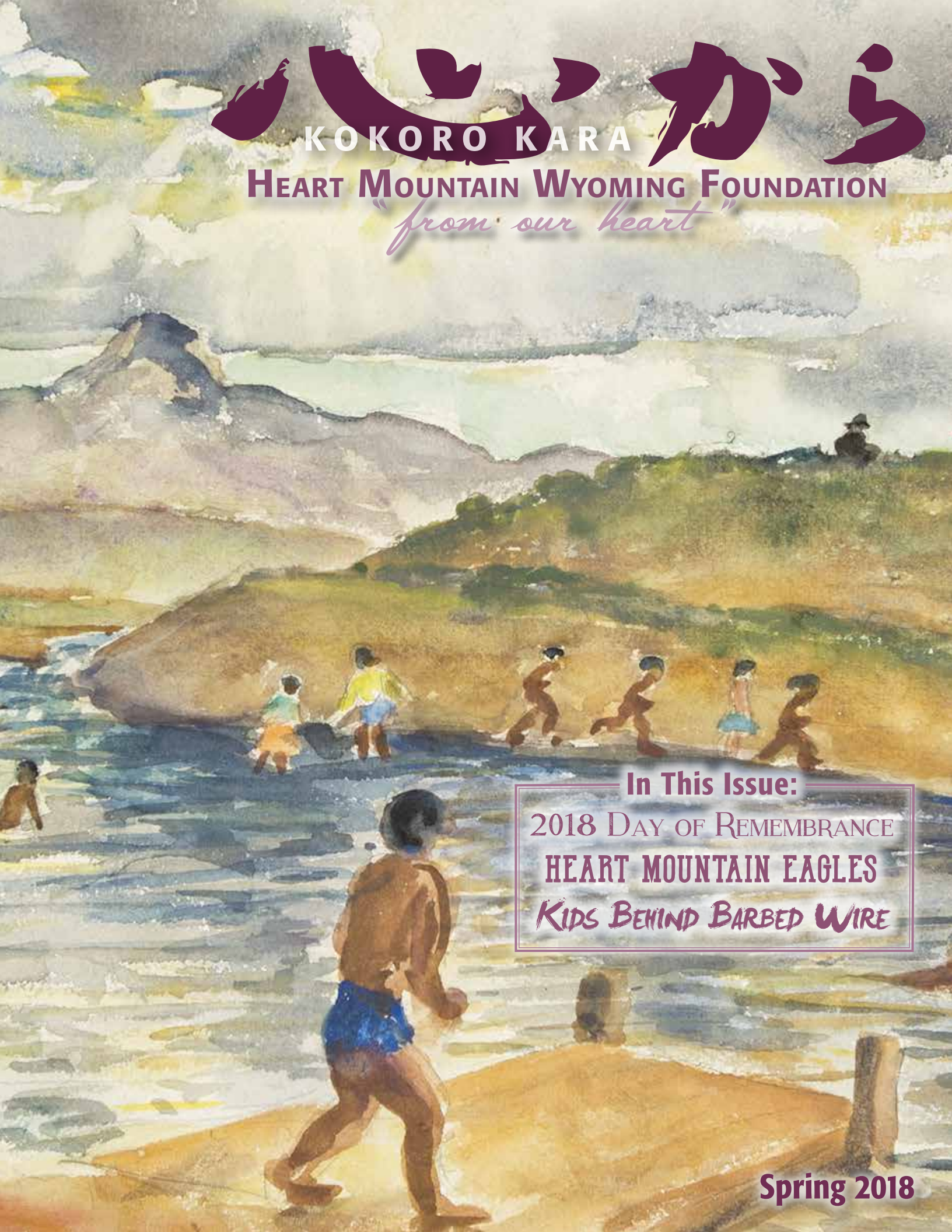




KOKORO KARA

HEART MOUNTAIN WYOMING FOUNDATION

"from our heart"



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KIDS BEHIND BARBED WIRE

Spring 2018



About the cover:

Watercolor by Estelle Ishigo, featured in our newest exhibit
"The Mountain Was Our Secret: Works by Estelle Ishigo"
which is on display in our temporary gallery from May
through to the end of 2018.
(Allen Eaton Collection, Japanese American National Museum)

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A UNIFIED APPROACH TO PRESERVING OUR HISTORY

CHAIR SHIRLEY ANN HIGUCHI



It has been a busy year so far, with events, meetings, and successful advocacy on behalf of the Japanese American community. The February meeting of the Japanese American Confinement Site Consortium (JACSC) was a long time coming, and it was heartening after months of hard work to finally see so many people gathered together to discuss what's possible. We at the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation (HMWF) are so proud of the role we've played in bringing the JACSC together and ensuring that the Japanese American legacy will continue to inspire, to prevent injustice, and to move into the future.

As you'll remember, the JACSC has progressed thanks to the funding of the National Park Service's Japanese American Confinement Sites (JACS) program, which awarded HMWF \$60,599 in 2017 to serve as conveners for the Consortium. The meeting with HMWF, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), and the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in October further solidified the commitments made before the 2017 grant, and the February meeting was set to bring a larger group together to discuss the potential strength of a national Japanese American consortium.

One of the great successes of the JACSC meeting was the groundbreaking memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by the four major stakeholders, HMWF, JANM, JACL, and Friends of Minidoka. Friends of Minidoka leadership has gone above and beyond for the JACSC, pledging to provide vital financial, logistical, and resource support. This marks a momentous step in the right direction to sustain a network of support, collective bargaining

power, and resource-sharing. This gives me great hope, not just for HMWF, but for every member of the JACSC and every member to come.

The meeting, graciously hosted by JANM, was an opportunity for organizations and groups to share their stories and goals for the future. The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula, a former DOJ detention center in Montana, spoke of renovating their property to showcase the courtroom where so many Issei were sent before camp. The Tuna Canyon Detention Station Coalition is currently fighting to build a memorial for the site to attract visitors in LA and to encourage them to see the rest of the Japanese American sites. It was an inspiring opportunity to see how one site's individual project can benefit other sites and museums.

The lessons of these sites and the incarceration story transcend political party lines. The educational and cultural benefits to the states with these sites cannot be understated.

In 2006, Congress established the JACS program to preserve and interpret WWII Japanese American confinement sites. In the years since, \$21 million in grants have been awarded to 163 grantees. The HMWF has received multiple JACS grants, including the one that made the February JACSC meeting possible. The JACS program has helped museums and groups that rely on grants to further the cause and educate the American public and wider world about the unjust incarceration of Japanese Americans.


However, just days before the meeting, this

extremely important program was threatened when the Trump Administration unveiled a budget proposal that would eliminate JACS funding. The urgency of the situation led JACSC coordinator Brian Liesinger and JACL Executive Director David Inoue to take the lead in forming a unified front with representatives from across the country and across the aisle to support continued JACSC funding.

The lessons of these sites and the incarceration story transcend party lines. The educational and cultural benefits to the states with these sites cannot be understated, as was expressed by the 57 representatives and 114 organizations who signed on to support the preservation of JACS funding. Four of the representatives were Republicans, and of those four, they all represent the districts where former concentration camps bring in tourists and jobs. The successful effort to preserve JACS funding was an inspiring show that despite today's fractured political

climate, bipartisan agreements can still be made with great results.

