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Japanese Immigration and Japanese Internment as Reflected in The Works of Japanese-American Authors

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The United States is a country of immigrants most of whom had their share of prejudice, discrimination and racism. Yet, the Japanese experience is unique due to their internment after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Japan is located on four large islands and thousands of tiny ones off the eastern coast of Asia. Until mid-nineteenth century, Japan's rulers enforced rigid isolation from the rest of the world and its influences. Officially closed to the Western world, traditional Japanese culture remained intact for centuries following the first contacts with the West in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1853, Commodore Matthew C. Perry of the United States Navy sailed his warships into Edo Bay.

The arrival of Westerners made a profound impact on Japan, causing a new ruler, Emperor Mutsuhito (1852-1912), to take control of the country. The Emperor took the name "Meiji," which meant "enlightening rule" and thus began the Meiji Restoration period that lasted from 1868 to 1912. This signaled Japan's entrance into the modern era and its development in order to take its place alongside the Western nations. The consequence of the encounter with the West signified change for the Japanese. Among other things, an important step taken was the promotion of education among all Japanese people, including peasants and women. Trade with other nations was allowed and Western technology became necessary. The meiji rule would make Japan a major world power.

Even though it was illegal, Japanese peasants began to emigrate in the late nineteenth century. The United States and Hawai were among their destinations but they intended to go as "sojourners," that is, for a short period of time to make money to send home and later to return to Japan to buy a farm or a business with their savings. Allowing emigration, the Japanese government also decided to regulate who could go to the United States. This was because Japan wanted to be well represented abroad. and chose to send those who were literate and had been in school for at least eight years. (Benson 403-405).

The encounter with the Orient came about with immigration. The first immigrants from Japan to settle in Hawai arrived in 1868. Until the 1880s only a few settled in the United States and by 1924, the year they were excluded, less than 300,000 had settled in American territory. Compared to the great numbers arriving from Europe during the same period, Japanese immigration remained very small for they were not fleeing from oppression or extreme poverty as most European

immigrants were. They were not from the poorest levels of Japanese society and were probably more literate than most European Americans at the time.

During the Meiji period taxes had been increased immensely to pay for modernization and many farmers had to sell their farms to pay their taxes. Therefore, the typical Japanese immigrant was a very young man from a farming family who had about eight years of schooling. Strongly attached to his family and to his native land, he was proud of his culture and traditions. Since most Japanese immigrants were farmers, most of them settled in California. Many were hired as permanent laborers on large farms, but were paid less than white workers.

Not all of the immigrants went into farming. Some became skilled loggers, miners, railway workers and fishermen. They worked in a wide variety of positions, such as domestic workers, hotel and restaurant help and factory workers. Those who decided to stay permanently after saving enough money, opened businesses in cities. Their preference was ports like Seattle or San Francisco, where ships from Japan came, or towns near farms that employed Japanese workers. These immigrants opened boarding houses, hotels, restaurants and small shops in neighborhoods called little Tokyo. By 1909, San Francisco, Seattle and Los Angeles, the three western cities with the largest concentration of Japanese, had over 500 Japanese-owned business establishments (Davis 14).

Unfortunately, the encounter with the Orient had undesirable consequences. As the historian Roger Daniels states, "But to most Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, all Asian immigrants seemed to present a threat to the American standard of living and to the racial integrity of the nation. These attitudes and the actions that accompanied them were clearly racist...." (4) Therefore, like the first Asian immigrants in the United States, that is, the Chinese, the Japanese were unwelcome and could not escape white hostility and racism. As the first groups of newcomers arrived from the land of the rising sun, an anti-Japanese movement developed, first in California and then elsewhere in the West. As long as the Japanese were confined to the unwanted hard and dirty jobs, they were tolerated because they had earned a reputation as good workers. However, as the *San Francisco Chronicle* claimed, "Japanese ambition is to progress beyond mere servility to the plane of the better class of American workmen and to own a home with him. The moment that this position is exercised, the Japanese ceases to be an ideal laborer" (Davis 14).

