
The Violence Inside The Country And Japanese Racism In The Book Farewell To Manzanar

An untold part of World War II that many people do not know about is the imprisonment of thousands of Japanese Americans along the west coast. After Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan in 1941, the United States Army believed that all Japanese Americans were disloyal to America. For the Japanese people, this meant that they would be locked away in internment camps for years. On the other side of the war, American citizens were losing their loved ones every day. A combination of stress and loss during war creates a damaging impact on our citizens rather than a benefit to America.

As depicted throughout *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Houston, Japanese Americans living on the west coast faced extreme racism and dehumanization during World War II. Jeanne, the main character and her family were moved out of their home into a camp called Manzanar. Reflecting on the poor conditions of the camp, Jeanne states "Whatever dignity or feeling of filial strength we may have known before December 1941 was lost, and we did not recover it until many years after the war." (33) As they worked hard trying to make the camp livable, the prisoners seemed to forget who they were as humans while trying to survive. Not only did they face hardships inside the camp, but they had already been demonized by the public by the time they were free to leave. As illustrated on page 115, "Worst, the very thought of going back to the West Coast filled us with dread... Three years of wartime propaganda-- racist headlines, atrocity movies, hate, slogans, and fright-mak posters-- had turned the Japanese face into something despicable and grotesque." (115) Leaving the camp, the prisoners were framed as America's enemy. To the public, they were locked away for being traitors to the country, but in reality, it was only because of their race. Throughout the novel, Houston recounts her personal experiences from World War II to represent how the Japanese people at the time were faced with unimaginable circumstances at this point in history.

In contrast to the oppression of Japanese Americans, American soldiers were put in a different kind of misery during World War II. The poems *Anthem for Doomed Youth* and *In Flanders Fields* surround the theme that with war comes great loss. In the poem *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, Wilfred Owen discusses the soldiers of World War II, all whose lives were lost in battle. "What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? Only the monstrous anger of the guns, Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle can patter out their hasty orisons." (Owen) The author is representing how the soldiers were being killed off like animals, and the chilling sound of the rifles was what they heard more than anything else. Also, as expressed in the second stanza of *In Flanders Fields*, "We are the Dead. Short days ago We lived felt dawn, saw sunset glow, loved and were loved, and now we lie in Flanders Fields" (McRae) The death caused by the war took a great toll on American families across the nation. In death, these men were taken away from their homes and their loved ones. Within these poems, Owen and McRae depict the sad reality of the war.

Under the physical and mental stress of war, people can end up losing their ability to empathize, resulting in a negative change in behavior. One reason for this is because of a molecule inside the human brain that dictates our ability to behave morally; also called oxytocin. "High stress inhibits oxytocin release and makes us temporary psychopaths.... Stress narrows one's focus

on oneself and we cease to be morally competent." A person's "moral molecule" is compromised under the stress of war, and as a country, people can create an unwelcoming society to live in. In *Farewell to Manzanar*, Jeanne's father, or Papa lost his moral molecule between prison and the internment. The quote "And he was of course a prisoner of war." (53) symbolizes how he had gone mad amid all the fighting in the country. Even so, Papa was just one of the many people in the book that lost their old selves during that time. In all, the loss of oxytocin in many Americans and Japanese people created the grim atmosphere of World War II.

Clearly, war in American history has put a great strain on society and its moral behavior. As observed throughout the sources, Japanese Americans faced severe cruelty, while American soldiers were all surrounded by death. This shows how violence inside the country caused extreme suffering, rather than an eventual benefit.

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