

A Prisoner in Her Own Land

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World War II officially began on September 1st, 1939, when invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany occurred. The United States decided to stay out of the war until it became completely necessary to enter. However, they did side with the Allies and cut down on their exports to Japan. Japan also signed an alliance with Germany. This caused an increase in tension between the United States and Japan.¹ Shortly thereafter, on December 7th of 1941, the Japanese military bombed an American naval base in Pearl Harbor. The attack left 2,403 Americans dead, 188 planes destroyed, and damaged 8 battleships. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attacked American facilities located in the Philippines.² These events caused the United States to make the decision to finally enter the war, the day after the bombings, on December 8th, 1941. The bombings caused a fear about national security, especially on the West Coast, and it put the Japanese at the top of the United State's enemy list. This had a strong impact on the treatment of Japanese people living in America, who had been a target of racial discrimination in the United States since they first came to the United the mid 1800s. Americans initially welcomed the Japanese when they first immigrated to the United States, but as the Japanese moved up the social ladder and became more prosperous in

¹ "World War II and Roundup: Pre-War Discrimination," Asian American Center Media, available from <http://www.asianamericanmedia.org/jainternment/ww2/pearl.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

² "Attack at Pearl Harbor, 1941," Eyewitness to History, available from <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/pearl.htm/>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

business and agriculture, they began to face prejudices because they grew to be seen as a threat to the white Americans. The prejudices against the Japanese became evident when the United States government set up laws in the early 1900s that prevented Japanese Americans from becoming citizens, buying land, marrying outside their race, and obtaining certain jobs.³ The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 escalated America's prejudices held against the Japanese. The uprising of distrust towards the Japanese race, and the government's strong concern for their own people, resulted in extreme measures being taken to ensure national security for white Americans. These extreme measures included the evacuation and confinement of over 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry, most who were American citizens or legal residents. The group taken into confinement consisted of approximately 60,000 children. Those placed in internment camps did not play a role in the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and the government had evidence that the Japanese Americans did not pose a threat to America's safety. Despite this, on February 19th, 1952 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed order 9066, which allowed for the military areas to be set up for any individuals considered to be a danger to society and national security. This resulted in the sending of Japanese Americans to relocation camps where they remained trapped behind barbed wire fences and constantly watched by armed guards. The order did not directly mention Japanese Americans, but the intentions of the order specifically targeted Japanese Americans.⁴ The 120,000 evacuated Japanese Americans stayed in these camps for as many as four years while the

³ "World War II and Roundup: Pre-War Discrimination," Asian American Center Media, available from <http://www.asianamericanmedia.org/jainternment/ww2/pearl.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

⁴ "Attack at Pearl Harbor, 1941," Eyewitness to History, available from <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/pearl.htm/>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

war was still going on.⁵ The building and establishment of ten Japanese internment camps proceeded after the President's order in the spring and summer of 1942. Japanese Americans received notices saying that they would have to be ready to move within forty-eight hours; the United States military removed the Japanese from their homes and transported them to the camps. The Japanese American evacuees did not receive a hearing, and they received limited information about their next destination, the internment camps. Camp Harmony had a reputation of being one of the biggest camps built. Camp Harmony's location, Puyallup, Washington, consisted of a barren region, surrounded by barbed wire fences that provided for no escape. The American government did not realize it at the time, but their conduct towards the Japanese Americans replicated the Nazis' actions of taking people from their homes, and placing them into concentration camps

After the war, letters, reports, and many other documents emerged from the internment camps. Among these documents, are six letters written by a young Japanese American woman and resident of the internment center, Camp Harmony. The letters addressed Elizabeth Bayley Willis, her former teacher from Garfield High School, located in Seattle, Washington. Elizabeth Bayley Willis taught art, Latin, and English.⁶ The letters are also referred to as the Elizabeth Bayley Papers. The author of the letters attended Garfield High School before the American government forced her out of the life she was living, and put her into a barricaded camp. The student author remained

⁵ Maisie Conrat and Richard Conrat. *Executive Order 9066: The Internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans* (Small Pr Distribution, 1997), 6.