At our Pilgrimage in July, we will have a chance to thank two of the groups who have made the JACSC such a success. On Saturday, David Inoue of the JACL will deliver our keynote speech, and on Thursday, I will be hosting an intimate meet and greet with Friends of Minidoka leadership. It will be an opportunity to get to know those who have gone above and beyond for the JACSC, exhibiting their commitment by signing the MOU and participating in the digital storytelling workshop two years in a row.

Just weeks after our meeting, we have collectively achieved so much. I hope to carry on the positive momentum with the commitment to have two meetings a year to continue to create great things. For those of you who can make it, I'm excited to see you at the 2018 Heart Mountain Pilgrimage on July 26-28. 

Shirley Ann Higachi



Members of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation board, advisory council, and staff meet in Los Angeles in February for a series of events. Read more about these events starting on page 7.

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There are many ways to support the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation:

Membership

Become a member, renew your membership today, or encourage someone else to become a member!

More info @ heartmountain.org/member

COMMEMORATIVE BRICK PAVER

Sponsor a Commemorative Brick Paver and have your message memorialized in our entrance forever.

More info @ heartmountain.org/support

DONATIONS help us fulfill our long-term mission of: memorializing the place and events that have come to symbolize the fragility of democracy; educating the public about the history surrounding the tragic and illegal imprisonment of Japanese Americans; and supporting inquiry and research so that future generations understand the still relevant lessons of the Japanese American incarceration experience.

Make a **general donation** to help us keep our doors open or donate to a specific fund:

Save-A-Barrack & ROOT CELLAR

Our National Historic Landmark Site contains several original structures, which require varying levels of restoration and preservation as we prepare to make them accessible to the public. Help us make these special projects a reality!

MEMORY & JUSTICE ENDOWMENT

Your tax deductible contribution will help ensure that the Foundation continues to teach the Heart Mountain story, including its relevance to circumstances in our day.

More info @ heartmountain.org/support

Collections Care Fund

Supporting the Collections Care Fund helps us with collections care and management, and the costs associated with processing, preserving, storing, protecting and growing the collections. Do you have artifacts to donate? We are actively seeking artifacts, objects, works, and materials related to Heart Mountain and to Japanese American incarceration.

More info @ heartmountain.org/archives.html#donations

In Memoriam

Alberta Kassing (1921–2018)

Alberta Rebecca Kassing grew up an only child in rural Colorado during the two decades leading up to World War II. While attending college in her home state, Alberta befriended several students of Japanese descent, including her roommate. The bombing of Pearl Harbor added to the fear and intolerance already present in the country, and Alberta's college environment was no exception. Her roommate was ordered to leave their dwelling, but Alberta stood up for her, declaring that she would move out if her roommate had to leave. In doing so, she managed to secure her roommate's housing for awhile longer. At 21, after earning her B.A. and teaching certificate, Alberta actively pursued a teaching position at Heart Mountain, spurred on by her deep-seated belief in social justice and equality for all. Much of her conviction came from her strong Christian faith.

Former incarcerated Shig Yabu, a pupil in Alberta's math class, remembers some general naughtiness on the part of students in his 7th grade class, where Alberta dealt with a classroom filled with 60 students! Even with the struggle to control such a large number of children, Alberta's students felt she was a wonderful, organized teacher. Her youth and energy also fostered

more than a few crushes among her charges.

Yabu recalls many of the difficulties of teaching in the barracks, and how Alberta would often comment on how sorry she felt for those who were roasting closest to the pot belly stove, while others in the back were freezing. School supplies were limited, and in the

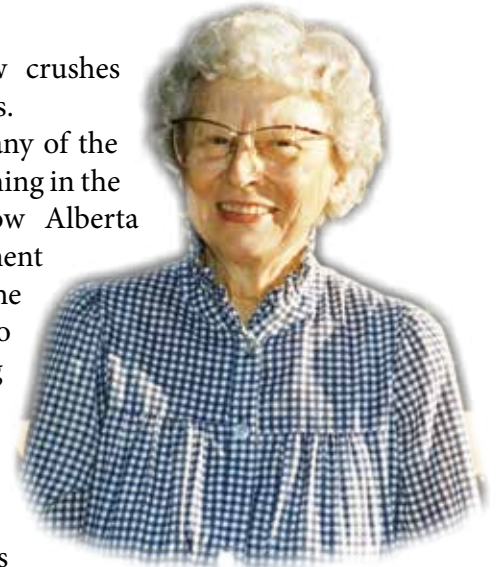


Photo courtesy of Bacon Sakatani

first days of the camp there were no textbooks. Schools from various areas eventually donated their old books. Other materials were in poor condition: while there were many color crayons, they were all broken.

In addition to her work at Heart Mountain, Alberta was also active in the Cody community. She volunteered after school at the Cody hospital and taught Sunday School at the Cody Methodist Church. She also cared for her ailing father. Even with these responsibilities, Alberta invited students at Heart Mountain to visit her home in Cody. Despite nasty and bigoted comments directed towards them, she escorted her pupils around the town when they visited.

After the war ended, Alberta moved to Kansas City, where she continued to teach. After earning a Master's degree in Chicago, she worked in Arizona and Panama, among other places, before settling in California. She eventually retired to the Hollenbeck Home in Boyle Heights. She was an active resident in that facility: welcoming new members, serving as president of the Resident's Council, and caring for cats found around the facility. Alberta also enjoyed life outside of the center, traveling and attending cultural



Photo courtesy of Bacon Sakatani

Alberta Kassing teaching math at Heart Mountain.



Photo courtesy of Bacon Sakatani

events in the area.

People always remarked on Alberta's positive presence in the home, where she would greet residents by name with a cheerful "Good morning!" She stayed in touch with several former incarcerated students, recruiting a now grown Shig Yabu and fellow former Heart Mountain incarcerated Bacon Sakatani to speak to the residents of Hollenbeck. As she told of her experiences teaching at Heart Mountain, Shig said "tears would flow down her cheeks."

Alberta remained an active supporter of social justice causes, and especially of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation. She constantly promoted the HMWF, sharing brochures and publications, including *Kokoro Kara!* Alberta had hopes to visit the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center, but sadly, she never made it back to Wyoming. Her support of the organization still sent many visitors our way, including close friend Alice Mallory, who recently visited the center. Alice described Alberta as "an example of humility and grace, curiosity, tenacity and conviction."

In February 2005, the Japanese American National Museum honored over 200 former teachers from the camps. The museum tracked down 53 former teachers, and over half attended the evening ceremony, where


Alberta was honored by her former student, Shig. She was part of a special group who believed in and encouraged incarcerated students forced during such a critical and difficult time in their development. These teachers believed in the value and potential of those incarcerated, and worked to ensure that their young pupils would still be able to achieve their dreams. Shig Yabu had this to say about his former teacher: "Alberta touched many lives of all races...[she] was sincere to each and every student she taught. Her friendship meant a lot to me." 



