EXISTENTIALIST TEXTUAL RESPONSES TO THE JAPANESE AMERICAN INCARCERATION OF WORLD WAR II

by

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ABSTRACT

During World War II, and shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the American government unjustly incarcerated over 120,000 Japanese American citizens due to rampant, racist, wartime hysteria which branded Japanese Americans as potential enemies of the state. After the war, internment narratives authored by Japanese Americans were published, sharing with the public their internment experiences and the traumas they bore due to the time they spent incarcerated. In my thesis, I analyze two of these narratives, applying the lens of existentialism to my analysis. First, I share a brief overview of Japanese American history, including an explanation of what the Japanese American internment was. Next, I share details and photographs I took while on site visits to the grounds of where two internment camps used to stand. Finally, I share my analyses (made through the use of the lens of existentialism) of two internment narratives, *They Called Us Enemy* and *Farewell to Manzanar*.

KEYWORDS

Japanese American internment, World War II, existentialism, documentary photography, incarceration literature

INTRODUCTION

Japanese American History Overview

Japanese immigrants first arrived in the United States in 1868—at which point they landed on the shores of Hawaii (in fact, the territory of Hawaii was only granted the status of statehood in 1959, under the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower). This initial batch of immigrants sought access to work opportunities that were promised to be financially prosperous and stable by agents of Hawaii's sugar industry. The reality of plantation work, however, was grim. Working conditions were oppressive, and Japanese immigrants tolerated extreme hardship. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed which "establishes the basis for making non-citizen Asian residents ineligible for naturalization" (Japanese American National Museum). Concurrently, strong anti-Asian (in particular, anti-Chinese) sentiment is birthed within the United States, allowing for Japanese immigrants to be able to take labor jobs previously held by Chinese immigrants. However, this turn of luck for Japanese immigrants was fleeting, as the Immigration Act of 1924 was passed around forty years later. Colloquially known as the Japanese Exclusion Act, this act barred "the entry of all aliens who are ineligible for citizenship" into the United States (Japanese American National Museum). Japanese immigration into America came to a startling halt.

On December 7, 1941—in the midst of World War II—Japanese military troops launched a surprise attack on an American naval base, Pearl Harbor, located near Honolulu, Hawaii, on the island of Oahu. The United States suffered extreme, devastating casualties as a result of the attack, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested the United States Congress to declare war against the Empire of Japan the following day, officially propelling the United States into World War II. The grievous act of violence committed by the Japanese Empire which prompted the

United States to officially enter into the war also allowed for the longstanding anti-Asian sentiment that was brewing within America for decades prior to quickly surface. The result of this shift was the unjust, dehumanizing incarceration of over 120,000 loyal, law-abiding, Japanese Americans, many of whom were American-born citizens.

Japanese American Internment Overview

The attack on Pearl Harbor caused the United States government to become highly suspicious of Japanese Americans, as it was believed that they might have the ability and motivation to aid the war efforts of the Japanese Empire (despite lacking evidence which proved these suspicions). At the beginning of 1942, fueled by rampant, racist fear of Japanese Americans, the United States War Department created restricted zones and instated curfews across the West Coast—where most Japanese Americans lived—forcing them to abide by these oppressive restrictions. Anti-Japanese-American propaganda was rampantly circulated during this time, helping to promote racist fear that would ultimately result in the incarceration shortly after the United States formally entered the war. The production of propaganda materials became so popular that even the beloved American author and illustrator Theodor Seuss Geisel—otherwise known as Dr. Seuss—participated in the creation of deeply racist messaging, as seen in the example of his work below.

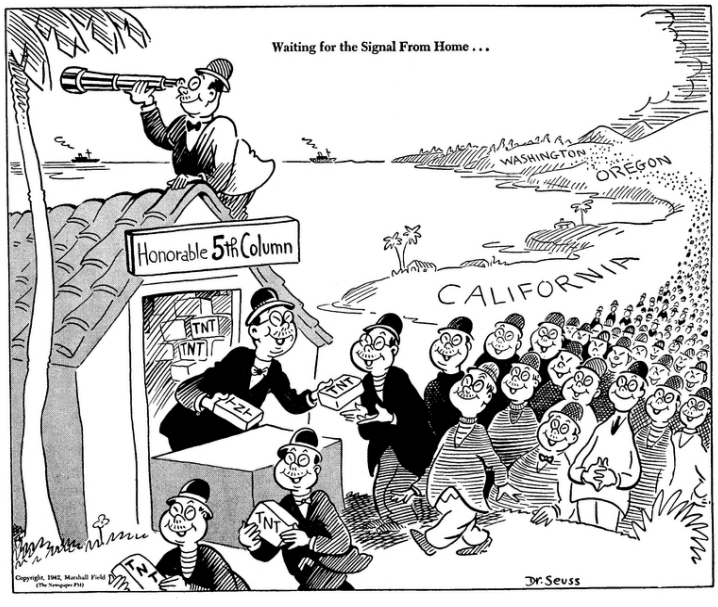


Fig. 1. Geisel, Theodor Seuss. *Dr. Seuss Draws Anti-Japanese Cartoons During WWII, Then Atones with Horton Hears a Who!* Anti-Japanese-American cartoon illustrated by Dr. Seuss depicting Japanese-Americans preparing to stage an attack on American soil at the command of the Japanese Empire. 20 August 2014. *Open Culture*, https://www.openculture.com/2014/08/dr-seuss-draws-racist-anti-japanese-cartoons-during-ww--ii.html.

In February of 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 into law, which allowed for United States "military commanders to exclude civilians from military areas" (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). Although Japanese Americans were never explicitly targeted within the language of the executive order, it was clear that they would be the only population within the United States who would be subject to the instructions laid out in the ruling. The United States military quickly removed tens of thousands of Japanese Americans who lived on the West Coast and placed them into internment camps inland—ultimately, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were unjustly detained by the American government over the course of the war.

Ten camps were operational within the United States throughout the war. Located throughout California, Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado, Arizona, and Arkansas, the camps were situated in remote, desolate, isolating locations, and living conditions were abysmal. The camps were intentionally located inland—carefully and strategically distanced away from the West Coast and marks of metropolitan American life. The United States government was fearful that Japanese Americans would communicate with members of the Japanese Empire to help support and coordinate an invasion of the West Coast, or another deadly attack similar to the one which devastated Pearl Harbor.

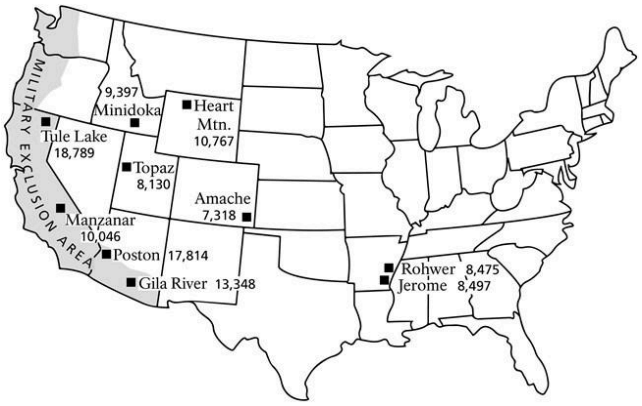


Fig. 2. National Park Service. *War Relocation Centers*. Image of "War Relocation Centers" and their peak populations. *National Park Service*, https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/war-relocation-centers.htm.

Those who were subject to internment lived in hastily constructed barracks, used communal bathrooms, and were restricted to the constantly monitored bounds of camp marked by barbed wire fences. Many internees lived in confinement for three or more years. They often banded together in order to run makeshift schools, camp newspapers, sports leagues, and activity groups for children. As the war came to an end, the government started to close down the internment camps it operated—Japanese Americans were finally free to leave. Many families returned to their hometowns; many others relocated. In 1982, a presidential commission identified “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership” to be the true causes of internment (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica). The United States Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act in 1988 which provided surviving Japanese Americans who were incarcerated with financial reparations and a formal apology for its unlawful treatment of Japanese Americans during the war.