⁶ Camp Harmony Mrs. Willis's Class. University of Washington Library, Special Collections □ <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/exhibit/willis.html>; Internet; accessed 13 May 2010.

anonymous because of the dangerous consequences she could potentially face anyone uncovered her identity, especially after all the complaints she made against the government in her letters. For the remainder of this evidence discussion she will be known as Nicole. Nicole's letters are dated from May 1st, 1942 to April 11th, 1943. In her letters she wrote about what life was like at Camp Harmony which included: the Japanese's Americans harsh living conditions, what type of work she and other Japanese Americans did at the camp, what she did in her leisure time, her feelings about the United States government, and her longing to go back to her old life. Her letters reveal that the Japanese Americans during World War II endured treatment that lacked humanity. The dictionary definition of humanity is: Human beings collectively; the human race. A humane quality or action.⁷ The dictionary definition of humane is: characterized by kindness, mercy, or compassion; marked by an emphasis on humanistic values and concerns.⁸ This means that the government did not treat Japanese Americans like human beings, who should be treated with kindness. Instead of being treated with compassion, they received cruel treatment, which can be labeled as inhumane. The American government eventually acknowledged this act of injustice through the signing of the Japanese American Redress Bill in 1988. This bill stated that each internment camp victim received \$20,000 in reparations and given an apology signed by the president on

⁷ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "humanity."

⁸ *Ibid.*, "humane."

behalf of the entire country.⁹ However, this could not fully make up for all physical and mental traumas that the Japanese experienced as a result of their internment.

The Elizabeth Bayley Willis Papers reveal the inhumanity of the larger U.S. society by demonstrating the clear separation within racial class; between the hierarchy of military and government, and the Japanese peoples; and the extreme measures taken to make both the government's distrust of the Japanese, and their priority in keeping the white American citizens safe, known to all. The level of inhumanity towards Japanese Americans displayed in the Japanese Internment Camps is demonstrated in the Elizabeth Bayley Willis Paper's descriptions of location, people, items, and camp life; the American government made their inhumane treatment towards the Japanese known publicly to all.

After being evacuated from their homes, the locations to which the Japanese victims relocated to were considered inhumane, somewhere where one takes people who are considered evil and ill to society; and in the government's perspective, the Japanese equaled exactly that. The purpose in examining the locations in this era, and in particular of the Japanese relocation camps, is to view the echelon of vast differences between two kinds of people, and how treatment immensely varied depending on one's racial identity. In this case the two groups of people consisted of the Japanese Americans, and the upper class white Americans. The description and details of the locations of the Japanese Americans during World War II shown in the primary source reveal that by force they

⁹ "Internment History," Public Broadcasting Service, Children of the Camp, available from <http://www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history/index.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

had to live in harsh conditions; this further displays the hostility that the American government had towards the Japanese after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Nicole's letters gave a detailed account of how the government singled out Japanese American Citizens and placed them into locations where conditions were severe and unfavorable. In her letters she wrote that she was located at Camp Harmony, an internment camp, in Puyallup, Washington. The government placed over 7,000 Japanese Americans there. She said the camp was "divided into four areas, Area A, B, C, and D. The areas then subdivided into different sections."¹⁰ In these sections included barracks, outdoor bathrooms, a mess hall, recreation center, post office, military headquarters, etc. Thousands of Japanese Americans lived at the camps at one time, which caused housing to be very crowded and have little privacy.

Nicole's letters made references to how she was living and going to school in Seattle, Washington before being placed into the camp in Puyallup, Washington; Puyallup is approximately thirty-seven miles away from her home. The teacher she wrote letters to is not a Japanese American and is not in an internment camp. Nicole gave insight into white American teacher's life and location, when she said, "I hope you are enjoying yourself at Agate Point. It must be wonderful to go swimming in the cold salt water and then to lie on the warm sand. How I wish I could do that! I hear you are having good weather and so are we but lately it's been too hot and we can't do anything to avoid

¹⁰ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections, available from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/>; Internet; accessed 5 April 2010.

the heat except sit in the shade of the barracks which isn't very good."¹¹ This shows that the Japanese Americans were put into separate locations just based off their race, and how did not have a say in where they would live for the next few years. This quote also shows Nicole and many others had strong desires to be in the outside world just like her teacher Elizabeth Bayley Willis. Unlike Mrs. Willis they were not able to enjoy the same freedoms and liberties. Simple freedoms such as swimming or lying in the sand could not be enjoyed by the Japanese Americans because of the arrangement and location of the camps they resided in.