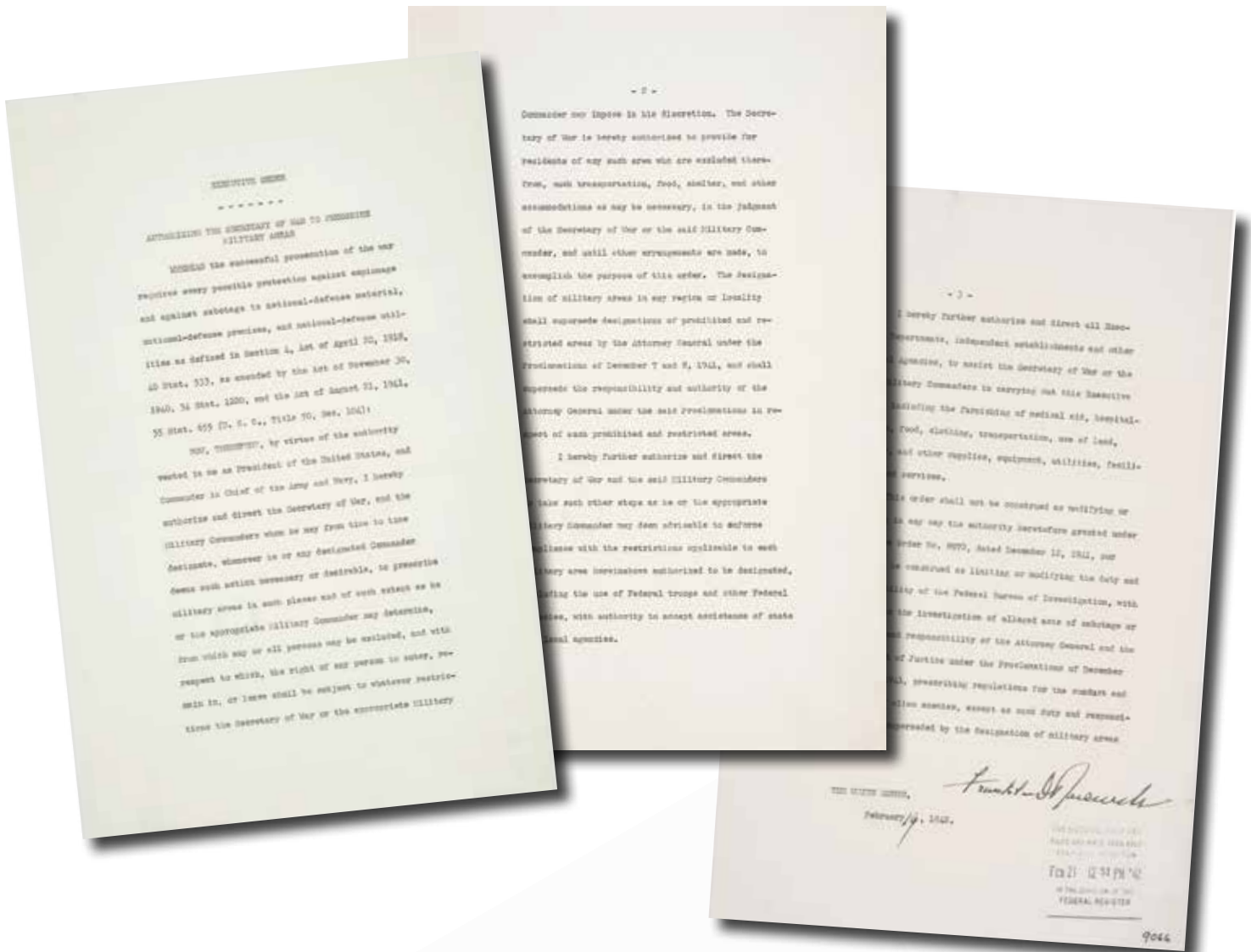
Photo courtesy of Bacon Sakatani

Top: Alberta (far left) with students at Heart Mountain.
Above: Shig Yabu with Alberta.

2018

DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

events



Every February we commemorate the signing of Executive Order 9066 on the Day of Remembrance, with numerous events taking place around the country. On February 13, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) hosted a screening of the documentary “And Then They Came For Us” at the US Capitol Visitors Center. Representative Judy Chu and Senator Mazie Hirono spoke on the importance of the documentary, which covers the Japanese American incarceration and its relevance today.

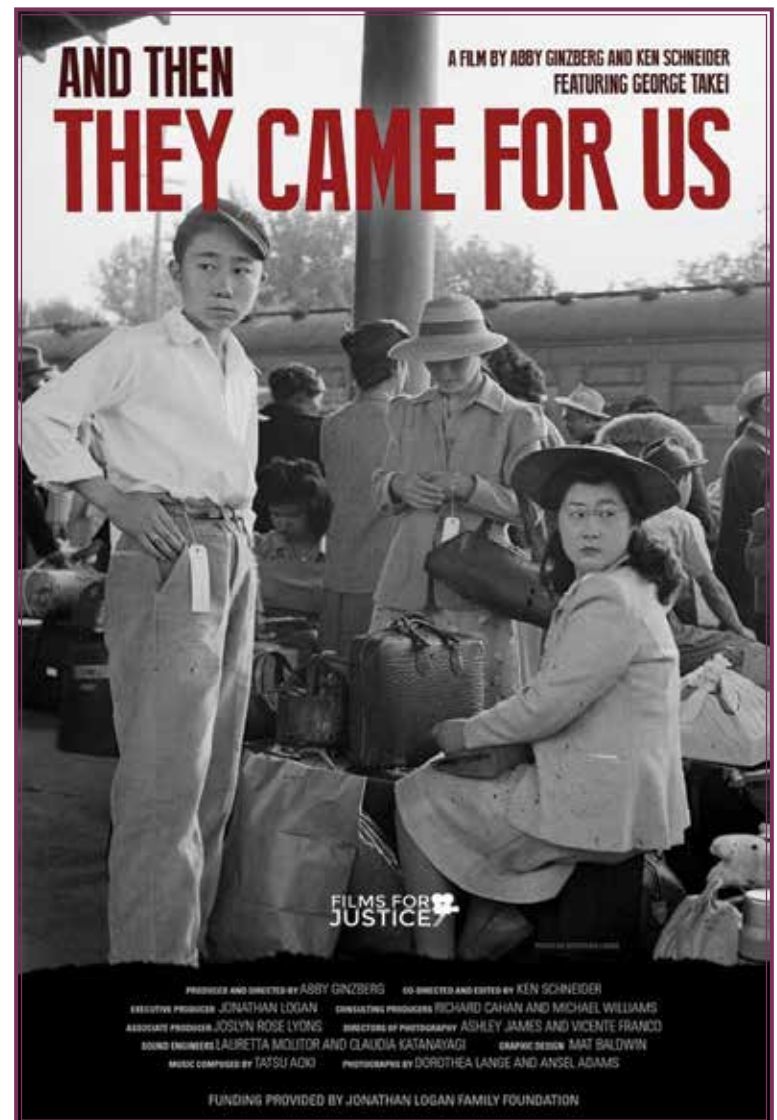
“And Then They Came For Us” gets its name from anti-Nazi pastor Martin Niemoller’s famous poem:

First they came for the Socialists,
and I did not speak out —
Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists,
and I did not speak out —
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews,
and I did not speak out —
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me —
and there was no one left to speak for me.

The film uses newly rediscovered Dorothea Lange photographs of the forced relocation and incarceration 76 years ago, along with interviews of former incarcerated to “bring history to the present” by retelling the story of wartime injustice and connecting it to today’s Muslim registry and travel ban. In fact, it was the election of the President Trump and his subsequent travel restrictions on people from majority-Muslim countries that inspired social filmmaker Abby Ginzberg to partner with Ken Schneider to make the documentary as a reminder of why the lessons learned from the incarceration are still important to today.

“These hateful policies, including the Muslim travel ban, are fueled by same hysteria that caused the Japanese American internment during World War II,” said Representative Chu of California, CAPAC chairwoman.

