

林子園

MANZANAR

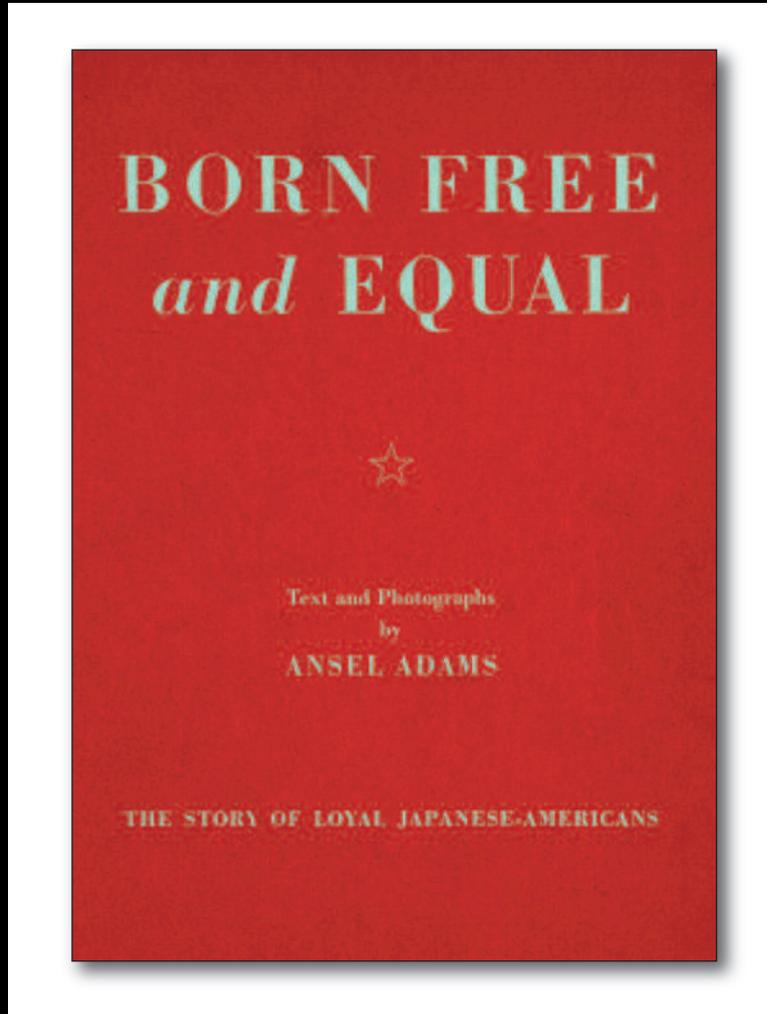


THE WARTIME PHOTOGRAPHS OF **ANSEL ADAMS**

Robert Flynn Johnson

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Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Exhibition Organized by
PHOTOGRAPHIC TRAVELING EXHIBITIONS
Los Angeles, CA



This exhibition features fifty photographs by Ansel Adams of the Japanese American relocation camp in Manzanar, California, during World War II. These photographs were the subject of his controversial book *Born Free and Equal*, published in 1944 while the war was still on, protesting the treatment of these American citizens. Also included in the exhibition are more than twenty-five various photographs, documents, and works of art that further record this era. These Adams Manzanar photographs from 1943 were shown in the exhibition *BORN FREE AND EQUAL: An Exhibition of Ansel Adams Photographs*, organized by the Fresno Metropolitan Museum of Art, History and Science in 1984 and are later prints from the original negatives in the Library of Congress.

Cover Image:

Ansel Adams (American, 1902–1984), ENTRANCE TO MANZANAR, 1943.
Silver gelatin print (printed later).

Exhibition Tour Management by
PHOTOGRAPHIC TRAVELING EXHIBITIONS
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THE WARTIME PHOTOGRAPHS OF ANSEL ADAMS

This exhibition recounts one of the darkest moments in the history of the United States, one that the distinguished author John Hersey referred to as “a mistake of terrifyingly horrible proportions.”¹ It is a story of ignorance and prejudice, but it is also a story of perseverance and nobility. What happened should never be forgotten so that it should never happen again.