Locations of camps included Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Arkansas, Colorado, etc. The creation of the internment camps intended to isolate the Japanese Americans from society, so that they could not do any harm to the rest of the people in country.¹² Therefore, the camps that Nicole and many others lived in consisted of isolated locations in desert like or swap areas away from society. These locations experienced hot summers, cold winters, and dust storms.¹³ It is important to note that camp locations only occupied West Coast of the United States. Japanese located in Hawaii, where the attack took place, did not experience placement into internment camps because they took up a third of the population, and it would have been impossible

¹¹ Ibid. No Page.

¹² Maisie Conrat and Richard Conrat. *Executive Order 9066: The Internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans* (Small Pr Distribution, 1997), 2.

¹³ "The Camps Experience: Permanent WRA Camps," Asian American Center Media, available from <http://www.asianamericanmedia.org/jainternment/camps/permanent.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

to gather that many people to put into camps.¹⁴ The overall act of confining the Japanese Americans as prisoners into confined locations shows the hostility and racism that the Americans government had towards anyone of Japanese ancestry. The dictionary definition of racism is: the notion that one's own ethnic stock is superior. Discrimination or prejudices based on racism.¹⁵ Any kind of racial discrimination is considered inhumane, unjust, and unconstitutional because it implied that one group of people is superior to another. This contradicts the Declaration of Independence, an important American document, which states that all are created equal.¹⁶

Two types of camps where Japanese Americans were located at existed; this included temporary detention centers and permanent war relocation authority camps. Japanese Americans lived in temporary centers until they were placed into permanent centers.¹⁷ The fifteen temporary detention centers tended to have locations where fairgrounds and horse tracks used to be. The camp that Nicole described in her letters was a temporary facility located in Puyallup, Washington in Pierce County on former fairgrounds. It's location proved to be ideal because it was many miles inland, remote,

¹⁴ "Historical Overview of Japanese-American Internment Camps," Momo Media, available from <http://www.momomedia.com/CLPEF/history.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

¹⁵ *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "racism."

¹⁶ The Declaration of Independence: The Wants, Will, and Hopes of the People," United States History, available from <http://www.ushistory.org/Declaration/document/>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010

¹⁷ Louis Fiset, "Camp Harmony," History Link, available from http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=8748; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

and isolated. Upper white class and other non-Japanese Americans did not have to face being forced to live in an isolated location away from their home; this made it clear that one's race had a major effect on one's location.

Location placement seemed to be one of the effects that occurred from the United State government's decisions and actions, after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. It is apparent how unfair judgment towards certain ethnic groups reveals the larger picture within the United States society, and this comes down to the unequal treatment of certain individuals. In this case, it is the Japanese Americans experiencing unfair treatment from the United States government because they were seen as a threat. The descriptions of the people involved include the government and military on one side, and the Japanese American victims on another. This reveals that an extreme separation between not just racial hierarchies existed, but also class levels that were based on race existed; this had a huge affect on how humane or inhumane people got treated based on what their racial or class label.

The government exercised unfair, racist treatment by placing citizens and legal residents, who were innocent into relocation camps. Although Japanese Americans made up the majority of people placed in the camps, other groups such as Germans and Italians experienced interment. The Germans and Italians underwent interment because their home counties fought against the United States in the war; therefore the United States believed that they could pose a possible threat to Americans.

In her letters, Nicole showed how the Japanese Americans felt about their treatment at these camps and overall in society by stating what the first generation of Japanese immigrants said: "Our children are Americans yet they are being kicked around

like dogs –by Americans. The American government made a lot of promises in the last war. It is against making the same promises. The promises of today will be as good as the promises of last war.”¹⁸ This shows that they had faced discrimination for quite some time. In the last war, World War I, they experienced discrimination, and the American government did not fulfill promises they made for citizenship and fair treatment. As a result, the Japanese did not trust any promises that the government was making in World War II. They continued to be targets of discrimination and continually faced denied citizenship because of their race. They had no control of their citizenship statuses because the responsibility of granting citizenship belonged to the government, which consisted of primarily white upper class Americans, many who discriminated against Japanese Americans.