Personal History of Interest Regarding Internment Narratives

Seattle, Washington—like many other metropolitan cities on the West Coast (such as Los Angeles, California and San Francisco, California)—is a city teeming with history related to the

Japanese American internment. My hometown, Mercer Island, Washington, is an island (around two miles wide by five miles long, boasting a population of around 25,000 residents) that lives on Lake Washington, located directly east of downtown Seattle—that shares with Seattle a connection to the internment. I discovered this quiet connection during my first year of high school at Mercer Island High.

Every Sunday—over the course of my four years in high school—I visited residents at the Mercer Island branch of the Sunrise Senior Living home community. This living community housed senior citizens who struggled with memory impairments and related health conditions, such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease. When I began volunteering within the community, I quickly befriended a few Japanese American women who lived there, and eventually established a peaceful, regular Sunday morning routine with them—play some memory-jogging card games and commune about the past week. As time progressed, I became close with these few women, and I began to inquire about their lives, families, and histories, asking them about where they were born, if they went to college, what they did for work, and if they had spouses or children. Most of their families were rooted in Seattle, or elsewhere on the West Coast, and because of this—and due to their age—they were subject to the oppressive and jarring circumstances associated with the Japanese American internment.

I became particularly close with and fond of one of these women—Hideko (“Hide”) Tekawa—and the few experiences she shared about the internment of her and her family came as a deep, rattling shock to me. Hide was born in 1933 in Los Angeles, California and was the youngest of five sisters. When she was around nine years of age, she and her family were interned at the Poston War Relocation Center, an internment camp located approximately 140 miles northwest of Phoenix, Arizona. At its peak, the population of the Poston War Relocation

Center was estimated to be holding just under 18,000 internees. In telling me about her internment experience, Hide recalled the harsh living conditions at the camp, and even mentioned that she witnessed a childbirth take place, sans medical professionals. She also recalled returning home to a city which seemed to forget that her family were once residents—their house was overrun, their belongings vanished. I first met Hide and learned about her experiences in 2018, but the astonishment and shock which I felt when she first told me her story still lives within me. I could not make sense of what Hide had endured 80 years prior to my meeting her—I found the idea that she had been imprisoned solely due to the way she looked to be indigestible. I told my parents, with great fascination and disbelief, that Hide was subject to internment, and first began to read into what the internment entailed, who it affected, and why it took place.

During my junior year of high school, I took AP United States History, a course designed to examine the historical development of the United States from its "discovery" in the 1490s by caucasian explorers to present day. During the course, there was focus placed on the discussion of America's involvement in WWII and the atrocities the war bore, but I cannot recall learning extensively about the impact of internment on the United States and its citizens. It was not until I enrolled in the required Junior Research Seminar all English majors are mandated to take Texas Christian University that I learned more about, and became increasingly interested in, the realities of internment. The focus of the Junior Research Seminar in which I was enrolled (taught by Dr. Sarah Robbins) explored American immigration and diaspora narratives, and included a unit focused on the exploration of the histories and stories of American immigrants who were received with prejudice and opposition—including those of Japanese descent who were subject to the wartime internment. It was due to this focus of study with which I can credit my interest in

written internment narratives and the messages, feelings, and personalities that I found to be embedded within them. In order to explore the messaging present within internment narratives further, over the course of my senior year (and in pursuit of my Departmental Honors in English), I conducted a research project (the writing of an Honors Thesis in pursuit of receiving Departmental Honors in English) centered around the exploration of responses to the Japanese American incarceration as represented within internment narratives written by survivors of the internment.

Key Internment Narratives Discussion, Existentialism Defined, and Argument Focus

My research focused on two different internment narratives in particular—*They Called Us Enemy* by George Takei and *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston—which were authored by Japanese Americans who lived through and survived internment.

My interest in internment narratives, however, was born at a very particular moment in time: after I read *No-No Boy* by John Okada during the aforementioned Junior Research Seminar. Originally published in 1957, the novel follows the journey of a second-generation Japanese American man—Ichiro Yamada—who is forced to navigate his return home to Seattle post-internment. Upon his return to Seattle, he struggles to adjust to the troubled and complicated relationships he has with his parents and younger brother, while trying to decide if he should return to school or seek employment. Ichiro experiences great mental anguish throughout his re-assimilation process—he contends with his distinct Japanese and American identities, his resentment towards his Japanese heritage and appearance, and his view of justice and fairness as they relate to his status as an American. Although fictional—yet loosely based on the author's personal experiences—I was immediately gripped by the harrowing, moving, and what I deemed

to be existential responses to the enduring of internment and its aftereffects which were portrayed in Okada's novel.

In analyzing the accounts of two unique internment experiences documented in the nonfiction memoirs *They Called Us Enemy* and *Farewell to Manzanar*, I was able to further explore existentialist responses and reflections to internment which were authored by survivors. My investigation into internment narratives is centered on the synthesis of my understanding of the history of internment with the concept of existential thought, allowing for a modern and fresh understanding of people's accounts of their own internment experiences to be shared. I believe that exploring the messaging which exists within internment narratives through the lens of existentialism is a particularly important undertaking, as "revisionism is important to historians because it reveals conceptual and methodological blind spots in race-centered areas of study like Japanese American internment" (Kurashige 7). As it relates to my study of the effects of incarceration, my conception of the often broadly defined framework of existentialism is defined as a philosophical and psychological framework which is used to analyze how an individual operates and makes sense of a world that is often incomprehensible. Applying the framework of existentialism to the study of internment, I believe, can help us better understand how people's identities, senses of self, and purposes were altered in the face of such a great, jarring injustice and attack on their personal freedoms, bodily autonomy, and senses of agency. Ultimately, I hypothesize that the Japanese American internment bred existentialist responses and reflections from survivors, and that the framework of existentialism allows for scholars to better understand the lasting, complex pains that internment forced upon tens of thousands of innocent, unjustly treated Japanese Americans.

In the following chapters of my thesis, I aim to take readers along on site visits I made to the grounds of two of the incarceration sites discussed in the literature I analyze. Furthermore, in sharing photographs I took during my site visits, I aim to honor the heritage of photojournalists who documented what life was like within the camps during the war. After engaging with the grounds of internment sites in California and Arkansas, and recording my experiences doing so, I then present analyses of two memoirs, one (*Farewell to Manzanar*) which is now a staple in some states' public school curriculum, and the other (*They Called Us Enemy*) being a more recently published graphic novel that, like texts published earlier, lends itself to my existentialist interpretation of internment narratives and experiences.

SITE VISITS OVERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Internment Camp Site Visits Overview

During the war, photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Ansel Adams made efforts to document the operations of internment camps and the lives of internees (Rothstein). Their efforts are regarded as important, rightfully so, because their photographs secured and preserved a visual history of the incarceration. Within her discussion on photographs taken of the internment by photographers such as Lange, Adams, and Toyo Miyatake—three famous American photographers—Judith Fryer Davidov (professor of American Studies and English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst) posits that "photographs are artifacts with a continuing life"—their contents (and what their contents represent) can be revisited and reexamined at any point in the future (Davidov 240). Similarly, by revisiting and photographing sites in California and Arkansas where internment camps were located, I aim to reexamine and memorialize—decades later—the grounds upon which the injustices of internment occurred. It is my hope that my photographic investigation plays a role in the preservation and memorialization of the spaces in which the internment took place, creating modern artifacts of my own which are able to possess a "continuing life" (Davidov 240).

During the early months of 2025, I visited the Manzanar National Historic Site and the Rohwer Heritage Site—where the authors of the memoirs I investigated were each interned. Additionally, I was able to visit the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California, in order to explore their extensive exhibit focused on Japanese American history and the internment.

