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Honorable Mention Contest Entry: A “Land You Could Not Escape yet Almost Didn’t Want to Leave:” Japanese American Identity in Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

McKenzie P. Tavoda

Chapman University, tavod100@mail.chapman.edu

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2. Essay

For my senior thesis in history, the use of the Leatherby Libraries was crucial to the development of my paper. Once I determined the direction of my thesis, I began using “Discover!” to locate research relating to my topic. Through the Library I accessed ProQuest, to seek out previous dissertations and theses relating to the history of Manzanar. Without the free access to ProQuest offered, the financial burden would have been prohibitive and would have limited my access to source material. Instead, I was able to consider sources from these scholar’s bibliographies, enabling me to seek secondary sources best suited for my topic.

I found many secondary sources and some primary sources in the library, such as Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston’s memoir *Farewell to Manzanar*, and most importantly, *Sakuteiki*, a modern translation of a Japanese gardening, by Jiro Takei. The styles of the gardens I found in Manzanar were crucial to my analysis. Leatherby Libraries’ search engines “Discover!” and access to “Jstor” enabled me to locate academic journal articles, videos, and periodicals. I was able to check out a documentary about Manzanar, enabling me to have more time to take notes and discern critical details. The Library’s provision of “Jstor” to students has been incredibly helpful throughout my academic career at Chapman. For my course of study, free access to *The Journal of Asian American Studies*, *The Journal of American History*, and *California History*, has been invaluable.

Online, I discovered two episodes of *California’s Gold* on Manzanar and realized that the Huell Howser Archives would have them available. I immediately located them on Chapman’s webpage that detailed the archives, and was then able to view them in the Archives; the interactive map added an additional perspective. At the exhibit, I spoke to Angel Diaz about Huell Howser’s experience, which sparked the her suggestion of an out of print book *Born Free and Equal* by photographer Ansel Adams which included autobiographical notes about his time visiting Manzanar during the war. I also found the book *Twice Orphaned*, with transcribed interviews from orphans in Manzanar who had their own park within the camp. Special Collections added another depth to my experience at Leatherby; the librarians are interested in helping expand knowledge by digging deep to seek out source material.

The Manzanar Archives are at the camp’s original site, four hours away from Chapman, because the proximity was manageable, I took several trips to analyze the gardens and research vital information only available there as it is not accessible online at this time. These archives hold an extensive collection of internee interviews on DVD. With prior permission, I was able to watch these the center and these reflections became the central primary source material for my thesis. The park rangers and excavators at Manzanar are passionate and very knowledgeable;

some gave me some of their own publications, not available anywhere else. Lastly, I was able to analyze photos of the gardens that were not accessible anywhere online because families, not famous photographers, took them.

In evaluating all the information I obtained, the primary sources were the most powerful in supporting my theory. I used the photographs and subsequent analysis from the books by Ansel Adams to illustrate what the gardens looked like and his message was depicted through photographic composition. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's memoir provided a wealth of quotes to explain how the Japanese Americans felt during their time in the internment camp. These quotes and translations of Japanese phrases were touchstones throughout my thesis. Most engaging were the hundreds of interviews at the Manzanar Archives, as former internees reflected on their lives and time spent in the camp. The Huell Howser episodes also included interviews with Japanese Americans and their thoughts of Manzanar further supported my argument.

Within the Leatherby Libraries, the assistance from the librarians of both the Huell Howser Archive and Special Collections was superior; they understood the brevity of my project and appreciated my interest in pursuing the extensive resources available from their departments. The sources they helped me to uncover supported my argument and provided the necessary supplement to my trips to Manzanar. The library has a great depth of research material to offer, beyond what we typically think of in terms of a library, was instrumental in researching my thesis. I would have never considered before that Special Collections would have information regarding Manzanar and I did not realize how extensive the Huell Howser Archives were until I went there for myself and saw the archive room full of films and books. As I pursue graduate school, thanks to my experience with the Leatherby Libraries, no matter the library I visit for research, I will seek out their exhibits, special collections, and rare books sections because I now understand the abundance of information to be found there.

3. Summary

My senior history thesis regards the 11, 000 Japanese Americans who were interned in the Manzanar Relocation Center from spring of 1942 to fall of 1945. They were forcibly removed from their homes in Southern California and relocated to the internment camp, four hours into the California desert. *Issei*, who were first generation immigrants from Japan were not allowed to become American citizens and struggled to keep their families together as their *Nisei* children, second generation Japanese and legal citizens, grew up culturally divided between their parent's ethnic ties to Japan and their desire to be truly American. Once in the camps, many Japanese people navigated precariously along this dividing line. In the face of racial discrimination and war hysteria, they expressed their Japanese ancestry through their gardens, confirming that despite the social conditions of the camp, they were respectful Americans hoping to keep their families and communities strongly bound together through cultural displays of their heritage.

Despite their new home looking and feeling like a prison, the internees took the space and made it their own. Using themes derived from family and community, they made their barracks more homey and their "neighborhoods" more comfortable. The gardens contributed to this transformation and greatly enhanced their quality of daily life. A former internee recalled her mother often saying, *shikata ga nai* or "it cannot be helped." However, as soon as they arrived they began to challenge the tenets of the social organization set in place to control them. Creativity emerged as the internees began to reshape their new living conditions to meet their needs for self-expression and community affiliation. The skills those Japanese men had acquired in their prewar careers as gardeners were then put to use transforming the barren landscape. The resulting sceneries created in the camps exemplify the Japanese belief in *Gaman* or "perseverance and fortitude;" a reflection of their resilience despite having endured discrimination for decades.

At Manzanar, a small group of gardeners took back some semblance of their individual power by manipulating the desolate landscape into a place of beauty within the confines of a barbed wire fence. While it seems easy to believe people were motivated to create these gardens in defiance of an oppressive government, this does not seem to have been the case. Through the application of Japanese gardening techniques to a challenging environment, these gardens cultivated expressions of cultural identity and necessary communal space thereby enhancing the lives of the internees. These gardeners were able to enact personal authority over their confined space. Rather than disobedience, the gardeners of the Manzanar Relocation Center used their expertise as a means to express their freedom of self, enhancing their community by sharing parts of themselves that could never be restricted or taken.

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