Approximately 2,900 Japanese-American victims relocated to Camp Harmony in April of 1942 without questions asked and being told where they were going.¹⁹ One of the Japanese American groups evacuated included the “Isseis,” the first generation of Japanese Americans to come to North America. Laws made by the American government prohibited them become United States citizens, but their children would be granted rights such as voting in the future. A total of 47,000 Isseis lived in the United States during World War II. The children of the Isseis made up another group of the

¹⁸ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections, available from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/>; Internet; accessed 5 April 2010.

¹⁹ Maisie Conrat and Richard Conrat. *Executive Order 9066: The Internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans* (Small Pr Distribution, 1997), 3.

Japanese- American victims at Camp Harmony; they are referred to as Nissei. The Nissei consisted of pupils from various high schools in the Washington area, experienced being pulled out of their education without a choice. For instance Nicole, who is most likely a Nissei, said “What I wouldn’t give to be back in Seattle next September to continue my studies at Garfield. Many of the boys say this too. Some of them who were not good students and didn’t like school even say this. It is my belief that everyone here would like to go back to their normal life.”²⁰ Before Japan’s attack on Pear Harbor, Japanese Americans lived normal lives, and resided in Hawaii and on the west coast of the United States. They even attending schools such as Garfield High School, and some even decided to enlist in the military and go to flying school. This shows that they had the basic freedoms and rights that all Americans were given. However, after the attack the American Government took these rights away when they relocated the Japanese Americans against their will into interment centers, such as Camp Harmony. The government drafted some of the young Japanese Americans into the military, while others volunteered only to get out of the drastic situation that they had to undergo. For example, Nicole in her letters wrote a list of boys who volunteered for the military, which included: “ Kay and Eddie Sato. Jun Hayakawa, Sadao Baba, Harry and Bill Yanaginachi, Frank Hantanaka are some others.”²¹ This shows that many students would rather be in the military than be in the camps. It became one of the only ways to escape internment. Nicole even mentioned that she was thinking about joining the army. For

²⁰ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections, available from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/>; Internet; accessed 5 April 2010.

²¹ Ibid, no page.

those who lived in the camps, they seemed to have been divided into groups based off their labor assignments. For example, Nicole wrote that “railroad gangs” made up one of the ground in the camp; they basically did construction work and building railroad tracks; this hard labor demanded male workers, revealing that a separation between Japanese men and women existed. It was likely that husbands and wives, brother and sisters, parents and children experienced this separation. Separating families can be categorized as inhumane and unjust treatment for various reasons. Also, the fact that camps consisted of forced labor shows the inhumane treatment of Japanese-American victims, and how the government took advantage of them. It also shows how Japanese Americans faced being discriminated against them and faced being told to act against their will only because of the fact that they were Japanese descendants, or culturally Japanese.

Class hierarchies formed based off race, where the Japanese resided on the bottom, and white Americans resided on the top. The other side of the Japanese Americans groups that held the power, consisted of groups like the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, which included Californian natives of all ethnic backgrounds. Nicole mentioned that they wanted to take away the US citizenship of American born Japanese and deport them because they did not trust them to be on the side of the United States after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. She did not like this idea and said, “our citizenship is very dear to us and I hope this thing never occurs.”²² This indicates that the Japanese Americans lived in a state of fear and distress. They had seen how cruel the government was treating them, and knew the government and people of higher power had capabilities of taking away their citizenship.

²² Ibid, no page.