During the 1890s and early 1900s, racist attitudes reached their peak. The three major California parties--Republican, Democrat, and Populist--took a stand against all Asiatic immigration. Anti-Japanese feeling became even stronger with the arrival of 45,000 immigrants between 1903 and 1905. At an anti-Japanese meeting a Stanford University sociologist said, "it would be better for us to turn our guns on every vessel bringing Japanese to our shores rather than to permit them to land" (Davis 15). The Japanese were labeled as "heathens" who could not become assimilated. They were accused of being dirty like other minorities. People thought of them as "sneaky," "untrustworthy," and "degenerate" as well as "disloyal." Old arguments about Asians were revived. In the early 1900s newspapers and films

called the Japanese immigrants the "Yellow Peril." Furthermore, they spread fantasies about a Japanese invasion of the United States and Mexico. In 1905 the headlines on the front page of the conservative *San Francisco Chronicle,* which was the most influential newspaper on the Pacific Coast, read "THE JAPANESE INVASION, THE PROBLEM OF THE HOUR" (Daniels 10). Newspapers continued to run sensational articles for months about Japan sending immigrants as spies. Some of the typical headlines were:

CRIME AND POVERTY GO HAND IN HAND WITH ASIATIC LABOR
HOW JAPANESE IMMIGRATION COMPANIES OVERRIDE LAWS
JAPANESE A MENACE TO AMERICAN WOMEN
ADULT JAPANESE CROWD OUT CHILDREN
THE YELLOW PERIL--HOW JAPANESE CROWD OUT THE WHITE RACE (10)

Nevertheless, the Japanese immigrants had an advantage over Chinese immigrants. The United States took Japan seriously for Japan was much stronger than China and was concerned about its prestige among nations. Thus, Congress could not pass a Japanese Exclusion Act as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Japan closely watched over the welfare of its citizens. The first Japanese immigrants who had arrived in Hawai is evidence to that fact. These immigrants had entered three-year contracts to work on the sugar plantations. The working conditions were miserable and the work was hard. The Portuguese and Spanish overseers fined or physically abused the workers if they were not satisfied with their work. Finally Japanese workers complained to their government. Japan, displeased because Hawai was disrespectful to its people, tried to negotiate for the rights of its workers. Upon failing, the Japanese ambassador cut ties with Hawai taking sixty workers back to Japan (Benson 406).

Behind much of the hostility toward the Japanese was the fear of economic competition. The immigrants were willing to work more for less than native workers. If a Japanese immigrant opened a store, this led to picketing, rock throwing and appeals for white boycotts. Similarly, when the Japanese got into the laundry business, white workers organized the Anti-Jap Laundry League. In 1905 an anti-Japanese organization called the Asiatic Exclusion League was formed in San Franciso. Patriotic organizations such as the American Legion, anti-immigrant groups, and farmers joined union members to agitate for Oriental exclusion. During election years anti-Asian incidents increased because candidates would encourage racist feelings to win votes. Politicians were the most ardent supporters of "Keep California White" (Davis 15).

The outcome of the anti-Japanese movement was friction between the two countries. Since mobs attacked Asians following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, this led to official protests by the Japanese consul. Yet, the first significant clash involved neither workers, nor farmers, but schoolchildren. California law had long allowed "separate schools for children of Chinese and Mongolian descent," and San Francisco had established a segregated school for Chinese pupils in the 1870s (Daniels 12). Requiring Japanese children to go to the school in Chinatown had been discussed previously. It was in 1906 that San Francisco's school board ordered all Japanese children to attend the segregated school. The order made the front page

news in Japan and became an international matter. As a result Japan protested to President Theodore Roosevelt who wrote, "The infernal fools in California...insult the Japanese recklessly, and in the event of war it will be a Nation as a whole that will pay the consequences" (Davis 16).

The President who had signed the latest renewal of the Chinese Exclusion Act publicly attacked discrimination against Japanese schoolchildren. Roosevelt, trying to keep good relations with Japan, succeeded in getting the order cancelled and in 1908 negotiated the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan in order to limit immigration. Accordingly, only the wives, parents and children of those who had homes in America would be permitted to enter. Although the agreement intended to curb Japanese immigration, the result was its expansion. Between 1908 and 1924 thousands of Japanese women immigrated to the United States.