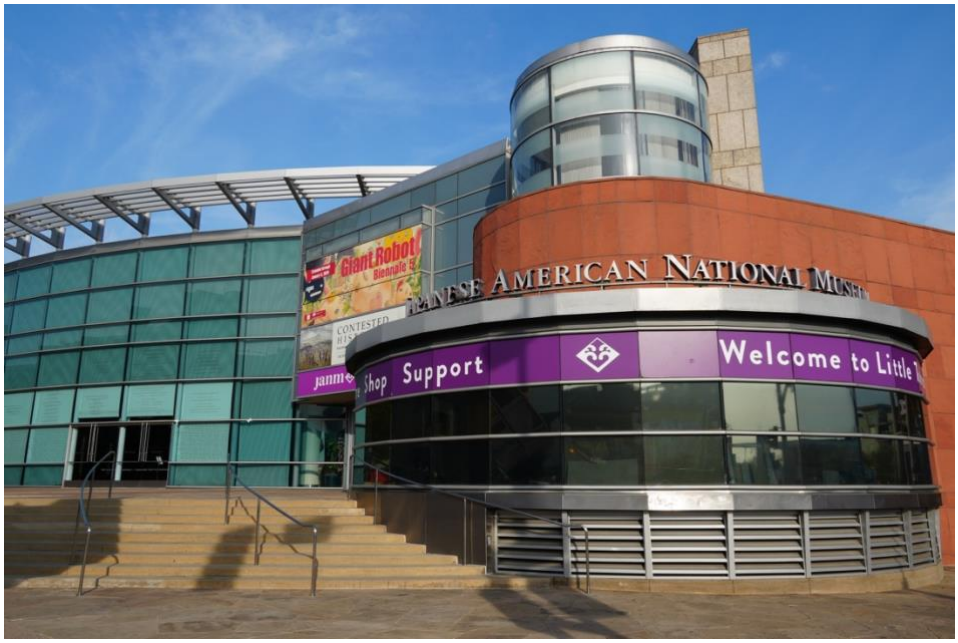
To get to the grounds of the Manzanar National Historic Site, I drove around 220 miles north of Los Angeles, California, into Inyo County, California. Situated between the Sierra

Nevada mountain range and the sprawling Mojave Desert, the site was completely isolated from metropolitan life. When I visited in January of 2025, I was met with a cold, biting, harsh climate. The high wind speeds which were present were unforgiving, and dust was constantly being blown in all directions. Manzanar internees faced severe, uncooperative weather throughout the year, oftentimes without access to proper accommodations or resources to help cope with the uncomfortable climate.

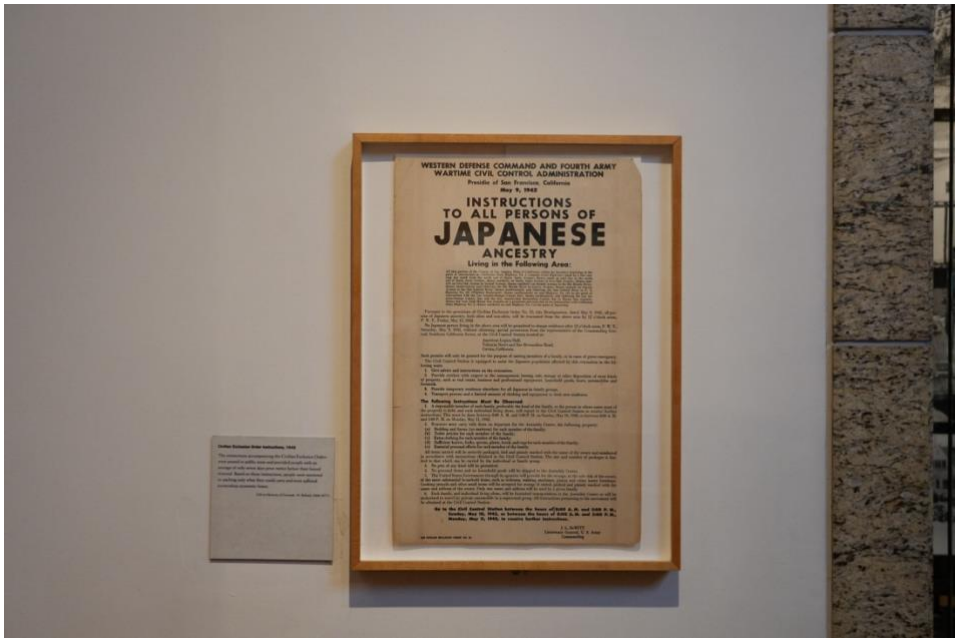
To reach the grounds of the Rohwer Heritage Site, I drove around 110 miles south from Little Rock into rural, impoverished southeast Arkansas. The site was situated near the Mississippi river and state border. When I visited in March of 2025, I was met with rainstorms and cold temperatures. Not only were Rohwer internees completely isolated from any important marks of modern life, but they were also subject to humid, wet, swamp-like weather conditions.

I found visiting both sites to be extremely emotional—to read about the internment is shocking, but to walk the grounds upon which people were incarcerated unlawfully allowed for my conception of the true injustices of internment to grow exponentially.

Japanese American National Museum Site Visit Photographs



The Japanese American National Museum building in Los Angeles, California. Jan. 2025. Los Angeles, California.



Civilian exclusion order instructions document on display in the JANM. Jan. 2025. Los Angeles, California.

Reconstructed barracks on display in the JANM. Jan. 2025. Los Angeles, California.

Model of barracks layout in an internment camp on display in the JANM. Jan. 2025. Los Angeles, California.

Manzanar National Historic Site Visit Photographs

Me at the entrance of the Manzanar National Historic Site visitor center. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Reconstructed barracks. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Reconstructed barracks interior. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Reconstructed barracks interior. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Reconstructed barracks interior. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Exterior of the women's latrine. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Interior of the women's latrine. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Interior of the women's latrine, note the lack of privacy barriers. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Reconstructed mess hall. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Reconstructed mess hall kitchen. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Reconstructed classroom. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Manzanar Fire Department building. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Reconstructed recreation area. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Reconstructed barbed wire fence which surrounded the camp. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Internment site grounds, note the extremely arid conditions. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Internment site grounds. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Internment site grounds. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Internment site grounds. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Internment site grounds, note the towering Sierra Nevada mountain range which borders the site to the west. Jan. 2025. Manzanar National Historic Site.

Rohwer Heritage Site Visit Photographs

Me at the entrance of the Jerome-Rohwer Interpretive Museum & Visitor Center. March. 2025. McGehee, Arkansas.

The exterior of the Jerome-Rohwer Interpretive Museum & Visitor Center, although this building is now a museum, it used to function as the train depot at which internees would be delivered to at the end of their days long train journey from California. March. 2025. McGehee, Arkansas.

Train tracks behind the Jerome-Rohwer Interpretive Museum & Visitor Center. March. 2025. McGehee, Arkansas.

Road within the Rohwer Heritage Site. March. 2025. Rohwer Heritage Site.

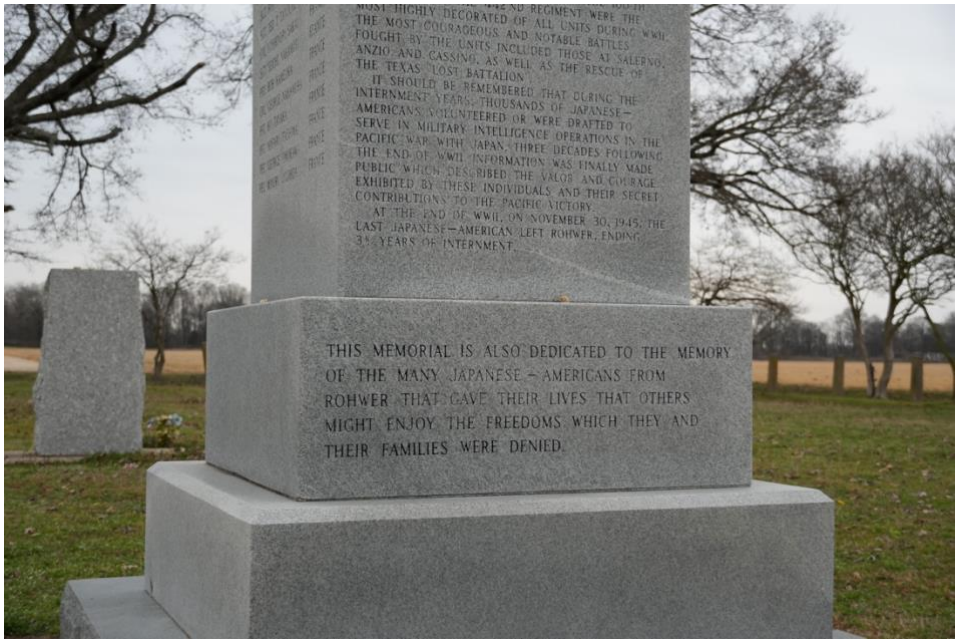
Entrance to the Rohwer Heritage Site. March. 2025. Rohwer Heritage Site.