CAPAC, founded in 1994 and originally chaired by Norm Mineta, aims to provide for the full

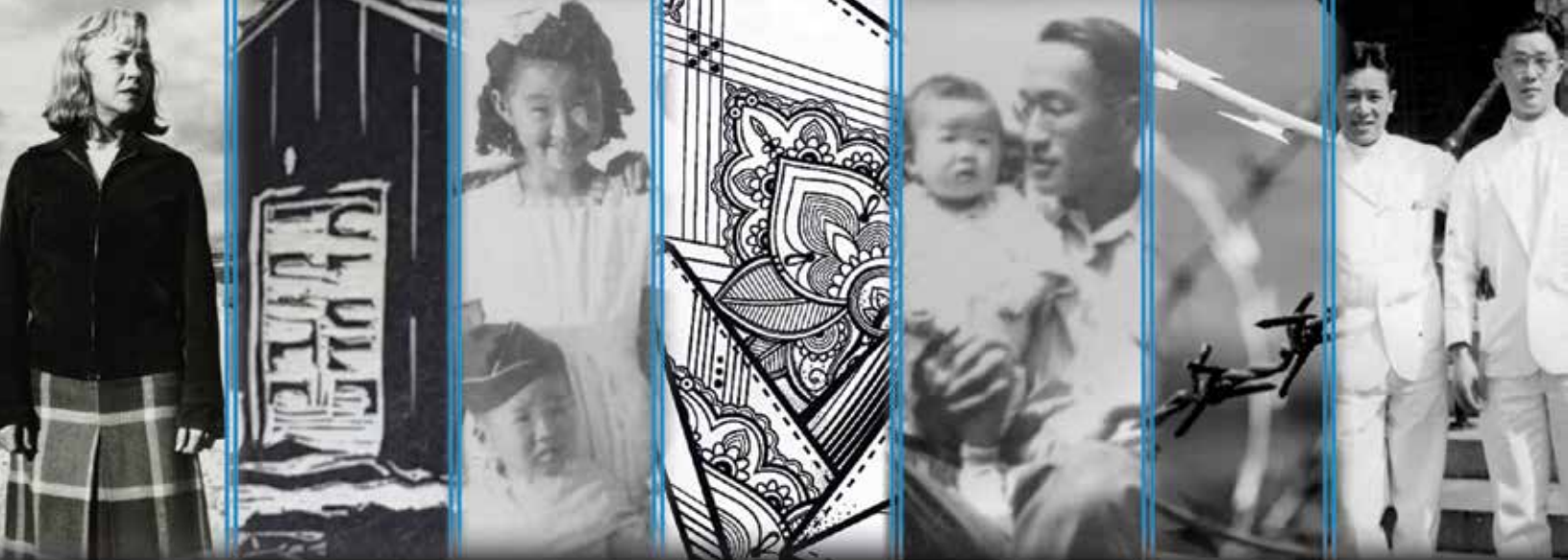


participation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and reflect the concerns and needs of the Asian American community. Today, that means recognizing racism and prejudice, even when it’s targeting other vulnerable groups.

After the screening, the filmmakers were joined by Karen Korematsu of the Korematsu Institute, Don Tamaki, *coram nobis* attorney for the late Fred T. Korematsu, and Sirine Shebaya, senior staff attorney for Muslim Advocates.

The so-called military necessity that landed more than 120,000 Japanese Americans in concentration camps is echoed in today’s calls to strengthen national security. Said Tamaki, “When the court advocates limiting rights in the name of national security, what you get is a blight on our country’s history.”

To buy a copy or to check for screenings of “And Then They Came For Us,” please visit www.thentheycamedoc.com.



2018 DAY OF REMEMBRANCE events

On the Saturday of this year's Day of Remembrance weekend, HMWF, in partnership with the Japanese American National Museum (JANM), and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), hosted a welcome reception for the Japanese American Confinement Site Consortium (JACSC). Heart Mountain's 2017 spoken word videos featured heavily as well in a special screening, showing the possibilities of working together as a unified group to share the incarceration story in inventive ways. On February 17, almost 200 people gathered in JANM's Tateuchi Democracy Forum to watch the short films and a panel with the workshop participants, which was followed by a reception.

The nine spoken word videos were created at last year's Heart Mountain Pilgrimage, when the participants, ranging from high schoolers to senior citizens, spent a whirlwind two days performing, filming, and editing their projects with coaching from spoken word artist G Yamazawa and filmmaker Jeff MacIntyre. The end product was a series of videos that combined spoken word poetry, music, and images to tell the story of the Japanese American incarceration.

"A great way to shrink the gap between ignorance and enlightenment is storytelling," said MacIntyre, who presented the videos with ABC news anchor David Ono.

Though the videos were made at Heart Mountain, the topics were wide-ranging; the videos reflected different aspects of the incarceration, including confusion felt by descendants, rage at property loss, the round-ups of community leaders immediately after Pearl Harbor.

After the screening, the spoken word participants took to the stage to discuss the inspirations behind their films. One woman, who had signed up for the workshop without an idea for her poem, found her mother's old diary from Heart Mountain a week before the Pilgrimage. It was the diary that inspired her video.

Friends of Minidoka leadership participated as well, exemplifying and celebrating the powerful results of cross-camp partnership.

This type of partnership is what the JACSC hopes to achieve. Before the meeting the following day, the videos were the perfect introduction to what is possible when the community works together.



Photo by Maggie Locker-Polding

Above: Shots from short films screened at the event.

Left: Audience with panel featuring filmmakers and workshop participants.

At the February 18 Japanese American Confinement Site Consortium (JACSC) meeting at the Japanese American National Museum (JANM), representatives from 14 different Japanese American organizations met to discuss their goals for the Consortium. A ground-breaking Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by HMWF, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), JANM, and Friends of Minidoka in a pledge of commitment to maintain the Consortium, and in the weeks since the meeting the Consortium has banded together to protect the Japanese American Confinement Sites (JACS) program's funding from federal budget cuts.

The JACS program was established by Congress in 2006 for the preservation and interpretation of WWII Japanese American confinement sites. \$38 million was authorized for the lifetime of the grant, and in the past twelve years, \$21 million in grants have been awarded to 163 grantees. The Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation has received multiple JACS grants, including the one that made the February 18th meeting possible.

The week before the 76th anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066, the Trump Administration released its 2019 budget proposal, which marked the JACS program for defunding, threatening hundreds of confinement sites, museums, and the incarceration legacy.

The meeting in LA came at an opportune time just days after the new budget proposal was unveiled. More than 40 people converged on JANM to share ideas and to work to further define the organization and goals of the Consortium. Organizations represented at the meeting included the Amache Preservation Society II, Densho, Korematsu Institute, Manzanar National Historic Site, Friends of Minidoka, the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula, the National



Members of the Consortium signing the Memorandum of Understanding after a fruitful day of discussion and planning.

Japanese American Memorial Foundation, the Poston Community Alliance, the Tuna Canyon Detention Station Coalition, and more. Over the course of the day, participants refined their vision of what the Consortium could and should try to accomplish.

A new goal had just presented itself.

Immediately after the meeting, David Inoue (JACL Executive Director) and JACSC Coordinator Brian Liesinger worked on templates of letters for JACSC members to sign and send to their representatives in Congress and the Senate.

Within weeks, 114 national and local organizations, as well as 57 Representatives, signed on to support the JACS program. Notably, four were Republicans, representing the areas encompassing Heart Mountain, Manzanar, Tule Lake, and Amache, respectively. In a time of such bitter partisanship in US politics, a bipartisan letter of support was extremely valuable in the fight to save JACS funding.