Until the Gentlemen's Agreement, immigrants had been single men. Some men returned to Japan to marry and brought along their wives with them and many arranged marriages through the mails. Arranged marriages in which parents chose their son's or daughter's spouse with the help of matchmakers were traditional in Japan. In the United States, men seeking a wife contacted matchmakers in Japan to find them a "picture bride," that is, someone who would agree to marry them after having seen their photo. Many women in Japan were eager to leave the tradition-bound society to go to a land where they could have more freedom. However, immigration in these circumstances brought much suffering and regret for many picture brides. In her novel *Picture Bride*, Yoshiko Uchida recounts the story of Hana, a "picture bride." Hana's disillusionment begins as soon as she arrives:

> When she set foot on American soil at last, it was not in the city of San Francisco as she had expected, but on Angel Island, where all third class passengers were taken. She spent two miserable days and nights waiting, as the immigrants were questioned by officials, examined for trachoma and tuberculosis and tested for hookworm....It was a bewildering, degrading beginning....(6)

In most cases, when the women arrived in the United States, they discovered the man was much older than in the photo. In the novel Hana is disappointed when she meets her husband. When Taro sees her startled look he says:"I am afraid I no longer resemble the photo my parents gave you. I am sorry."(7)

The new brides joined their husbands behind store counters and in the fields. Issei, first-generation Japanese, were generally skillful farmers. By the 1920s, almost half of the Japanese Americans in California were either farmers or farm laborers. They had succeeded in farming lands that no one had thought would produce crops and made notable contributions to California farming. As the farmers prospered they became the targets of politicians and agricultural interests. In 1913 California passed its first Alien Land Law that restricted the right of Asian Americans to own land (Benson 410). An alien is a person who is not a citizen of the United States. According to the United States laws, whether they are legal or illlegal, resident or nonresident, all foreign nationals are designated as "aliens." Naturally, Asian immigrants fall in this category. Primarily due to their non-Caucasian physical

traits, even after having been naturalized, they have remained alien-ated. In *Picture Bride*, Hana's friend Kiku tells her:

> You're going to have to realize something important, Hana. We are foreigners in this country, and there are many white people who resent our presence here. They welcome us only as cooks or houseboys or maids. Why, even if Taro's store were twice as big and it was on the best corner in downtown Oakland, still his only customers would be the Japanese and the men on Seventh Street. Don't forget, we are aliens here. We don't really belong. (25)

In 1920 the Californians passed an even more restrictive Alien Land Law which prohibited selling lands to aliens who could not become citizens, that meant Asians. When their right to own land was taken the Issei farmers placed their land in the name of their native-born children or found ways to lease land profitably.

A few Japanese Americans questioned the Naturalization Act of 1790 according to which only "free white persons" and after 1870, black people as well, could become naturalized citizens. A couple of cases were taken to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1922 in *Ozawa v. the United States*, the Court ruled that Japanese Americans were prohibited from becoming naturalized citizens. The ban in Asian naturalization lasted until 1952.

Furthermore, in the year 1924, President Calvin Coolidge signed the Immigration Act, also called the Oriental Exclusion Act which banned all Asian immigration.

> The Immigration Act of 1924 barred entry of "aliens ineligible to citizenship"; because Japanese and other Asians were barred by the 1790 naturalization law stipulating that "whites only" could be naturalized as citizens, the 1924 act totally excluded them from immigration (Lowe 181).

The Filipino were an exception to the Immigration Law. Yet, their condition was rather peculiar.

> Owing to U.S. colonization of the Phillipines, Filipinos were "wards" of the United States aned were called "nationals"; they were neither aliens nor Citizens, and to exclude them required a change in their status (Lowe 181).