Road within the Rohwer Heritage Site leading towards a memorial and cemetery dedicated to internees and Japanese American soldiers who served in the war. March. 2025. Rohwer Heritage Site.

Fields which now occupy the space where barracks used to stand. March. 2025. Rohwer Heritage Site.

Entrance to the memorial and cemetery site. March. 2025. Rohwer Heritage Site.

The memorial and cemetery site. March. 2025. Rohwer Heritage Site.



A monument within the memorial and cemetery site. March. 2025. Rohwer Heritage Site.

Rohwer Heritage Site grounds. March. 2025. Rohwer Heritage Site.

Rohwer Heritage Site grounds. March. 2025. Rohwer Heritage Site.

FAREWELL TO MANZANAR ANALYSIS

At seven years old, the cheerful childhood Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston enjoyed in Ocean Park, California (a neighborhood in Santa Monica, located west of downtown Los Angeles) was met with a jarring and life-changing disruption. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Houston's father—Ko Wakatsuki, a successful fisherman—was falsely accused of providing oil to Japanese submarines off the coast of Southern California while on fishing expeditions, and was arrested by the FBI. He was then sent to Fort Lincoln in Bismarck, North Dakota, for nine months, along with other men of Japanese ancestry who were presumed to be loyal to the Empire of Japan. In the wake of her husband's arrest, Houston's mother—Hawaiian-born Riku Wakatsuki—was left responsible to care for many of her ten children who were not yet adults, Jeanne being the youngest. Eventually, the Wakatsuki family was forcefully relocated to the Manzanar Relocation Center located in Inyo County, California—around 220 miles north of their home in Santa Monica, nestled between the Sierra Nevada mountain range and the sprawling desert valley in the Mojave Desert popularly known as Death Valley. At the conclusion of the war, Jeanne and her family moved to Long Beach, California—just over 30 miles south from their pre-internment family home in Ocean Park. Jeanne quickly involved herself in her schoolwork and many extracurricular activities, and after graduating from high school, she enrolled at San José State University and graduated with a degree in sociology. Out of university, she took a job as a social worker and married James D. Houston, a fellow student she met during undergrad. Later in life, one of her nephews—who was born in an internment camp—asked Houston about their family's incarceration experience. This conversation prompted Houston to begin writing about her time at Manzanar, and in 1973, she published *Farewell to Manzanar* which she co-authored with her husband. One of the first accounts of internment to be widely published, *Farewell to Manzanar*

was received with high praise—it was later adapted into a made-for-television movie which won a Primetime Emmy Award, has become assigned reading in public schools across the United States, and has sold over one million copies (California Museum). Before her death in December of 2024 (at the age of 90) Houston went on to author many more books and serve as a prominent, vocal advocate for the remembrance of the Japanese American internment (Sandomir).

In this chapter, I will revisit how the memoir *Farewell to Manzanar* works to effectively convey the internment experiences of Jeanne Wakatsuki and her family in a mode which places emphasis on how the incarceration impacted their senses of identity, autonomy, and dignity—individually and as a family. At the time of internment, Jeanne was making the transition from wholly dependent child to increasingly independent preteen, and the distinct sense of self that was forming within her was heavily impacted and molded by the years she spent growing up in camp. For Jeanne's parents, internment severely undermined and damaged their sense of dignity, promoting deep shame and a permeating mental anguish within them. Long after the literal incarceration the Wakatsuki family endured ended, the injurious after-effects of their trauma remained—this idea also becoming a central element of the memoir.

Jeanne's Internment Experience

Throughout her internment at Manzanar, Jeanne dedicated much of her time to figuring out how to feel purposeful and lead a meaningful life—she began to study under the direction of nuns, explored activities related to her Japanese roots, and eventually became so comfortable with her life and routines in the camp that she could not imagine leaving. Alongside her sense of self and worldview, Jeanne's youth was undeniably defined by her internment.

Without a warm home to relax in or a regular school schedule to keep herself occupied, Jeanne realized shortly into her time at Manzanar that she needed to figure out how to keep

herself stimulated and entertained. She soon took notice of the few Maryknoll nuns who lived in and worked at Manzanar. In charge of caring for around fifty interned orphans, the nuns were kind and welcoming to the children living in the camp—they developed a recreation program for them and handed out candy, developing a comfortable community for the interned children to exist within. They also taught the Catechism of the Catholic Church to those who were interested—its lessons and stories quickly commanded Jeanne's attention, and she began to regularly study under the direction of the nuns. Most interesting to Jeanne were the stories of female religious figures who tended to meet cruel endings, such as "Saint Agatha, or Saint Juliana, who was boiled alive, or Saint Marcella, who was whipped to death" (Houston 39). Perhaps too young to consciously understand her attraction to Catholicism, it is still evident that Jeanne used the religion as a device to help her better understand and cope with her unjust circumstances. In hearing stories about other wronged women who were unfairly punished, a young Jeanne began to relate and empathize with the suffering they endured, drawing parallels between her forced confinement behind barbed wire to their pained existences. Jeanne was better able to make sense of, and cope with, the harsh conditions of her internment, turning to stories of persecuted Catholic saints and imagining "in some childish way that [she] was among them…up there on the screen of history, in a white lace catechism dress, sweating and grimy, yet selflessly carrying [her] load" (Houston 39-40). Ultimately, on a quest to seek out empathy and support to rely on while enduring the harsh conditions of her internment, Jeanne found comfort in Catholicism—her initial attraction to the particular stories of oppressed saints representing her acknowledgment of the persecution she was forced to endure.

Jeanne's father, however, found organized religions suspect, and had discouraged her from exploring religious teachings throughout her childhood. So, when he was transferred from

Fort Lincoln to Manzanar and subsequently reunited with his family, he was quick to chastise Jeanne's relationship with the Maryknoll nuns and Catholic church. When Jeanne informed him of her plans to be baptized and confirmed, he swiftly prohibited her from doing so. Jeanne's source of solace from internment life had been stripped from her, and a resentment toward her father took its place: "I just hated Papa, for weeks, and dreamed of the white-gowned princess I might have become" (Houston 104). Once able to find solace in the presence of the Maryknoll nuns and consolation in the stories they shared, Jeanne was again left to cope with the trials and unknowns of internment alone—further complicating her experience in camp and perspective on internment by placing the burden of understanding it and being supported through it back onto herself.

In another effort to occupy and entertain herself, Jeanne tried to engage with her cultural roots by visiting an elderly geisha who lived near her in the camp and was teaching a traditional form of Japanese dance to young girls. Jeanne attended one of the geisha's lessons and felt as though her teachings were alien—not only was the content of the lesson mystifying, she could not even understand the language or dialect in which the geisha spoke. At the conclusion of the lesson in the geisha's barracks, Jeanne "rushed out…back to more familiar surroundings" (Houston 98). During a time in which it was a crime to be Japanese, Jeanne made a brave effort to engage with her Japanese heritage—trying to ground her identity in her Japanese roots. Her speedy exit from the geisha's quarters, however, symbolize her disconnect with traditional Japanese culture, and the overwhelming discomfort and fright it elicits within her when engaging with it. Although labeled too Japanese to be considered a loyal, upstanding, free American, Jeanne nonetheless felt too American to be able to connect with her Japanese heritage—her

already fragile, confused, developing identity becoming more fragmented by way of her experience with the geisha.