The American Government and the United States military played the biggest role in creating the Japanese internment camps. It was under executive order 9066 that forced all the western states on the pacific to have strategic military zones, and all Japanese-Americans in or around the zones has to evacuate with a forty-eight to seventy-two hour notice.²³ The military consisted of soldiers and staff sergeants at the camps. The soldiers evacuated the victims and were on guard at these camps. Their responsibilities included being in charge of keeping everything in order, and not letting trouble arise in this confinement; they had to oversee if all was peaceful, and to make sure that the Japanese would not rebel once they could not see the future or length of these internment camps.²⁴ Nicole wrote in her letters that the “soldiers watch on towers and march back and forth along the fence.”²⁵ The military would kill those who resisted following orders.²⁶ The military handed out questionnaires to the Japanese Americans in the camps that questioned their loyalty, which outraged many Japanese Americans. It asked anyone who was seventeen or older to say that they would serve in the United States military if asked, and would pledge allegiance to the United States over any other country, especially

²³ “Life in Japanese Interment Camps, “Think Quest, available from <http://library.thinkquest.org/TQ0312008/bhjc.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

²⁴ Roger Daniels. *Prisoners without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 4.

²⁵ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections, available from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/>; Internet; accessed 5 April 2010.

²⁶ Life in Japanese Interment Camps, “Think Quest, available from <http://library.thinkquest.org/TQ0312008/bhjc.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

Japan. They expressed feeling of outrage because they had to prove their loyalty, unlike white citizens who did not get questioned about their loyalty. Nicole in her letter expressed more unfairness regarding the United States military when she said, “I am also not in favor of an all American Japanese combat unit.”²⁷ This again shows how the American government tried to separate the Japanese from the rest of society because they did not even trust them to be in the military with other Americans. A lot of people had to enlist in the service as the war became more intense with each month going by. Drafts occurred left and right; young American soldiers went to go fight for their country, whether they wanted to or not.

The government also came with ideas of what to do with the Japanese-Americans after the war was over, and they came up with “deport[ing] them after war” as a main option.²⁸ This fell through when the war ended, and the notion was no longer a consideration. The consideration to deport the Japanese Americans and to keep all others in the country shows the unfair treatment towards Japanese Americans and, the positive treatment of the military, soldiers, and white Americans during this era. It also shows that the military and white Americans had more freedom to do whatever they wanted to without control in contrast to the Japanese Americans whose freedom was limited. The military and other white American citizens seem to be considered above the rest; therefore if they wanted to harass, they could get away with it. This shows that during

²⁷ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections, available from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/>; Internet; accessed 5 April 2010.

²⁸ Richard Drinnon. *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 3.

this time the white Americans in the military had superiority and how they seemed to be favored by the government, and that they had the ability to do whatever they pleased without facing consequences.

Overall Nicole's letters reveal the separation between the government and military, and the Japanese Americans; it also reveals the bitterness that exists between the two groups. Each group had a different reason for being bitter. The American government had bitter feelings toward the Japanese because of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, which left thousands of Americans dead. The Japanese Americans had bitter feelings toward the government because the "American government feels so free about hurting their children and then asking them to volunteer and finally saying they might be drafted."²⁹ This shows how the American government had full control of the situation and the fate of the Japanese Americans, and had no problem on forcing them to live in camps, and then be in the military. The Japanese Americans did not receive equal rights and faced discrimination. The first generation of Japanese immigrants seem to be the most bitter according to the historical records.³⁰ They tried to get citizenship by volunteering in World War I but could not get their citizenship until 1952.³¹

From the discrimination towards the Japanese Americans, stems harsher circumstances. These harder circumstances not only showed up in the items that the camp

²⁹ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections, available from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/> Internet; accessed 5 April 2010.

³⁰ Maisie Conrat and Richard Conrat. *Executive Order 9066: The Internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans* (Small Pr Distribution, 1997), 4.

³¹ Ibid.

victims were allowed to bring to the camp, but the items which were provided for them once they arrived. The Japanese-American victims upon their evacuation from their own homes could only bring a few, and strictly minimal amount of belongings to the camp, also called “knick-knacks” frequently in Nicole’s letters. The military said that they could only bring what they could carry. This meant that many of their personal possessions and pets had to be left behind. They were given a limited amount of time to sell their possessions and get rid of their property.³² This resulted in a loss of billions of dollars and losses of businesses. On top of that when the Japanese Americans arrived at the camps the government provided them with a scarce amount of low quality items. The descriptions of the items used by the Japanese Americans during WWII in the primary source reveal that the Japanese by force had to limit their number of personal possessions to just the basic necessities while living at the internment camps; this shows the unfair treatment they endured from having their freedoms limited and the losses they had of personal possessions.