There were about 250,000 Japanese Americans in the United States at the time and the Nisei, or second generation of American-born Japanese made up more than one-quarter of that population (Benson 411). Until the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese Americans lived quietly among themselves. Since American society made every effort to keep the Issei segregated they were less exposed to Americanization than other immigrant groups. The Issei were strict parents and were critical of the Nisei's adoption of American ways. Smoking, dancing, parties and dates were either forbidden or strictly supervised. Parents demanded that their children follow old country customs such as bowing to their elders. In 1982, Yoshiko Uchida published *Desert Exile:The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family*, an autobiography of her life during the war. The narrator thus recounts:

> We understood some Japanese, many of the conversations were beyond our comprehension. I occasionally amused myself by counting the number of times my parents exchanged bows with their friends during a single visit, and I think the most was 13 times. (21)

The elders insisted on traditional values of obedience to authority, conformity to the community standards and fulfillment of the duties one owed to parents and community. Nisei children were urged not only to attend schools but to excel. Most Nisei fulfilled their duties to their parents by doing well in school, but they reached the realization that their education was wasted. Many graduated only to become workers in a family business or farm. They could not be hired as teachers until after World War II. White parents would complain if a Japanese American was in charge of their children (Daniels 19).

On December 7, 1941, Japanese forces attacked the naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawai. Immediately over one thousand Japanese American community leaders, Buddhist priests, Japanese language teachers and the Kibeis (Niseis who had been sent to Japan for education), suspected of being spies for Japan were seized and imprisoned by the U.S. government. Although there was no evidence, it was reported that Japanese spies had aided the enemy. Urban legends became common at the time. "One popular tale said that Japanese farmers on Hawai planted crops in the shape of arrows pointing to Pearl Harbor to guide the attacking planes" (Davis 27). In her memoir, *A Farewell to Manzanar,* Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston tells the story of her father, a fisherman who was arrested. Mr. Wakatsuki had been in the United States for thirty-five years but was still prevented by law from becoming an American citizen. He was arrested for delivering oil to Japanese submarines offshore. When being interrogated at Fort Lincoln he was asked:"Who do you want to win this war?" His answer was, "When your mother and father are having a fight, do you want them to kill each other? Or do you just want them to stop fighting?"(64) He was found innocent and was allowed to join the rest of his family in Manzanar internment camp. Although, "He had been gone nine months. He had aged ten years."(46)

The attack on Pearl Harbor had brought out long-standing anti-Japanese sentiments held by whites in the Pacific coast. Politicians, local patriotic groups, and newspapers, demanded the removal of all Japanese Americans. Hatred against the Japanese Americans was fueled by newspapers. They were referred to as "Japs," "Nips," "mad dogs," and "yellow vermin" (Daniels 29).

Two months after the attack, President Roosevelt gave his full support to a removal program to be carried out by the military. On February 10, 1942 he signed Executive Order 9066, which ordered all Japanese Americans to be evacuated from their homes and sent to detention camps, also called internment camps. According to the government report, this was necessary to prevent those Japanese Americans still loyal to Japan from sabotaging the nation's military efforts, carrying out espionage for the Japanese government, or staging internal attacks. Yoshiko Uchida in *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family,* relates her personal story and expresses their disbelief upon hearing the possibility of an evacuation. "How

could the United States government intern its own citizens? It would be unconstitutional." She further states:"Although use of the word "Japanese" was avoided in this order, it was directed solely at people of Japanese ancestry. The fact that there was no mass removal of persons of German or Italian descent, even though our counrty was also at war with Germany and Italy, affirmed the racial bias of this directive." (56) Interestingly enough, it is an historical fact that in the United States during World War II, not European-born German and Italian citizens, but American-born Japanese citizens were arrested and sent to internment camps. Later in Topaz, the internment camp, an Issei friend says to her, "It's too bad you Nisei have no country to take your grievances to, Yoshiko San, since it's your own country that's put you behind barbed wire." (134)

Lieutenant General John L. De Witt who was the chief of the Western Defense Command responsible for the states of Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Idaho and Montana is quoted to have said, "A Jap's a Jap. They are a dangerous element....There is no way to determine their loyalty....It makes no difference whether he is an American: theoretically he is still Japanese, and you can't change him...by giving him a piece of paper" (Davis 29).