On March 22, just over three weeks after the JACSC met in LA, a spending deal was passed, preserving JACS funding for the 2018 fiscal year. The successful result of the grassroots campaign to protect the JACS program is one of the earliest concrete examples of what the consortium can accomplish as Japanese American organizations merge to form a unified front.

HEART MOUNTAIN

EAGLES

By Bradford Pearson



STORY OF HEART MOUNTAIN EAGLES FOOTBALL TEAM TO BECOME BOOK



Author Seeking Help From Former Incarcerees and Families

In June 2013, I was a reporter on a press trip in Wyoming when Claudia Wade and the Park County Travel Council brought us to a patch of earth outside Cody, and to a small but mighty museum on that patch: the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center. Wandering through the exhibits, I—a white boy from New York with embarrassingly little knowledge of the Japanese American incarceration—was bowled over by the incarcerated’s strength, and their country’s malevolence.

Near the end of the exhibits, I came upon a placard that described the extracurricular activities of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center’s high schoolers. There was one sentence in particular, at the very bottom, that struck me. That sentence informed visitors that the Heart Mountain High School football team lost only one game during its entire existence.

That fact lodged in my brain for days, then weeks, then months. I thought about the team constantly, even though I knew only that one thing about them. These boys—with their pompadours and letterman jackets and rolled Levis—weren’t the enemy. They were American teenagers, just trying their best to be American teenagers. Penned in, they took that out on the football field to historic results.

Every couple weeks I would stay up late Googling and learning about Heart Mountain, devouring everything I missed in that short museum trip. I read articles in the *Heart Mountain Sentinel* about the team and its band of all-stars: Babe Nomura, George “Horse” Yoshinaga, Stan Igawa, Keiichi Ikeda. I read Densho oral histories, and dug through copies of the *Rafu Shimpo* to learn about the players’ lives after the camp. I read Wyoming high school football websites to try and place the team’s feats in their correct historical context. (At 6–1, the Heart Mountain Eagles still own the best winning percentage in Wyoming state football history, a record unlikely to ever be broken.)

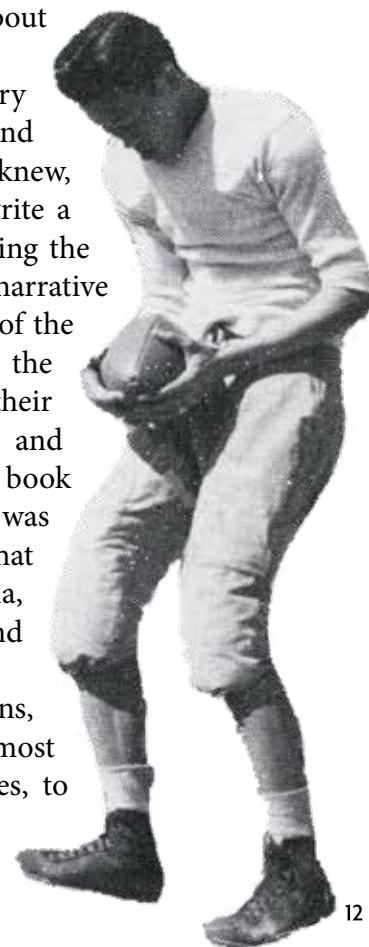
The Heart Mountain Eagles, it turns out, weren’t

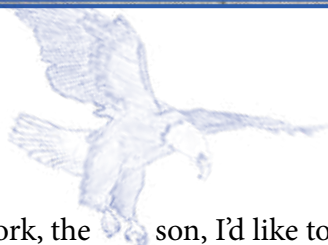
just good. They were virtually unstoppable. They won their first six games, trouncing opponents from schools across Wyoming and Montana. Thousands of Heart Mountain incarcerated lined the field for every game—the football team was the only interscholastic team not allowed to leave the camp for games—and watched the Eagles outscore their opponents 137 to nothing over those six contests. It was, without a doubt, the most interesting story I’d come across in my career as a journalist.

Then, three years after my trip, Donald Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States. I tried to think of what I could do, with my skills as a journalist, to counteract measures I thought were unjust. Every time the candidate and then president questioned Judge Gustavo Curiel’s credentials, every time he announced a new Muslim ban, every time he disparaged DACA recipients and their parents, every time he tweeted about the refugee crisis, I thought about Heart Mountain.

The time to tell the story of Heart Mountain and its 11,000 residents, I knew, was now. I decided to write a book about the camp, using the football team’s heroic narrative as a way to tell the story of the entire center. I contacted the families of players for their blessings (and help!), and started working on a book proposal. This February I was lucky enough to have that proposal accepted by Atria, an imprint at Simon and Schuster.


I have personal reasons, that go back to some of my most vivid childhood memories, to

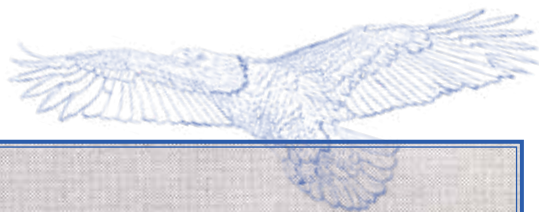




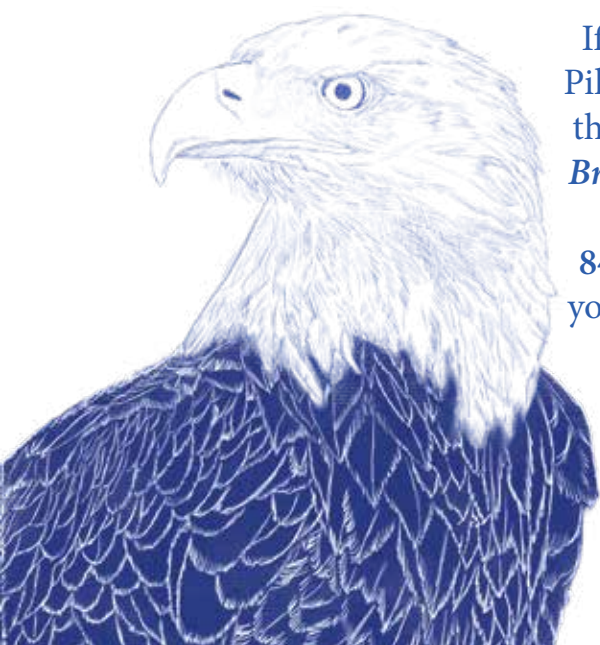
tell this history. I grew up in Hyde Park, New York, the hometown of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. I attended middle school in a grand Colonial Revival building constructed with Roosevelt-earmarked Public Works Administration funds, and dropped my mail off at a post office built with the same funds. Nearly every year my classmates and I would file onto a bus and visit the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library. And every year we'd leave with a different lesson: one about the New Deal, one about polio, maybe one about his Scottish terrier, Fala. We never learned about Executive Order 9066, a moral void on his résumé. As a native

son, I'd like to be a part of remedying that.

To do that, though, I'll need as much help as I can get. I'll be attending the Heart Mountain Pilgrimage this July—just as I did last year—and I'm hoping to speak with and interview as many former incarcerated and their families as possible. If you have a connection to the football team: great! If not, that's totally fine, too. I'm looking to understand the camp on a personal and emotional level, one that will bring the story to life in book form. Maybe you have just one memory of a football game, or even another sporting event. That's more than enough. No memory is too small. 