Background

In the aftermath of the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent declaration of war by the United States, a wave of fear and paranoia swept the western United States and the Hawaiian Islands. Anxiety over possible invasion by Japanese forces or sabotage by fifth columnist Japanese and Japanese Americans living amongst the general American population overrode common sense in Government circles. Despite the protestations of Attorney General Francis Biddle, Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, and even F.B.I.

Director J. Edgar Hoover, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in the most unfortunate act of an otherwise admirable presidency, allowed public opinion and biased, racist attitudes of elements within the U.S. Army to induce him into issuing on February 19, 1942, Executive Order 9066: the forced evacuation of persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast.

This evacuation was done despite the fact that the F.B.I. had, within three days of Pearl Harbor, rounded up and arrested 857 Germans, 147 Italians, and 1,291 Japanese (367 in Hawaii and 924 on the mainland) for subversive activities. The government did not intern Germans, Italians, nor, with few exceptions, Japanese residing in Hawaii. Instead they rounded up Japanese and Japanese Americans residing in the western United States. In the end, these individuals were interned in ten camps spread over underpopulated areas of the West and in Arkansas in the Midwest.



Baldwin H. Ward (American, 20th century),
JAPANESE ATTACK PEARL HARBOR,
7:55 a.m., December 7, 1941.
Gelatin silver print (printed later).



Dorothea Lange (American, 1895–1965), JAPANESE-AMERICAN RELOCATION, 1942. Photographic reproduction.

The locations, dates of operation, and number of prisoners of the camps, according to John Armor and Peter Wright in their 1988 book *Manzanar*:

Gila River, Arizona	Aug. '42-Nov. '45	13,400
Granada, Colorado	Sept. '42-Oct. '45	7,600
Heart Mountain, Wyoming	Sept. '42-Nov. '45	11,100
Jerome, Arkansas	Nov. '42-June '44	8,600
Manzanar, California	June '41-Nov. '45	10,200
Minidoka, Idaho	Sept. '42-Oct. '45	9,990
Poston, Arizona	June '42-Nov. '45	18,000
Rohwer, Arkansas	Oct. '42-Nov. '45	8,500
Topaz, Utah	Oct. '42-Oct. '45	8,300
Tule Lake, California	June '42-Mar. '46	18,800
Total		114,490

The act of rounding up civilians and imprisoning them in camps had occurred in earlier centuries. The term “concentration camp” was first used to describe the actions of the British against the Boers during the Second Boer War (1899–1902), but today it is indistinguishable from the horrors of the extermination camps perpetrated by the Nazis against Jews, Russians, and other victims of the Reich in World War II. American authorities euphemistically labeled the Japanese internments as “war relocation centers,” but given the harsh conditions Japanese Americans suffered, a more appropriate term might be war relocation “camps.”

“Mine Okubo describes the conditions: “The camps represented a prison: no freedom, no privacy, no America. Internment camps were also guarded by U.S. military personnel and had a barbed wire perimeter.”²



Ansel Adams (American, 1902–1984), MANZANAR STREET SCENE, SPRING, 1943. Gelatin silver print (printed later).