While De Witt and the army were responsible for the military defense of the West, the Justice Department, which included the FBI, was responsible for internal security. In fact, immediately after Pearl Harbor, FBI agents had raided homes looking for contraband--radios, cameras, binoculars--and anybody on the list of suspicious aliens. The chapter entitled, "Pearl Harbor Echoes in Seattle," in *Nisei Daughter* by Monica Sone, treats the hysteria during that period. Fearing the FBI, Monica and her family try to destroy everything from Japan in their home. They burn Japanese books, magazines, including Monica's schoolbooks which she had been saving to teach Japanese to her own children in the future. When it comes to her Japanese doll her grandmother had sent from Japan, she cannot burn it but asks her American friend Chris to keep it for her.

Monica Sone humorously recounts an incident involving the FBI. The FBI visit the Matsuis inquiring for Mr. Matsui. She tells them, "he not home." However, Mrs. Matsui cannot speak English well enough and the agents lose their patience and begin shouting at the old woman:

> Mrs. Matsui dove under a table, dragged out a huge album and pointed at a large photograph. She jabbed her gnarled finger up toward the ceiling, saying, "Heben! Heben!"
> The men gathered around and looked at a picture of Mr. Matsui's funeral. Mrs.Matsui and her two children were standing by a coffin, their eyes cast down, surrounded by all their friends, all of whom were looking down. The three men's lips formed an "Oh." One of them said, "We're sorry to have disturbed you. Thank you, Mrs. Matsui, and good-by." They departed quickly and quietly.(154)

Monica Sone's autobiography *Nisei Daughter*, is not as simple as it appears. "It is rather the subtly documented story of the sacrifices demanded of the *nisei* by the racial exclusivity of American society, of a soul's journey from rage to shame, from

self-assurance to uncertainty" (Kim 80). *Nisei Daughter* spans Monica Sone's life in Seattle within the Japanese-American community, where her family ran a hotel, to her internment and her resettlement in a small liberal arts college. As a Nisei she depicts the duality of her childhood:

> Nihon Gakko (Japanese School) was so different from grammar school I found myself switching my personality back and forth daily like a chameleon. At Bailey Gatzert School, I was a jumping, screaming roustabout Yankee, but at the stroke of three when the school bell rang and doors burst open everywhere…I suddenly became a modest, faltering, earnest little Japanese girl with a small, timid voice. (22)

Japanese culture and identity is epitomized by the Japanese school where Nisei children learned Japanese etiquette and the language of their parents. Issei parents insisted that their children go to Japanese School more than ever after the passage of the Alien Land Acts and the exclusion legislation of 1924 which made them acutely aware of the fact that they were unwanted in America. Thus, aware of the prejudice and discrimination their children would be encountering in American society, the parents tried to prepare them for eventual return to Japan or for jobs requiring bilingual ability. However, Nisei children disliked attending Japanese School like Kazuko, who thought the Japanese traditions promoted at Nihon Gakko could not be applied to her life in the Seattle slums:

> As far as I was concerned , Nihon Gakko was a total loss. I could not use my Japanese on the people at the hotel. Bowing was practical only at Nihon Gakko. If I were to bow to the hotel patrons, they would have laughed in my face. Therefore, promptly at five-thirty everyday, I shed Nihon Gakko and returned with relief to an environment which was the only real one to me. (28)

Sone writes about the prewar discrimination and the prejudice both the Issei and Nisei encountered. Kazuko recognizes the hatred against the Japanese people when people stare coldly at her on the streets or refuse to wait on her in department stores. Overcome by the racial rejection she begins to blame herself.

One of the two major events that led Kazuko, like other Nisei, to self-alienation was the Immigration Act of 1924 that barred entry of Asians "ineligible for citizenship." While the "otherness" of the Issei was confirmed, the Nisei experienced increasing pressures toward assimilation and suffered from intergenerational conflict. The second historical event that had alienating effects was the wartime internment of Japanese-Americans. Upon hearing Roosevelt's declaration of war, Kazuko expresses her feelings as such, "I writhed involuntarily. I could no more have escaped the stab of self-consciousness than I could have changed my Oreintal features." (Sone 150)

On March 31, 1942, all Japanese American residents along the West Coast were directed to report to control stations and register the names of all family members. First they were to be taken to an assembly center temporarily and later placed in an internment camp. The Japanese American internees were allowed to bring along only what they could carry. Consequently, they had to sell or give away

almost everything they owned, including houses, furniture, refrigerators, pianos, cars, and pets.