Established by the War Relocation Authority, a recreation program for interned children allowed for them to take chaperoned trips outside of the camp in order to go hiking, or take overnight camping trips. On one such trip Jeanne attended, she recalls thinking to herself: "If I had been told, the next morning, that I could stay outside the fence as long as I wanted, that I was free to go, it would have sent me sprinting for the compound" (Houston 96). The idea of returning to the life which she used to live—a free, mostly untroubled one—was now stressful and alarming. Having acclimated to Manzanar, and having internalized the reasons for her internment, a fear of the free world outside of camp was now instilled within Jeanne—if she were to leave camp, would she be welcomed back to society? Treated kindly? Be safe from judgement from her neighbors, classmates, and peers? For Jeanne, it was safest to not dream of being a member of free American society like she used to be—it was easiest and most comforting to imagine herself limited to the bounds of camp, safe and surrounded by her family and people like them. Internalizing the concept that she was better off segregated from the rest of American society would later negatively warp her identity as a Japanese woman living in a predominantly white society. Jeanne would grow up seeking validation and acceptance from her white classmates and friends, engaging in activities that would allow her to be received well by them (e.g. perfecting her baton twirling skills, vying for the title of senior class carnival queen during her final year of high school).

Ultimately, the time Jeanne spent interned at Manzanar was formative in shaping her self-concept—she experimented with religion, explored her Japanese heritage, and came to identify herself as someone who was better off interned. Jeanne's identity was made complicated

due to her internment, the disconnect between her Japanese appearance and heritage, and lifelong status as an American-born citizen suddenly thrust into a world of confusion and perplexity.

Ko Wakatsuki's Crises of Dignity and Identity

Jeanne's parents found the psychological effects of internment to be extremely challenging to cope with—constantly struggling to shoulder the negative impacts of their free will and dignity being stolen from them. Ko Wakatsuki, Jeanne's father and a figure central to the Wakatsuki's family life and internment experience, found the struggles of internment particularly difficult to bear. Born in 1887, to a family which had historically been members of the powerful, respected samurai (military/warrior) class for centuries, Wakatsuki abruptly abandoned his plans to join the navy at the age of seventeen in order to seek success in the United States. He emigrated from Hiroshima and headed for the Hawaiian Islands. Having worked a variety of jobs (ones that mostly required unskilled, manual labor) across the western United States, he eventually met Jeanne's mother, Riku, in Spokane, Washington. After marrying and while having children, Wakatsuki constantly moved his family around in search of the business venture that would finally provide him the big break he had so desperately been searching for. Settling in Southern California, he started fishing commercially in Santa Monica around the time Jeanne was born.

Thirty-five years after he first arrived in America, still eager to cash in on the supposed financially fruitful promise of the American Dream, he was wrongfully arrested by the FBI. In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the government quickly became suspicious of people of Japanese descent who held commercial fishing licenses, fearful that they were somehow using them to aid enemy war efforts from the sea. Holding a license himself, Wakatsuki was taken into FBI custody only a few weeks after the attack took place. An American immigrant who had

placed his fate in the hands of the United States long ago, was now "a man without a country…he was suddenly a man with no rights who looked exactly like the enemy. About all he had left at this point was his tremendous dignity" (Houston 7). The effects of Wakatsuki's initial imprisonment on him were unconscionably painful. The decades he had spent intensely focused on providing a bountiful, comfortable life for himself and his family had been stolen from him in the mere minutes it took for him to be walked out of his home by federal law enforcement agents. The pride he once took in being a hardworking American resident was swiftly extinguished and replaced with shame and guilt regarding his Japanese identity and heritage, which barred him from being treated in a constitutionally just manner, a liberty which should be afforded to all who live in the United States. Wakatsuki's arrest acts as a harbinger of the deeply humiliating, demanding, and demoralizing emotional trials he would come to face throughout internment—his outlook on his life and place in American society permanently altered.

After his arrest, Wakatsuki was transferred to Fort Lincoln in Bismarck, North Dakota—a detention facility which was initially populated by Issei who were thought to be notable (and by proxy, potentially influential) members of the communities in which they lived. He was imprisoned at Fort Lincoln for nine months before being reunited with his family at Manzanar. The lasting pains associated with the time he spent at Fort Lincoln were overwhelmingly psychological: "for a man raised in Japan, there was no greater disgrace…the humiliation…brought him face to face with his own vulnerability, his own powerlessness. He had no rights, no home, no control over his own life" (Houston 65). Once a heavily-relied-upon family man, responsible for the well-being of his wife, their ten children, and the operations of his own, successful fishing business, Wakatsuki was now a victim of the deep, cutting emasculation which was felt by many interned Japanese men. Stripped of his agency, rights, and

autonomy, Wakatsuki suddenly found himself—the once pioneering, scrappy, hopeful immigrant—trapped in central North Dakota, his identity founded on idealism, hope, and ability to take action now seemingly useless and injured. Furthermore, the possession of the classically Japanese traits of honor and loyalty—which Wakatsuki believed himself to embody—were inarguably called into question when he was accused of aiding the Empire's war agenda. This attack upon his character and loyalty to the country in which he had lived for 35 years was incomprehensible, indigestible, and too great of an insult to disregard. To Wakatsuki, these charges were a stain upon his character, when they should have instead tainted the character of the country which imprisoned him. Unable to recover from the humiliation associated with being labeled dishonorable, which was drilled into him at Fort Lincoln, Wakatsuki was delivered to his family at Manzanar as a man forever pained by this.

Wakatsuki did not smoothly acclimate to internment at Manzanar, struggling to accept how drastically his life and purpose had so suddenly changed. Now, his freedoms and movements were controlled by the state: "he had no boat crew to command, no income to manage, no trips to plan, not even a dining table to preside over" (Houston 105). This lack of purpose was exasperating, and his frustrations with it fermented, at times manifesting itself within angry tirades directed at his wife, children, and neighbors. Though he had lived through times marked by hardship, financial struggle, and meager employment prospects, Wakatsuki always had strong command over his purpose, goals, and drive to build a successful life for himself and his family. Now, feeling as though he had virtually no use for any such traits in camp, his self-image quickly disintegrated, leaving behind only the remains of a once proud, driven, and energized family man.

However, the agony and frustration that internment bred within Wakatsuki was not powerful enough to combat the faith he still held in the promise of America. When it came time for him to answer the controversial loyalty questionnaire, he immediately knew that he would answer affirmatively, for he "had no reason to return to Japan…and he knew, even after all he'd endured, that if he had a future it still lay in this country" (Houston 77). Although he was currently a victim of a great injustice—inflicted upon him by the American government—the part of his identity which allowed him to feel prideful of his life in the United States (and choice to call it home) trumped the contempt towards the government he might have instead felt. This sentiment, one of hope and promise he believed still lay in his future in America, can perhaps be credited with making internment, and the thought of post-internment life, not as grim and disheartening as it otherwise might have been.

Although Wakatsuki took pride in having made a life for himself in America, his memories and connection to Japan were important, sentimental components of his identity—still existent, but perhaps distant due to his longtime physical disconnect from his country of birth. In camp, at times, Wakatsuki would sing in Japanese—sometimes reciting lines of the Japanese national anthem. On even rarer occasions, he would sing them in the style of a "deep-throated lament" and would "weep at the lyrics", reminded by the idea that the national anthem can be "read as a proverb…a personal credo for endurance" (Houston 80-81). Wakatsuki's fervent, emotional reaction to the anthem tasked with representing his place of birth and family lineage represents an emotional callback to the life he had in a country which once treated him with respect and regarded him as honorable—a country which he abruptly abandoned in exchange for one which barred him from seeking citizenship, and was currently preventing him from being a free, autonomous man.

Wakatsuki ultimately shouldered and endured the humiliating and offensive pains of internment, sustaining mental injuries that would later metastasize, negatively impacting his health, the operations of his family, and his relationships.