When the Japanese arrived at the camps they were provided with a minimal number of items. In a small room, they got “8 beds and a stove (the only furnished necessities).”³³ The mattresses were stuffed with hay and straw, which is about the cheapest and most uncomfortable material that someone could get to sleep on, besides sleeping on the cold, hard floor. Nicole said in her letters, “the first night was terrible but

³² “World War II and Roundup: Mass Removal, “Asian American Center Media, available from <http://www.asianamericanmedia.org/jainternment/ww2/mass.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

³³ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections, available from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/>; Internet; accessed 5 April 2010.

eventually we got used to the bed.”³⁴ This shows that they were deprived of having comfort and any type of luxuries. They only luxuries that they could bring with them was one small bag of knick- knacks besides the necessities, which included “toiletries, nails, hammers, boots,” etc.³⁵ When they went to the camps, they did a lot of labor type work, so old clothes and half boots became a necessity because in the camps the Japanese Americans had to undergo a large amount of forced manual labor.³⁶ Half boots are leather boots that went up to the calf and meant for heavy duty and messy work. Other items they brought from their own homes to the camps included their own tub or bucket because all of their clothes had to be hand-washed and then dried. This had to be done often because they barely had more than two or three outfits to wash either way, so as soon as things got dirty, they had to be washed, otherwise they would be forced to constantly walk around in dirty clothing. At the camps they were deprived of necessary items such as coal. Coal was in huge need in these camps because it supplied for all the energy and fuel there, and during this time, coal was not widely provided, especially inside of the camps, and the shortage had much of an effect on living a comfortable life in general. Another important item at the camp was tarpaper, which was used as a roof covering in the barracks and cabins. It was a very cheap material and provided a covering during the rain but by no means was a quality piece becomes when it was hot, it was burning, and when it was freezing, it was like ice; tarpaper provided for no shield whatsoever.

³⁴ Ibid, no page.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

The items given to them, shows the brutality and heartlessness of the situation at hand. Even the items that the Japanese were allowed to bring were so small, and such necessities, that it was almost ridiculous to think that they were treated as human beings, and not the enemy that they wanted to destroy. The materials with which their barracks were built, and the beds they which they were given to sleep on, is almost like what one provided one's farm animals to sleep in for the night; unfair, inhumane, and animalistic.

Then, from the uncomfortable and inhumane items provided for the camp victims, we see the detailed descriptions of camp life provided by Nicole. She explained some of the horrific circumstances that many had to face, and how the camps became a place of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness for the future. The descriptions of life in the Japanese-American internment camps reveal the unfair treatment and conditions that the Japanese had to endure for several years based upon their ethnic heritage.

At the end of her letters Nicole writes, “in general, people suffered so much unnecessary uncomfortable situations that no one can really blame them for being bitter.³⁷” For example, at the internment camps, the Japanese Americans experienced placement behind barbed wire fences and “constantly being watched by soldiers on towers who would move back and forth along the fence.”³⁸ The fences kept the Japanese from escaping and to prevent any outsiders from coming in. This proves that American government designed the camps specifically for Japanese Americans. Nicole mentioned in her letters that many Japanese Americans held a “grudge against the government”

³⁷ Ibid, no page.

³⁸Ibid, no page.

because they experienced treatment similar prisoners, when they did not do anything wrong.³⁹

At the camps they had busy days, filled with plenty of work and common labor jobs such as trucking. Other jobs for many others included, “making makeshift tables, chairs, benches, etc.”⁴⁰ The military assigned Japanese American camp residents long shifts and sometimes forced them to work overtime.⁴¹ This indicates that their days were already scheduled for them and they did not have much of a say in what their daily activities would consist of. They received an unfair payment of only eight dollars to sixteen dollars for a forty-four hour workweek.⁴² What they were paid was not enough, considering the amount of hours they worked. Also, the food they had to eat was said to be terrible and non-nutritional, and the fact that “early birds eat first” shows that not enough food to feed all the people at the camp.⁴³ They were being deprived of food, a life necessity. They also experienced the deprivation of having a comfortable living space. The living quarters were cold, which shows they were forced to freeze were not given the luxury of having a heater or air condition, which made life uncomfortable for the

³⁹ Ibid, no page

⁴⁰ Ibid, no page.