The internees were forced to liquidate their property in a short period of time. They were given forty-eight hours to two weeks to clear out. Many people in their communities took advantage of their situation. When Jeanne's mother in *Farewell to Manzanar*, tries to sell her valuable china, a full setting for twelve that was worth at least two hundred dollars, and is offered only fifteen by a dealer, she starts breaking the plates one by one. "Mama took out another dinner plate and hurled it at the floor, then another and another, never moving, never opening her mouth, just quivering and glaring at the retreating dealer, with tears streaming down her cheeks."(14)

Internees were forced to abandon their businesses and jobs with little hope of reclaiming them. Japanese owned stores in Los Angeles were sealed and padlocked as their owners were moved to assembly centers in the spring of 1942. Many of them lost their land or homes or sold them with very low prices. Even the government took advantage of them.

> Nearly two thousand internees were assured that their cars would be safely stored by the Federal Reserve Bank. The army soon offered to purchase the vehicles at vastly undervalued prices. Those internees who chose not to sell were notified in late 1942 that their vehicles had been "requisitioned" (taken over) by the army for use in the war effort (Benson 377).

By June 1942, the Japanese Americans on the West Coast had been moved into temporary detention camps that were called assembly centers. These were hastily put up to house the evacuees. Mrs. Wakatsuki's first reaction in Manzanar is, "we can't live like this. Animals live like this." (26) In fact, they were housing people in what had previously been fairgrounds, stockyards, and racetracks. Dirty and smelly, they were not fit for human habitation. Japanese Americans found themselves living in stalls that had previously been used for cows and horses. Many evacuees had to live in remodeled horse stalls. Even a horse track had been converted into an assembly center at Tanforan. Despite the fact that county officials condemned the former horse stalls as unfit to live in, the Japanese American families were forced to live there for nearly six months.

Gradually, by November 1942, the internees were moved from assembly centers to internment camps where they would be kept over a period of three years. In her article "Reflections of Cultural Identities in Conflict," Catherine A. Luther states, "Ten camps were erected in various parts of the United States, all of which were located in desolate areas with extreme weather conditions. Although the U.S.government called them 'internment centers,' to many of the internees, the camps were, in essence, concentration camps." (70)

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston recounts their arrival in Manzanar in her memoir. "The bus was being pelted by what sounded like splattering rain. It wasn't rain. This was my first look at something I would soon know very well, a billowing flurry of

dust and sand churned up by the wind through Owens Valley." (18) She describes the next morning .n the barracks:

> We woke early, shivering and coated with dust that had blown up through the knotholes and in through the slits around the doorway. During the night Mama had unpacked all our clothes and heaped them on our beds for warmth. Now our cubicle looked as if a great laundry bag had exploded and then been sprayed with fine dust. A skin of sand covered the floor.(23)

The conditions in the camps were difficult to endure. A family could be housed in a single twenty-by-twenty foot cubicle with a stove, a single electric light and an army cot for each family member. Latrines and common bath facilities lacked privacy. Meals were taken army style in mess halls. The internees had to wait in line for every meal in the mess halls, for use of laundry facilities, the showers, and the latrines.

Moreover, everyone seventeen and over was required to fill out the governments Loyalty Oath. The heart of the questionnaire lay in questions number 27, Are you willing to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered? and Number 28, Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization? They required yes or no answers.