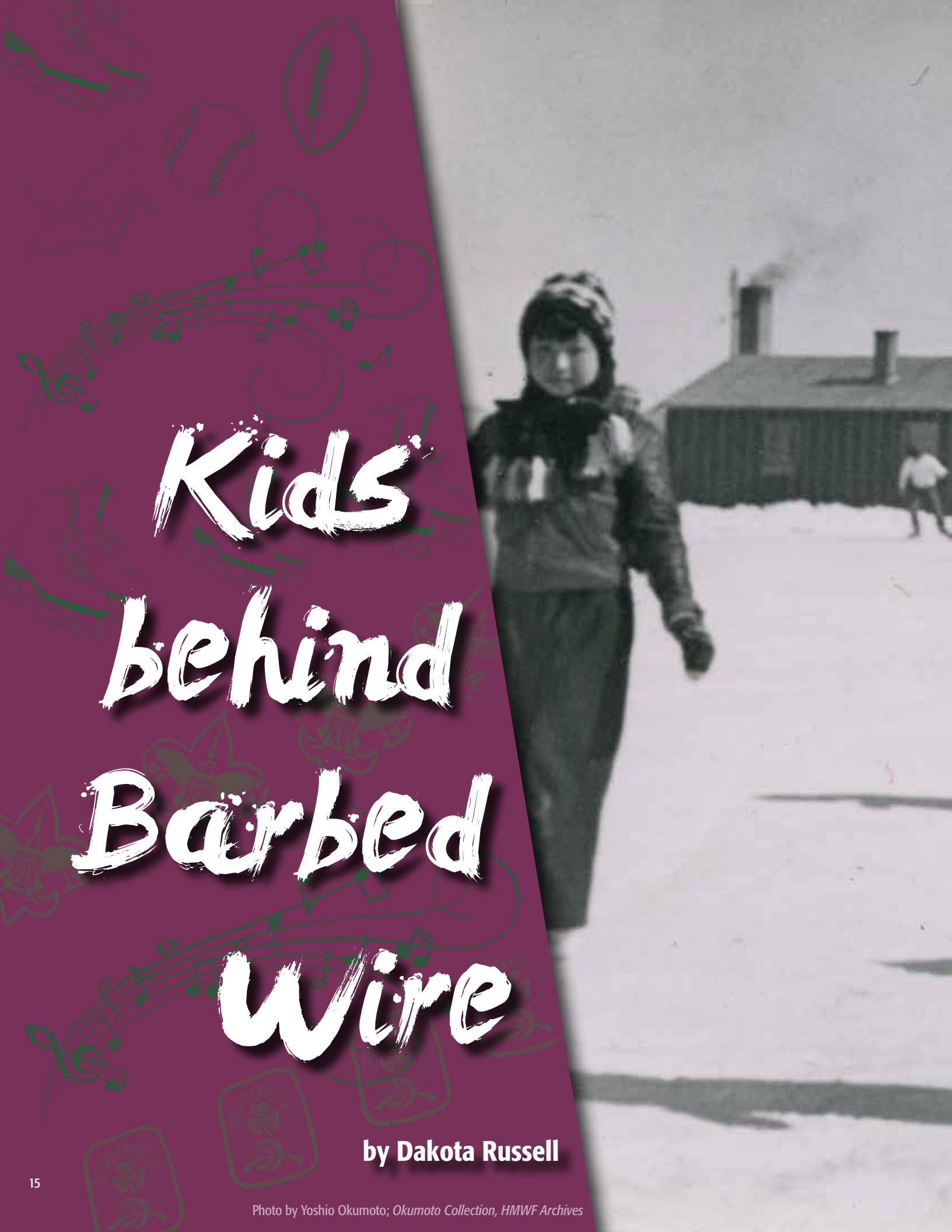
1944 Heart Mountain Eagles football team with coaches (all photos from 1944 and 1945 Heart Mountain High School yearbooks).



If you'd like to talk before the Pilgrimage—or aren't attending this year—my email address is Bradford.Pearson@gmail.com, and my phone number is 845-527-6380. Thank you for your time, and for allowing me to tell your stories. Truly.



Author: Bradford Pearson



Kids behind Barbed Wire

by Dakota Russell

Photo by Yoshio Okumoto; Okumoto Collection, HMWF Archives



Of the approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans sent to concentration camps during World War II, over half were children. It's a statistic that startles. It is common knowledge now that government officials based their decision to incarcerate Japanese Americans on hatred and fear rather than any sort of evidence, but to realize that those who suffered from these decisions were mostly children is chilling. To look at the incarceration experience through a child's eyes is, in some way, the most authentic way to view it.

For Japanese American children living on the West Coast, life was upended on December 7, 1941. Although the Japanese American community had been discriminated against for years, adults were often able to shield their kids from the worst of the treatment. Many American-born children had never

thought twice about their Japanese heritage.


After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, though, Nisei children felt like they stood out. Many remember other children calling them names and blaming their families for the attack. Some parents forbade their children from playing with Japanese American friends. The Nisei kids knew they had nothing to do with the war and couldn't understand why others seemed to think they did.

In the weeks that followed Pearl Harbor, things only grew worse. FBI agents began showing up unannounced at Japanese American homes across the West Coast. Children watched their parents hide or destroy family heirlooms and pictures that might indicate a connection to Japan. The agents rifled through everything, looking for evidence they could use to mark people as spies or saboteurs. They



Photo courtesy of UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library

A boy waits with his family's luggage in San Francisco on April 6, 1942, the day they were forcibly removed from the west coast. Photo by Dorothea Lange.



confiscated radios and cameras, arguing that these items could be used as tools for espionage.

Bacon Sakatani, 12 years old, was living with his family on their farm in Puente, California. His father was away hauling vegetables when the agents came. After ransacking the house, the agents instructed Bacon's mother to pass a message along to his father: he was to report to the local police station as soon as he returned. Bacon's father did so that afternoon, and never returned.

The story was the same for many Nisei kids. Since immigrants from Japan were barred by law from becoming American citizens, the government didn't need warrants or evidence to arrest them. They only had to consider them "suspicious." Hundreds of Issei men— teachers, priests, and fathers— were arrested and sent to camps hidden outside the city. It would be months before Bacon saw his father again. His mother was left with the burden of running the farm by herself.

With fathers and grandfathers taken from them, and with watching eyes constantly on them, the world became a scary place for Nisei kids. One night in Los Angeles, all the anti-aircraft guns along the harbor started firing. It was a false alarm, but many people were sure it was a Japanese attempt at invasion. Japanese Americans came under more scrutiny than ever before.

Rumors circulated for months that Japanese Americans were going to be forced from their homes on the coast, but no one knew when or where. In the spring of 1942, the rumors became reality. Posters began appearing in Japanese American neighborhoods, instructing anyone of Japanese ancestry to report to military offices that had been set up nearby. Once they registered with the army, families often had only 6 days to pack and prepare for leaving their homes.

Children joined their parents in making the difficult decisions about what to bring with them. They could pack only what they could carry, meaning many prized possessions had to be left behind. Some kids found room to stash their comic book and baseball card collections, while others were only able to bring the essentials. Norm Mineta, ten years old,



Photo by Yoshio Okumoto.

tried to bring his baseball bat along, only to have it taken away from him by the military guards as he boarded the train to leave. They told him it was a weapon. Pets could not come along, so kids hurriedly sought new homes for their cats and dogs. Some pets had to be euthanized.

With fathers and grandfathers taken from them, and with watching eyes constantly on them, the world became a scary place for Nisei kids.

