to the Immigration Act of 1924, the struggle for world power, and the embargo of necessary war materials. Although these actions may not have seemed very significant when they occurred, they led Japan to attack the navy base at Pearl Harbor on one calm Sunday morning.