Challenges Faced Post-Manzanar

Following their internment at Manzanar, the Wakatsuki family was forced to continue to reckon with the lingering, adverse psychological trauma born within them during internment. However, they first had to resituate themselves in Los Angeles, seeking help from the American Friends Service in order to find housing. They soon moved into a three bedroom apartment in "Cabrillo Homes, a housing project in west Long Beach, built by the government for shipyard and defense plant workers" (Houston 138). Jeanne's mother quickly became concerned with bringing in an income, and she started work at a fish cannery—working a position similar to the one she held before internment, characterized by tiring, monotonous manual labor. Jeanne's father, however, "would never accept anything like a cannery job" for it would do more damage to his already bruised pride and ego (Houston 139).

As Jeanne was envisioning how she would readjust to life outside of Manzanar, she was consumed with fear regarding how she would be received by society and what treatment she would be subject to at the hands of her fellow Americans. She was particularly concerned with the potential of facing racial discrimination, as she was "old enough to imagine it, and also old enough to fear it" (Houston 118). Having spent years forcefully segregated from the rest of American society—a segregation which was driven by racist, anti-Asian paranoia—Jeanne was right to feel nervous about reintegrating with a majority white population. Her worries about encountering discrimination due to her race, and facing the prospect of feeling like an outsider, she would soon learn, would be enduring issues she would have to combat throughout her life

post-internment. As she made her foray back into the public school system, Jeanne—now in sixth grade—was met with surprise from her classmates regarding the fact that she could speak English fluently. This shock indicated to her that she "would be seen as someone foreign, or as someone other than American" and that rather than be seen, she "yearned to be invisible" instead (Houston 142). Concurrently, however, Jeanne felt a growing need to be found acceptable, to prove that she was no different from her classmates, that she was just as smart, capable, friendly, and most importantly, American, as them.

Jeanne began to spend much of her time chasing acceptance from her white peers, a pursuit commonly undertaken among non-white Americans who find themselves to be a minority within most spaces they frequent and occupy. This hunt for acceptance Jeanne began to embark upon permeated her decision making, altering the choices she made regarding how she spent her time, and who she chose to befriend. She had further, more fully, digested the shame of being and looking Asian which was impressed within her by interment, and its negative effects were now more than frustrating emotions, they were guiding principles by which she operated. Jeanne believed that in order to feel whole and truly happy, she would first have to receive acceptance from the white population around her.

Jeanne ended up becoming best friends with "a pretty blond girl", Radine, who was originally from Texas and who also lived in Cabrillo Homes with her family (Houston 141). Jeanne and Radine grew very close, and Radine would often stick up for her if she noticed people directing foul looks Jeanne's way. When they entered high school, Radine's social success started to exceed Jeanne's, driving a wedge in their friendship. Although she was no stranger to discrimination, Jeanne was frustrated by Radine's success in high school, especially because they shared not only all the same "standards of achievement but ideas about how a girl

should look and dress and talk and act, and ideas of male beauty", yet Jeanne was not a recipient of "the kind of acceptance that seemed to come so easily to Radine", in fact, Jeanne came to believe that Radine was "something [she could] never be, some possibility in [her] life that [could] never be fulfilled" (Houston 154-155). In bearing witness to Radine's quick rise to popularity, Jeanne was reminded that she could endlessly, constantly, do everything in her power to gain social acceptance, but would ultimately never feel true approval from her white peers. To them, she was an ancillary character in their lives, rarely commanding their full, significant attention. Once labeled as a dangerous outsider by the government, a now free Jeanne still struggled to distance herself from the isolating effects of bearing the societally prescribed label of outcast.

Around three decades after the internment and well into her adult life, after having worked, married, and started a family, Jeanne returned to the site of her internment with her husband and three children. She recalls that while preparing to return to Los Angeles at the conclusion of internment, her father refused to ride the bus filled with other internees who were returning home from Manzanar. Instead, he purchased a car from a neighboring town, insisting that his family return to Los Angeles on their own terms. Demonstrating the ability of the car to his family, he recklessly sped around the grounds of the internment camp, driving so haphazardly that Jeanne started to cry out of fear. Jeanne's father driving his family out of Manzanar in their own car symbolizes the reclamation of his bodily autonomy and their collective freedoms. In one final act of defiance, Wakatsuki rejects the transportation offered to him by the government, taking his life and the lives of his family members back under their own control. Jeanne also reflects on the years she spent interned, stating that "Manzanar would always live in [her] nervous system"—this claim representative of just how formative and emotionally enduring her

experiences (and their associated, internalized pains) at Manzanar came to be (Houston 177). She also calls attention to a glimmer of optimism borne from the tragedies of internment, recognizing that "one of the amazing things about America is the way it can both undermine you and keep you believing in your own possibilities, pumping you with hope" (Houston 139). Although she and her family were victims of a great, shocking injustice, Houston felt it important to call attention to her belief that anyone can find hope in the promise of America, no matter what they have endured—this claim acting as further testament to her great strength, endurance, and inspiring sense of hope.

Ultimately, Jeanne's memoir effectively shares the emotional, trying realities of internment by bringing to light the confusion and disorientation she felt as she tried to navigate her life at Manzanar, the emotional damage her father sustained while interned, and the difficulties she and her family faced while trying to assimilate back into cosmopolitan American society—situating itself within the ranks of enduring, revealing, and highly impactful Japanese American internment narratives.

THEY CALLED US ENEMY ANALYSIS

Although best known for his role as Hikaru Sulu—the helmsman of the fictional starship *Enterprise* on the 1960s television series *Star Trek: The Original Series*—George Takei has since become a globally beloved and lauded actor, social justice advocate, political activist, and social media personality. Takei's boyhood, however, was not as kind to him as his later years have been. Executive Order 9066 was signed into law when Takei was just approaching five years of age—sharply interrupting his ability to enter into the Los Angeles public school system. Alongside his father, mother, and two siblings, Takei was unjustly incarcerated for four years. Originally interned at the Rohwer Relocation Center in southeast Arkansas, Takei's family was relocated to the Tule Lake Relocation Center in the northeast corner of the state of California. For an initial six-week period post-internment, Takei's family moved back to Los Angeles and initially sought housing on Skid Row—a historically rough and unsafe neighborhood east of downtown Los Angeles—until they later moved into a Mexican American barrio (Spanish-speaking neighborhood, typically boasting high poverty rates) in East Los Angeles. After graduating from Los Angeles High School in 1956, Takei briefly studied at the University of California, Berkeley, before transferring to the University of California, Los Angeles, to study theater. After completing his schooling, Takei successfully took on acting as a career, for which he has garnered hundreds of credits for his myriad roles in popular films and television shows. Due to the immense popularity he gained through acting, Takei consistently and cleverly leveraged his fame in order to direct awareness towards particular social issues important to him, including education and remembrance efforts relating to the Japanese American internment.

This chapter will highlight key memories and experiences of Takei's which were central to the time he and his family spent incarcerated in the midst of World War II. Furthermore, this

chapter will demonstrate how Takei's graphic narrative memoir aims to inform readers about the painful injustices of Japanese American internment citizens like himself (and his family) endured. First, I will report on the striking and effective depiction of the beginnings of internment life Takei provides readers with, centering this part of his story around how his family was forced out of their home and into a camp, and how they dealt with this adjustment. Next, I will focus on the challenges and moral complications faced by the Japanese American adults who were interned when the American government asked them to serve in the US military and swear allegiance to the US—the same country responsible for the internment of them and their families. Finally, I will discuss the ways Takei's book illustrates how the trauma of internment impacted him even after his release.

The Incarceration of the Takei Family and Their Reactions

Born out of the desire to make Japanese American incarceration narratives more accessible and interesting to learn about, Takei (alongside Justin Eisinger, Steven Scott and Harmony Becker) co-authored a graphic novel about his childhood incarceration experiences titled *They Called Us Enemy* (which was published in 2019). In a review of *Beyond the Icon: Asian American Graphic Narratives*—an edited collection authored by Eleanor Ty—an analysis of *They Called Us Enemy* argues that "the visual language of comics can counter dominant narratives and picture underrepresented histories"—positing that Takei's work acts as a unique visual source of uncensored commentary and representation of internment experiences (Urcaregui 144). In the novel, Takei recounts memories of his time at the Rohwer and Tule Lake Relocation Centers, discusses relevant pressures he believes his parents experienced throughout their lives (and during internment, particularly), details the significance of important historical events that took place within the United States (and globally) over the course of his life that

relate to internment, and more. Through harrowing and saddening descriptions—and the vivid illustrations which accompany them—of life during internment, Takei enables readers to clearly understand how confounding, fragmenting, and dehumanizing the Japanese American incarceration was.