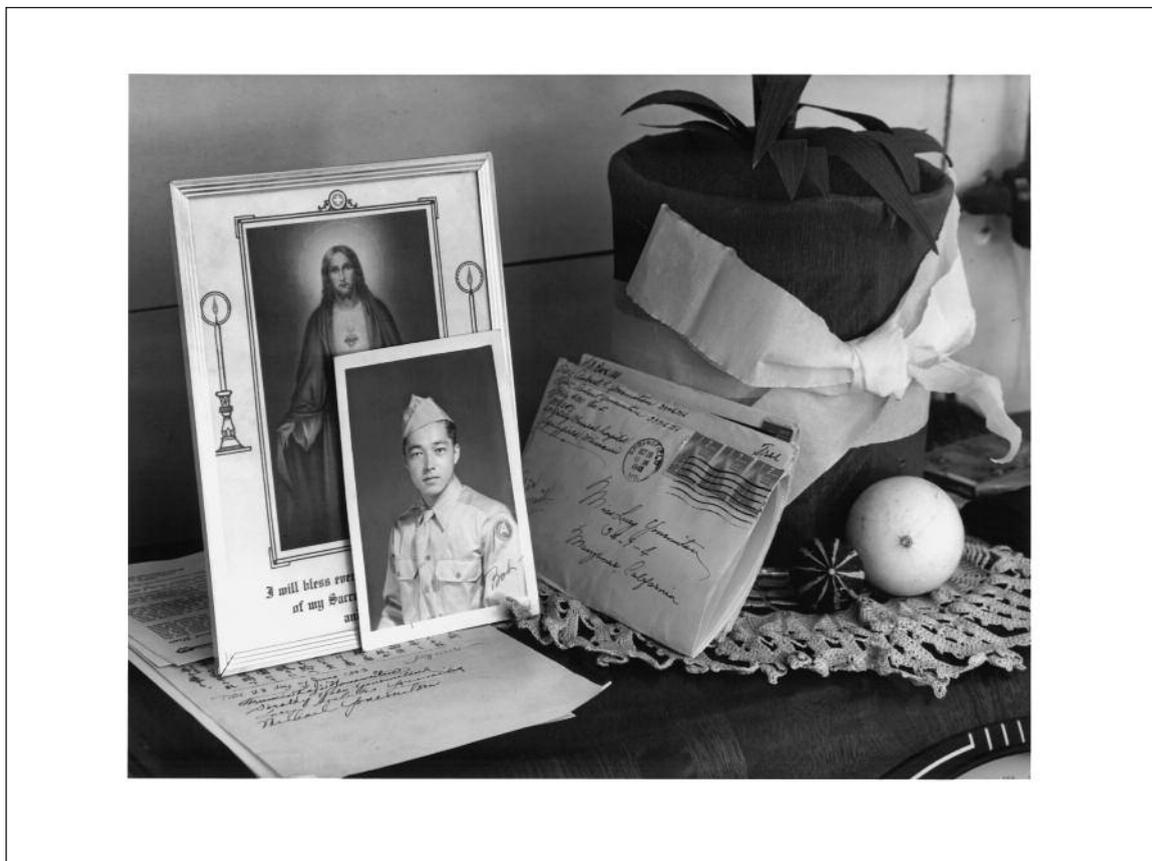
Manzanar

The brilliant social activist photographer Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) was hired by the U.S. government in the spring of 1942 to document this forced relocation. Her assignment included the camp at Manzanar, located in the remote Owens Valley in the northern reaches of Death Valley, California. However, when her photographs were submitted, they were viewed with alarm for showing the government in a bad light; the decision was made to impound (censor) her images until the end of the war.

It was only in 1943 that Ralph Merritt, the enlightened second director at Manzanar, invited his old friend Ansel Adams to come and photograph there. By that time, the internees had settled into their lives there coping as best they could. In 1942 a confrontation with camp guards had led to shots being fired, resulting in the deaths of two internees and the wounding of nine. There were no further incidents.

Some historians have criticized Adams's photographs, comparing them to the more politicized imagery of Lange. Linda Gordon wrote,

“Ansel Adams photographed at Manzanar a year after Lange did, producing work that, by contrast, reveals much about Lange's perspective. He tried to walk a cramped line, opposing anti-Asian racism, but avoiding identification with the opposition to the internment. Adams's pictures, primarily portraits—surprisingly for a landscape photographer—emphasized the



Ansel Adams (American, 1902–1984), PICTURES OF TOP OF PHOTOGRAPH, YONEMITSU HOME, 1943.
Gelatin silver print (printed later).

internees' stoic, polite, even cheerful making the best of it. His subjects were almost exclusively happy, smiling. His goal was to establish the internees as unthreatening, Americanized, open—scrutable rather than inscrutable. By making mainly individual portraits, he masked collective racial discrimination. The resultant hiding of the internment's violation of human rights was not an unintended consequence of this goal, but an expression of Adams's patriotism."³

There is no question that Lange was the stronger documentary photographer. However, Adams was working out of his comfort zone as a landscape photographer and his point was not to use his images to indict the authorities. Instead, he wished to portray the Japanese American internees as loyal Americans going about their lives like regular citizens, not as dangerous aliens. Adams saved his harshest attack on their unjust imprisonment for the language of his book, *Born Free and Equal*, published the following year, 1944.