Families rode on buses or trains to the so-called "assembly centers." These temporary facilities were set up to house Japanese Americans on the West Coast until the construction of larger camps like Heart Mountain were completed. Most Heart Mountain kids were first sent to one of two assembly centers, Pomona or Santa Anita. Before the war, these had been happy places. Pomona had been the Los Angeles County Fairgrounds. Santa Anita was a famous racetrack, where just two years before, Seabiscuit's victory had captured the nation's attention.

Now, Pomona and Santa Anita were crowded and depressing places, where families squeezed into one-room apartments in quickly assembled barracks buildings. Santa Anita was so overcrowded that some

families were forced to live in hastily whitewashed horse stalls. There was much debate among the Santa Anita children regarding who was “lucky” enough to be living in Seabiscuit’s stall.

It wasn’t long before they were moving again, to a place much further away. In the summer, word spread that the people at Pomona and Santa Anita would be going to Heart Mountain, Wyoming. The train trip took between four and five days. Norm Mineta suited up in his Boy Scout uniform for the trip. On the way to Santa Anita, authorities had allowed Boy Scouts to carry messages between the cars. Norm was disappointed to discover the same would not be true on the trip to Wyoming. The ride was boring and uneventful. When the train passed through towns and cities, the guards even made them close the window blinds, so no one could see out or in.

Heart Mountain was, at least, a final destination. It satisfied some of the many anxious questions that had formed in children’s minds. Other concerns still remained unanswered. Would they be going to school here? Were they going to be here forever? Could they leave the camp? The tall barbed wire fence and guard towers, constructed a few weeks after the incarcerated arrived, answered that final question.

Bacon Sakatani remembers that the guard towers didn’t scare him. He couldn’t imagine anyone thought

It was when he first realized that many people here actually hated him, just because of where his parents had come from.

a boy like him was dangerous enough to be a prisoner, and so he couldn’t fully understand what the towers were for. He wasn’t really scared until months later, when he received a pass to leave the camp and join a group of children on a trip to the nearby town of Powell. There, he saw signs—full of anger and racial slurs— forbidding Japanese Americans from entering stores and restaurants. It was when he first realized that many people here actually hated him, just because of where his parents had come from.

Inside the confines of the camp, kids felt safer. The camp was full of other children and, in the early days,



Boy scouts conduct the morning flag raising at Heart Mountain. Photo by Pat Coffey.

there was always something new to explore. Still, many children noticed a change in their parents. They seemed sadder and emptier. Families began to spend much less time together. Kids didn’t want to spend time in cramped barrack units with their parents, so they roamed around the camp on their own.

There was no coming home for dinner at night, since the barracks weren’t outfitted for cooking. Instead, people in the camp were supposed to report to mess halls on their block three times a day for meals. The mess halls were like cafeterias, where people lined up to get their food and then sat and ate at long picnic tables. The kids started sitting on one side of the building, and the adults on the other.

Shig Yabu remembers being the only kid in his Block 14 mess hall who had to sit with the adults. Sometimes, his mother and father made him carry his food back to their barrack room, so they could have some approximation of a private family dinner. Although he hated it at the time, Shig now believes that eating together kept his family close through the years they spent imprisoned at Heart Mountain.

At first, the food wasn’t very good, and there



always seemed to be shortages. Kids would eat at the mess hall on their block and still be hungry, so they would line up at the next mess hall, and then the next one, until they were full. The camp's administrators cracked down on this practice quickly. Soon, they had to show the mess hall workers a card stating which block they lived in to get something to eat.

With parents busy trying to turn the camp into a functioning community, and family ties damaged by institutional life, older kids started hanging around the camp in gangs like the Taiyos and the Exclusive 20. Mostly, these gangs fought amongst themselves and bullied younger kids, but occasionally they would also vandalize property or steal things from around the camp. Parents realized that if they wanted to raise good children within Heart Mountain, they were going to have to keep them occupied.

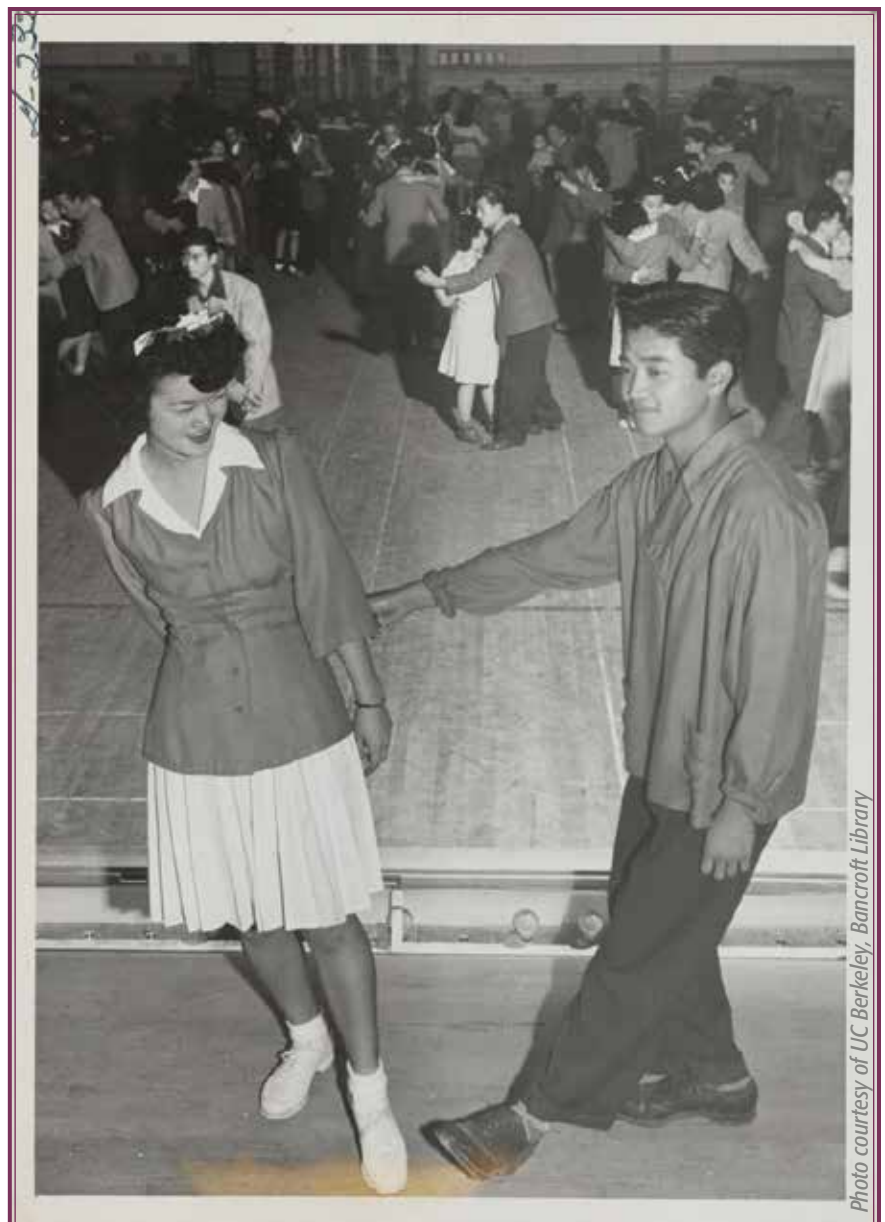
The adults soon created all manner of clubs and activities for children to get involved in around the camp. There were art clubs, swing dance clubs, weightlifting clubs, and more. Clubs organized holiday parties and raised money to help the war effort. Mostly, though, they helped give kids a sense of purpose inside the camp. Within a year, the youth gang problem was virtually nonexistent.