In the spring of 1942, the Takei family was forcefully rushed out of their home by armed officers who were enforcing Executive Order 9066 in their neighborhood. They were then transported 13 miles northeast of downtown Los Angeles—to the Santa Anita racetrack—where they lived in emptied out horse stables for several months. The families who were forced to live at the racetrack were each "assigned a horse stall still pungent with the stink of manure", although a young George, on the other hand, was excited by the prospect of "get[ting] to sleep where the horsies slept" and was unable to "grasp the injustice of the situation" at the time (Takei 32). George's parents, however, were devastated by this shocking and abrupt upheaval to their way of life. His father (Takekuma Norman Takei) and mother (Fumiko Emily Nakamura) "had worked so hard to buy a two-bedroom house and raise a family in Los Angeles" and were now being forced to reckon with the abrupt stripping of their successes, autonomy, and civil rights, in what Takei identifies to be a "degrading, humiliating, [and] painful experience" (Takei 32).

It is evident that this sudden, jarring expulsion from their home the Takei family experienced came to represent the onset of two deeply traumatizing wrongs: their unjust internment in grim and abysmal living quarters, and the painful blows their senses of pride and dignity would be forced to sustain myriad times over. Sundered from their secure, peaceful home they had worked so hard for, George's mother and father were forced to face the profoundly dehumanizing reality of internment upon arrival at the Santa Anita racetrack—they, alongside George and his younger brother and sister, were being primed to expect that the living

accommodations provided to them would be nothing short of miserable and purposefully humiliating. Coping with the awful living quarters, however, was not the only challenge internment brought upon the Takei couple. In order to persevere, they—either consciously or subconsciously—quickly needed to learn how to bear with the hefty emotional burden internment generated. George's mother soon relied on her homemaking skills in order to cope with the stresses of internment life. Using the sewing machine she had brought with her—despite the fact that she knew it was deemed a forbidden item within the camps—she "began the impossible work of making a home…out of the rough-hewn single room" they were assigned to (Takei 70). She made curtains out of surplus fabrics she found, and fashioned salvaged rags into floor mats. Unable to care for her family in the ways in which she used to, George's mother cleverly utilized the scarce amount of resources at her disposal in order to create a warm, nurturing home environment within the confines of camp. This display of care dually acted as "her own statement of defiance" against the cruel oppression they faced (Takei 71). George's father, on the other hand, "threw himself into being a part of the community" (Takei 72). Taking on the responsibility of being block manager for the designated block in which the Takei family lived, he busied himself with tending to his new community and managing its associated administrative tasks. George's father found himself managing the stress of internment by seeking out clear, structured, community-oriented purpose—a form of comfort for him that presumably combatted the unpredictable and fickle nature of life as an internee. Although they manifested differently, the techniques employed by the Takei couple in order to overcome the sense of helplessness that brewed within them act as a testament to their unfaltering strength in the face of great inequity.

Harmony Becker—the artist of the graphic novel—worked closely with Takei in order to visually bring to life the dark, sorrowful, challenging nature of being forced to move to an internment camp. Below is an example of one of Becker's evocative illustrations.

In the right-hand panel, a young George's blank expression is illustrated, indicating his inability to comprehend why his fellow passengers were so distraught. To the left of the panel of George, are three smaller panels stacked on top of each other—each depicting the heartbreaking reactions of Japanese Americans and their families to the unsettling unknowns of their futures within the confines of an internment camp. A father hunched over holding his head in his hands, a woman

weeping into a handkerchief, an elderly man embracing his wife—these dismal scenes each clearly emphasize the difficult and painful nature of dealing with the uncertainties of internment.

The "Loyalty Questionnaire" and Its Effects

Due to the massive number of casualties sustained by the armed forces of the United States, America was in dire need of an influx of new soldiers. Therefore, on February 3, 1943, president Franklin D. Roosevelt declared that "no loyal citizen of the United States should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of his citizenship regardless of ancestry" (Takei 113). This announcement marked a seismic policy shift, as it now meant that Japanese Americans could serve in the military if they were deemed to be loyal American citizens. The United States government decided that in order to determine where the loyalties of Japanese Americans lay, it became mandatory for all adults who were interned to fill out a questionnaire asking them to provide the government with extensive information regarding their "relatives in Japan, criminal records, membership in organizations, foreign investments, [and] even magazine reading habits" (Takei 114).

Two particular questions—numbered 27 and 28—on this survey, however, caused waves of offense to ripple through the internment camps. Question 27 asked internees if they would be "willing to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States on combat duty wherever ordered" and question 28 asked if internees would "swear unqualified allegiance to the United States…and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor" (Takei 114). Question 27 was asking those who were unjustly and cruelly incarcerated by their own government to be open to selflessly risking their own lives in a war for that same government. Question 28 was asking those interned to assure the American government that their loyalty lay with the United States, and not with Japan—implying that all Japanese Americans must have

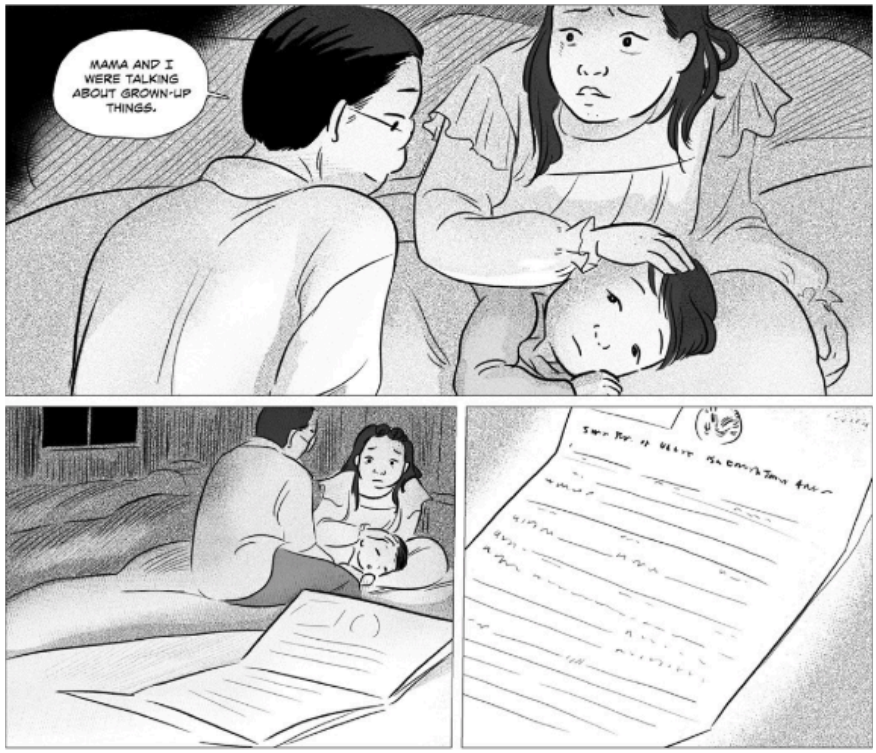
harbored some level of allegiance to the emperor, even if they were American citizens who were born on American soil.

George's mother "was an American-born citizen, and all her children were Americans…her country took everything her family had…put them behind fences…[and] now she was expected to put family second to a nation that had rejected them"—so she understandably felt "great frustration" regarding the notion that she had to prove her loyalty to the United States (Takei 116). Although he was born in Japan, George's father was raised in America. He was unable to become an American citizen due to restrictive laws which prohibited Asian immigrants from applying for citizenship, but despite this "question 27 asked him to serve in combat for a country that had rejected and then imprisoned him because of his ethnicity" (Takei 116). Due to the fact that Japan was his birthplace, "question 28 asked him to discard his entire Japanese heritage…for a country that would not have him…[and] answering 'yes' would make him stateless" (Takei 116).

