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AUDIO AND VISUAL MEDIA

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Education in a Japanese American Internment Camp

Farewell to Manzanar

Memoir

By: Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston

Date: 1973

Source: Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki, and James D. Houston. *Farewell to Manzanar*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973, 89–90, 93.

About the Author: Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston (1934–) was born in Inglewood, California. Her Japanese American family was among the first to be interned at the Manzanar War Relocation Center during World War II (1939–1945). Houston studied sociology and journalism at San Jose State College, where she and her husband, a novelist, first met. They were married in 1957 and live in California. Houston was awarded both the Humanities Prize in 1976 and the Christopher Award for the screenplay of *Farewell to Manzanar*.

"A Teacher at Topaz"

Memoir

By: Eleanor Gerard Sekerak

Date: 2000

Source: Sekerak, Eleanor Gerard. "A Teacher at Topaz." In *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience*. Lawson Fusao Inada, ed. Berkeley, Calif.: Heyday, 2000, 132–33.

About the Author: Eleanor Gerard Sekerak was born in California. She graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, before taking up an assignment to teach at Topaz Relocation Center in Utah during World War II. After the war, Sekerak returned to California and was a social studies teacher and counselor for thirty years before retiring. ■

Introduction

Since the turn of the twentieth century, the Japanese had immigrated into the United States, primarily settling on the West Coast as farmers. They encountered discrimination in immigration and naturalization, housing, and employment. During World War I (1914–1918), they formed an American Loyalty League in San Francisco to serve in the army. After the war, however, the Japanese were no longer allowed to immigrate to the United States and were denied citizenship.

In California, the Alien Land Law forbid the *Issei*, or first-generation immigrants, from buying land, even in the name of their *Nisei*, or American-born, children. Japanese Americans made up only 2 percent of California's population but produced 13 percent of the state's crops, with less land than their white neighbors. When whites boycotted their products, Japanese Americans started their own farmers' markets. They also challenged their exclusion from citizenship and immigration through the Japanese American Citizens League. During the 1930s, some progress was made, as Japanese Americans were elected to office in Hawaii, including a federal judgeship. However, the progress of the New Deal era would be catastrophically reversed with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Significance

Americans reacted to the attack on Pearl Harbor with racial hostility toward Japanese Americans, although most of them had never even lived in Japan and had become U.S. citizens. The Federal Bureau of Investigation searched hundreds of Japanese American homes, froze bank accounts, and arrested 1,370 people. Fearing another attack on the West Coast, leaders in California, Oregon, and Washington called for the detention of all Japanese Americans, whether *Issei* or *Nisei*.

In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (served 1933–1945) signed Executive Order 9066 to counter espionage and sabotage. As a result, the government established "relocation camps" for about 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry. Families were given from forty-eight hours to two weeks to pack and were forced to sell their homes, businesses, and farms to whites at whatever price was offered. More than two-thirds of those interned under the executive order were citizens of the United States and more than half were children.

Relocation began the following month. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) was created to administer the



Interned students, Kiyō Yoshida, Lillian Watkatsuki and Yoshiko Yamasaki attend high school at the Manzanar Relocation Center, 1943. THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

internment camps, which were scattered in isolated desert areas of Arizona, California, Utah, Idaho, Colorado, and Wyoming; a camp in New Jersey imprisoned those from the East Coast.

Schools were built in the camps, in some cases by internees, but had very little equipment. Students tried not to fall behind in their studies despite the circumstances. Many children kept diaries, wrote haiku poetry, and sketched pictures of their experiences at the camps.

When Japanese radio propaganda mentioned the camps as an example of America's "racial war" against Asians, President Roosevelt began to change his policies: the army was opened to internees and a Japanese American unit was created, eventually becoming among the most decorated of the war. Internees were also allowed to leave the camps if they could find work in another part of the country. Finally, a government employee, Mitsuye Endo, sued for her freedom and in 1944 the Supreme Court agreed with her. President Roosevelt rescinded Executive Order 9066 in 1944 and the last of the camps closed in March 1946. After their release, eight thousand of the former detainees decided to leave for Japan. In 1991, Congress offered each person who had been interned a reparations payment of \$20,000.

Primary Source

Farewell to Manzanar [excerpt]

SYNOPSIS: In this excerpt, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston describes growing up in the Manzanar Relocation Center, including her school days and extracurricular activities and her attempts to be "unmistakably American."

Once we settled into Block 28 that ache I'd felt since soon after we arrived at Manzanar subsided. It didn't entirely disappear, but it gradually submerged, as semblances of order returned and our pattern of life assumed its new design.

For one thing, Kiyō and I and all the other children finally had a school. During the first year, teachers had been volunteers; equipment had been makeshift; classes were scattered all over camp, in mess halls, recreation rooms, wherever we could be squeezed in. Now a teaching staff had been hired. Two blocks were turned into Manzanar High, and a third block of fifteen barracks was set up to house the elementary grades. We had blackboards, new desks, reference books, lab supplies. That second, stable school year was one of the things *Our World* commemorated when it came out in June of 1944.