Scout groups were the most popular clubs for younger children. The camp had dozens of Boy Scout troops, Girl Scout troops, and even a troop of Campfire Girls. The Scouts earned badges, marched in parades on holidays, and helped out with volunteer service projects. In 1943, the Girl Scouts even sold cookies at Heart Mountain for 75 cents a box. After the government began rationing sugar more strictly, the girls switched to selling war savings stamps.

The most exciting memories for many young Scouts were the trips to Yellowstone National Park. The camp administrators struck a deal with park officials permitting scout groups to leave the Heart Mountain

in the summertime and spend a week camping and exploring Yellowstone. As a service project, Heart Mountain Boy Scout Troop 333 built a footbridge across the Nez Perce Creek in the park. They were delighted to discover it was still standing when they returned for a reunion in 2002.

Sports were also popular among the kids at Heart Mountain. Almost everyone played baseball, but children could also watch and participate in football, basketball, tennis, and any number of other sports. They could also get permission to go outside the fence—or sneak beyond it—to go swimming in the



Tubbie Kunishima & Laverne Kuwahara jitterbug during a school dance at the Heart Mountain High School gymnasium. Photo by Hikaru Iwasaki.

Shoshone River or the irrigation canal. After a child was swept away by a strong current and drowned in the canal, the administration discouraged swimming there. Instead, a gravel lined swimming hole was built inside the fence, complete with a diving platform that kids would often swim and hide under.

In the winter, parts of the camp were flooded and turned into ice skating rinks for hockey and figure skating. After hours of practice, California kids who had never before seen snow became adept on ice skates. Ouija boards were another popular winter pastime at Heart Mountain, when the weather was too cold to venture outside. Kids would gather around tables in dark barrack rooms and wait for spelled-out messages or knocking sounds to come from the “spirits.”

Reading was another common pastime. Shig Yabu remembers that he brought only one book with him, *Huckleberry Finn*, and that he’d practically memorized it by the time he was allowed to return home. Friends on the outside also sent in books to help establish libraries inside the camp. In time, incarcerated set up co-op stores within the camp. Children were excited to learn that, among their other offerings, these stores sold comic books. The comics would have made for strange reading within Heart Mountain, though. At the time, many of the major superheroes were

battling supposed Japanese spies in the United States.

Teenagers frequently held dances. Some tailored their clothes to make them look like trendy “zoot suits,” and even stole chains from the drain plugs in the laundry rooms to simulate watch chains. Heart Mountain had its own swing band, the George Igawa Orchestra. After Igawa and most of his professional musicians were allowed to leave Heart Mountain and seek work in the Midwest, they passed the band on to the their teenage understudies, who carried on their legacy.

School itself was a surprising welcome return to normal life for most kids, although going to classes in a concentration camp never ceased to be odd. The administration converted barracks buildings into schoolrooms, which meant that class was always loud, crowded, and stuffy. School supplies were scarce early on. Kids often had to share textbooks. Almost all of the teachers were white at first, as Wyoming politicians dragged their feet in approving state teaching certificates for Japanese Americans. A portion of the first teachers were Quakers, who had strongly objected to the incarceration, and volunteered out of a sense of religious duty to improve life inside the camps. Many teachers lived within the confines of Heart Mountain, and some enrolled their own children in Heart Mountain schools.



Photo by Yoshio Okumoto.

In the summer of 1943, incarcerated at Heart Mountain built a new high school. A marked improvement over the barracks classrooms, this new building had its own library, a darkroom, and a huge gymnasium that doubled as a community center. The high school was a point of pride for Heart Mountain residents, and they planned to build a new elementary school right next to it. Wyoming politicians again interfered, insisting that the federal government was “pampering” Japanese Americans inside the camp. The government backed down, and the elementary school was never built.

In 1945, word went out that Japanese American families would be allowed to return home to the West Coast. For many kids, this news was bittersweet.

Their parents had lost their homes, farms, and businesses, and there was nothing to go back to. Some feared that people on the outside still hated them. Fathers left the camp first, looking for work back home, while children and their mothers stayed behind. Once again, families were separated, until the camp finally closed for good in November 1945.

We are often too quick to dismiss the perspective of children. We tell ourselves that they can't grasp the nuances of an adult world, that they can't hope to understand the complexities. Yet, when we look at the lives of the kids at Heart Mountain, we see them struggling with the same issues as their elders: the confusion and fear, the need to distract themselves by keeping busy, and the desire to do something—*anything*—to take control of and improve their situation. It's hard not to think that they may have had it worse than their parents. While adults could comfort themselves with nuance and complexity, the kids knew, immediately and certainly, that the world had gone terribly wrong.



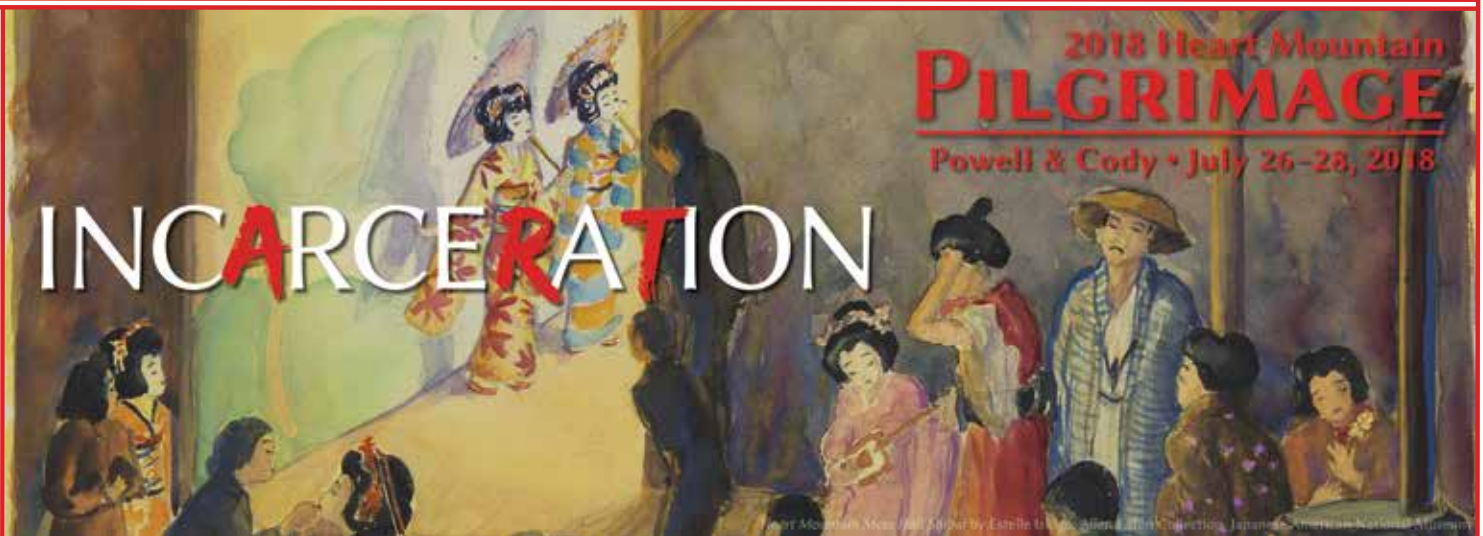
Photo courtesy of UC Berkeley, Bancroft Library

Photo by Hikaru Iwasaki.



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