These questions clearly forced internees to wrestle with the meaning and value placed upon their heritage, nationality, and citizenship status—no matter if they were an immigrant from Japan or American born. If George's parents stated that they were unwilling to be drafted, did that immediately brand them as unpatriotic and un-American? Or simply as two parents who wanted to ensure that their family did not endure any more fracturing than they already had? If they swore total allegiance to the United States, did that inaccurately imply that their allegiances were previously aligned with the emperor of Japan? These two loaded questions rightfully inspired offense within those who had never provided the American government with any reason to mistrust them or doubt their loyalty to the United States, and it served as yet another reminder to those interned of the rampant racist paranoia that the case for internment the government had

constructed rested upon. Even if you were born in America, born to American parents, or had no reason to warrant distrust directed at you by the American government, your Japanese ethnicity immediately marked you as an enemy alien during wartime—and you were suddenly not worthy of the protection and care promised to you by way of the American constitution. Moreover, these questions had the power to fragment the identities of those who were interned, forcing them to choose an identity (American or Japanese) to align with, and by proxy, completely sever ties with the one they were forced to swear was not a part of who they were. Out of "principled protest", George's parents answered no to both of the controversial survey questions (Takei 135). Those (along with their families) who answered no to both questions were dubbed "No-Nos" and were transported to "the most notorious, [and] the most cruel" of the camps—the Tule Lake Relocation Center (Takei 127). This transfer, a result of not pledging unwavering allegiance to a country who had wrongfully imprisoned them, further intensified the growing sense of alienation from their ethnic, cultural, and national identities that interned Japanese Americans would have to continue to reckon with.

Through her illustrations, Becker is once again able to poignantly depict the great mental anguish generated by the thought of having to answer the controversial, morally complex questions on the "loyalty questionnaire". As seen in the drawing below, George's mother's furrowed brow, tear stained cheeks, and tense posture indicate the mounting stress she feels regarding answering the questionnaire. George's father, however, masks any distress he might be feeling in order to reassure a worried, confused George that he should not concern himself with the reasons behind his mother's obvious anxiety. Ultimately, this series of panels clearly portrays the marked pain the questionnaire inspired within the adults who were mandated to answer it.

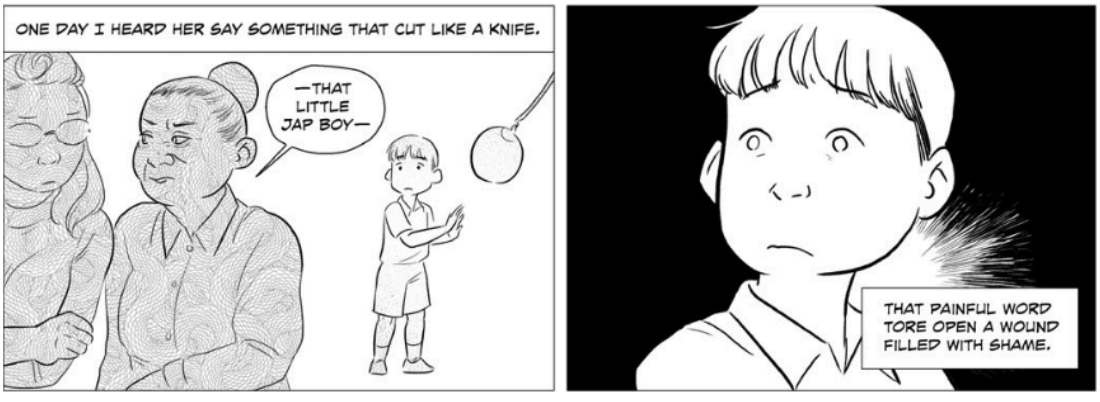


The Lingering Traumas Associated with Post-Internment Life

The aftereffects of internment were also injurious to the identities of Japanese Americans. Once released from the camps, families had to rebuild their lives from the ground up—seeking new housing, new jobs, and settling back into life in a country that had gotten used to thinking of them as dangerous, disloyal enemies of the United States. Children, like George, had to adjust to attending school, which was likely challenging had they not been of school age prior to their internment. After the Takei family left the Tule Lake camp and settled back down in Los Angeles, George enrolled in elementary school on the east side of the city. His fourth grade teacher, unfortunately, was not pleased with having him be a member of her class. If George raised his hand, "she'd look the other way", but during recess she would monitor him "like a hawk", and one day George even overheard her say "that little Jap boy" when making reference to him (Takei 171).

At George's young age, the reasoning behind the searing remarks made by his teacher was lost upon him—but he was left with "an unsettling feeling…that her calling me 'Jap boy' had something to do with our time in camp" (Takei 172). Drawing an association between these two events—being interned and then later being called a racial epithet—resulted in George feeling like he "deserved to be called that" (Takei 172). George was met with great bitterness and prejudice from his teacher because of the unjust attitudes she harbored towards Japanese Americans. Due to his youth, George was incapable of fully understanding why he was the target of such ill will from someone who was supposed to nurture, support, and uplift him over the course of around an entire year of his life. So, instead of being able to understand the reasoning behind the actions of his teacher, to cope with the hate he felt towards her, he instead learns to accept it—ultimately internalizing the racist, hateful sentiments other people held regarding his race and appearance from early boyhood. The internalization of such hurtful, externally prompted attitudes about oneself were just one of the myriad examples of the lasting, damaging aftereffects of internment. These detrimental ideas about one's self-image imprinted within themselves, negatively impacting their relationship with their physical appearance, racial and ethnic identities, and self-worth from a (potentially) very young age. It is experiences like the one a schoolboy-aged George suffered through which best highlight the painful aftereffects of internment, such as the internalization of feelings of shame, guilt, and anger regarding one's race.

In the panels below, Becker portrays the deeply ingrained feelings of shame about his race a young George felt so strongly.



The saddening portrait of George in the right-hand panel shows him shrouded in a dramatic pitch blackness—his eyes widened in shock, his lips turned down in sadness. The panel to the left shows his teacher using a slur to refer to him—with her lips pursed and eyebrows scrunched, Becker clearly portrays the cruel hatred she felt towards George and his Japanese descent, along with the shock and pain that was generated within George due to the reception of such hate.

Ultimately, *They Called Us Enemy* poignantly and effectively distills the layered, complex, and existential nature of the Japanese American incarceration from the perspective of a Japanese American who grew up in a series of internment camps. The clear narrative structure thoughtfully reveals to the reader the series of oppressive events the Takei family endured, and the accessible language which pervades the autobiography allows for an audience of all ages to easily digest and engage with the complexities of internment. Takei's memoir successfully subverts typical stereotypes associated with the graphic novel genre, as it proves itself to be a powerful, moving, and deeply informative account of the lived experiences of a Japanese American who experienced incarceration firsthand.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Ultimately, I believe that applying an existential lens to the study of internment narratives—like *They Called Us Enemy* and *Farewell to Manzanar*—can aid scholars and global citizens in being able to better understand the deeply complex and layered traumas which burdened over 120,000 interned Japanese Americans, all of who were wrongfully branded as criminals and threats to the national security of the United States during the war.

Many Japanese Americans who experienced internment, however, still expressed their enduring belief in the promise of America—the promise of access to prosperous work opportunities, and to the ability to build a better life for themselves than the one that either they, or their parents, left behind in their native country of Japan. The hope with which many internees speak—including Takei and Houston—proves to be inspiring, helping to breathe light and kindness into a moment in history which is rife with deep injustice and wrong: "one of the amazing things about America is the way it can both undermine you and keep you believing in your own possibilities, pumping you with hope" (Houston 139).

Finally, I believe that the importance of continuing to conduct research on the internment is a matter of paramount importance. It is my hope that research like mine—which is focused on the investigation and remembrance of internment narratives—allows for these histories and stories to stay alive and present within the broader American cultural memory—allowing the memory of internment and those who were interned not to be forgotten, and by proxy, hopefully ensuring that American political leaders and citizens will continue to work to prevent this particular history—and all of its associated wrongs—from repeating itself.

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