A yes answer to both questions was essential for army recruitment and for leave clearance. If the answer was no to either one, the person was considered disloyal and therefore, ineligible to leave the camps. Upon answering question 28 affirmatively, the Issei who had been denied of American citizenship would be renouncing their Japanese citizenship and left without a country. Some Nisei answered no for fear of being forced into the army and having to fight relatives in Japan. Others were ordered by their parents to answer no. John Okada's powerful novel *No-No Boy,* is about the Nisei's rebellion against the Issei generation; the Nisei Ichiro's desire for an identity separate from his parents. The protagonist's rejection of his parents is related to his strong desire to be accepted in American society which becomes impossible due to his Japanese heritage. His unfulfilled desire to become part of American society leads to the fragmentation and deformation of his family as well as his community.

As literary scholar Elaine H. Kim states in her analysis of the book, *No-No Boy* is full of contradictions and unanswered questions:

> whether the self-deluded *issei* who are still waiting for a final Japanese victory are fanatical fools or the hopeless victims of a racist society in search of temporary comfort; whether the *nisei* veterans who fought in the American army are brave and heroic, or self-hating martyrs; whether the Japanese American community is a comforting haven or destructive to the individual Japanese American. The question that underlies all the others is whether

> America is in fact the desirable land of democracy and freedom or a racist , predatory society (148).

The book poignantly depicts the fragmenting effects of internment on the family and community. Ichiro's "mistake," the mistake of refusing the draft, is serious enough for him to be ostracized by the community. The Nisei of Okada's novel are driven almost to self-destruction by their desperate desire to belong in America. The many years of hardship in America have "dried and toughened"(10) Ichiro's mother who cannot accept a country which would not accept them and her only hope is to return to Japan. In fact, she walked twenty-six blocks to save 35 cents on then loaves of day-old bread from a bread factory in order to save money and return to Japan. The father described as a "fat, grinning, spineless nobody" (12) is an alcoholic who cannot challenge his wife. He works the night shift at a hotel, "grinning and bowing for dimes and quarters from rich Americans who he detested…." (23) Even though Ichiro realizes that the Issei are the victims, he blames them for not confronting the reality that they could never return to Japan and that their real future was in America. Despite the hardships and obstacles to realize their dreams, they should have tried to learn English, to integrate themselves into the white society, and to make long-term commitments. Rather than clinging to illusions, the parents should have reconciled themselves with the reality. Yet, his mother's fanatical loyalty to Japan results in his imprisonment for refusing the draft. Ichiro's mother stubbornly refuses to admit Japan's defeat and her fanaticism culminates in her insanity leading her to suicide. Ichiro cannot help asking himself:

> Was it she (Ichiro's mother) who was wrong and crazy not to have found in herself the capacity to accept a country which repeatedly refused to accept her or her sons unquestioningly, or was it the others who were being deluded, the ones, like Kenji, who believed and fought and even gave their lives to protect this country where they could still not rate as first-class citizens because of the unseen walls? (104)

In 1943 the government instituted a program of releasing evacuees against whom there was no evidence of disloyalty and if they had jobs waiting for them. In June 1954 the government decided to terminate the camps by the end of the year and imposed weekly quotas for departure. However, when they returned many of the evacuees found their homes, businesses, and jobs lost. Their houses were badly damaged, and fields on their farms were ruined. There was little prospect of recovering their losses. Embittered by their experiences, more than five thousand Nisei renounced their United States citizenship. In November 1945, 1500 evacuees boarded a ship for Japan.

After years of analysis, in 1983, the final report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Citizens determined that property lost to the Japanese Americans during their internment was valued between $810 million and $2 billion. Finally in 1988 the United States Congress passed a bill formally apologizing to Japanese Americans for their internment in detention camps. The bill provided that Japanese Americans who had been interned and were still living

would receive a onetime payment of $20,000 to compensate them in some part for the ordeal that had caused so much suffering (Benson 379).

The internment camps for the Japanese Americans has been an experience they do not want to remember. Moreover, the encounter of the two cultures has not produced the desirable result either. As Yoshiko Uchida states in *Desert Exile:The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family*,

> We Nisei, were in effect, rejected as inferior Americans by our own country and rejected as inferior by the country of our parents as well. We were neither totally American nor totally Japanese, but a unique fusion of the two. Small wonder that many of us felt insecure and ambivalent and retreated into our own special subculture where we were fully accepted. (45)

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