⁴¹ Richard Drinnon. *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 5.

⁴² “The Camps Experience: Temporary Detention Centers,” Asian American Center, available from <http://www.asianamericanmedia.org/jainternment/camps/detention.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

⁴³ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections, available from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/> Internet; accessed 5 April 2010.

Japanese Americans. They also had to live where it was dusty, “rainy, and muddy.”⁴⁴ The temperatures at times were unbearable. During the winter it got below negative thirty degrees, and in the summer it reached above one hundred degrees.⁴⁵ She and many others were placed into several other unnecessary uncomfortable situations such as the water having chlorine in it. This is very unsanitary and can cause sickness. The camps took a toll on their health. For example, many of the Japanese in the camps experienced sicknesses and allergies such as hay fever. There was little or no medical care available to them. Children were deprived of a proper education. In the camps, the government did not supply any teachers and used camp members to be educators.⁴⁶ Some camps had schools, but they could not go back to the schools they once attended, which once again shows their limited freedom.

The Japanese victims at these relocation camps were provided with some recreation. They had a volleyball and basketball court, which shows that they had some time for recreation but not much because Nicole described their days mostly consisting of work. Quotes from an internment camp member shows that life in the camps were harsh and unfair. For example, Nicole says that she hopes that “someday they may all go back to normal life, enjoying peace and freedom and also that others will wish they were

⁴⁴Ibid, no page.

⁴⁵ Life in Japanese Internment Camps, “Think Quest, available from <http://library.thinkquest.org/TQ0312008/bhjc.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

⁴⁶ “Life in Japanese Internment Camps, “Think Quest, available from <http://library.thinkquest.org/TQ0312008/bhjc.html>; Internet; accessed 15 May 2010.

back where they were.”⁴⁷ This statements shows that she did not like the situation she was in and wanted to go back to her life where she wasn’t treated so unfairly. Overall the long work days, limited food, cold living quarters, and mud was not a favorable way to live and it was unfair that the Japanese were treated so harshly because of their ethnic heritage.⁴⁸

The Elizabeth Bayley Willis Papers reveal the society that created it because it continues shows the clear separation within racial class; between the hierarchy of military and government, and the Japanese peoples; and the extreme measures that were taken to make both the government’s distrust with the Japanese, and their priority in keeping the superior white American citizens safe. This was all proven by the levels of humanity displayed in the location, people, items, and descriptions of camp life at the Puyallup relocation facility. Understanding, researching, and studying my analysis in depth helps the reader learn lessons from history and apply those lessons to issues that face our society today, by taking what has happened prior to the current era, whether it be mistakes, successes, or both, and following patterns of events to make sure the negatives never happen again, and the positives only continue to flourish.

Nicole’s letters not only told of her experience in a Japanese internment camp during World War II, but it echoed the stories of thousands who were placed in the

⁴⁷ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections, available from <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/> Internet; accessed 5 April 2010.

⁴⁸ Richard Drinnon. *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 6.

camps. Despite Nicole's circumstances she kept a good attitude when she said, "Even now I feel that what I am going through is best for me at the time because I'm learning something."⁴⁹ It is important to look at her story and other's stories because it causes many to look at the realities of what really happened. The placement of the Japanese Americans into internment camps is not something that should be ignored. It is not an event that the United States should be proud of, but it is definitely something many can learn from. In a nation where freedom is valued, it is important to make sure that all have access to it. It is important to take precautions to make sure that one's freedoms are never violated like they were for the Japanese Americans during World War II.

⁴⁹ Camp Harmony Documents, Reports and Letters. University of Washington Library, Special Collections □ <http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Documents/Internet>; accessed 5 April 2010.