In the text Adams struggled with the argument that the incarceration of these citizens was not just but justified by military necessity. However, he rejected that argument, clearly and forcefully articulating his opposition to the internment. The book was not well received. Adams was called a "Jap lover" and copies of the book were burned. To fully understand the "Profiles in Courage" stand Ansel Adams took by publishing *Born Free and Equal* while the war was still raging, one must understand the emotionally volatile nature of those times in which it was published. Adams's strong convictions are fully apparent when one reads his forceful words while viewing his beautiful photographic imagery.



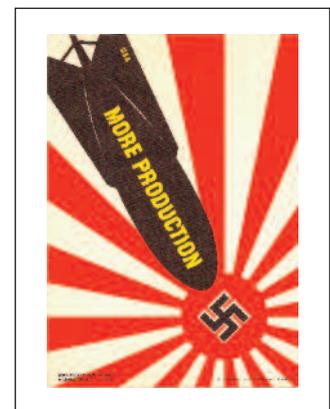
Chiura Obata (American, born Japan, 1885–1975), UNTITLED (San Francisco Bay with Mount Tamalpais), ca. 1940. Brush drawing.

Artistic Inspiration

Although none of the three drawings by Chiura Obata or the watercolor by Henry Minakata in this exhibition were done in Manzanar, they are representative of the creativity of Japanese American artists who did not allow their incarceration to dim their spirit.

Temper of the Times

In order to contextualize the Ansel Adams photographs and attempt to demonstrate fully the anxiety and paranoia in America in the days after Pearl Harbor that led to the unjustified forced evacuation of innocent citizens we have included in this exhibition propaganda posters, pennants, and magazine covers that illuminate the anger and outright racial prejudice in America at that time. The nation was at war and the Empire of Japan was the enemy. However, the antagonism against Germany and Italy at that time was almost solely directed at those countries' leaders not, as in the case of Japan, at a whole ethnic race.



Anonymous (American), MORE PRODUCTION, ca. 1942. Color lithograph poster.



Ansel Adams (American, 1902–1984), BIRDS ON WIRE, EVENING, 1943.
Gelatin silver print (printed later).

Conclusion

This is not only an art exhibition, a history lesson, or a study in race relations; it is all three. My hope is that it educates us about an unfortunate moment in our country's history that must be better understood and should serve as a warning against allowing emotion, prejudice and fear to overwhelm clarity and courage. Harold L. Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, in his 1944 foreword to *Born Free and Equal* sums up the essence of this human drama,

“It has long been my belief that the greatness of America has arisen in large part out of the diversity of her peoples. Before the war, peoples of Japanese ancestry were a small but valuable element in our population. Their record of law-abiding, industrious citizenship was surpassed by no other group. Their contributions to the arts, agriculture, and science were indisputable evidence that the majority of them believed in America and were growing with America.

“Then war came with the nation of their parental origin. The ensuing two and a half years have brought heartaches to many in our population. Among the casualties of war has been America's Japanese minority. It is my hope that the wounds which it has received in the great uprooting will heal. It is my prayer that other Americans will fully realize that to condone the whittling away of the rights of any one minority group is to pave the way for us all to lose the guarantees of the Constitution.”⁴

Robert Flynn Johnson

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¹John Hersey, “A Mistake of Terrifically Horrible Proportions,” in *Manzanar*, by John Armor and Peter Wright (New York: Times Books, 1988).

²Sara Ann McGill, “Internment of Japanese Americans,” <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/> (accessed May 3, 2010).

³Linda Gordon and Gary Y. Okihiro, ed., *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2006), 34

⁴Ansel Adams, *Born Free and Equal: The Story of Loyal Japanese-Americans* (New York: U.S. Camera, 1944), 7.