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MANZANAR



THE WARTIME PHOTOGRAPHS OF ANSEL ADAMS

Robert Flynn Johnson

Curator Emeritus, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Exhibition Organized by

PHOTOGRAPHIC TRAVELING EXHIBITIONS

Los Angeles, CA

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THE WARTIME PHOTOGRAPHS OF

ANSEL ADAMS

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. Adams's Manzanar work is a departure from his signature style of landscape photography. Although a majority of the photographs are portraits, the images also include views of daily life, agricultural scenes, and sports and leisure activities.

Robert Flynn Johnson, Curator Emeritus, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, in his essay for the exhibition writes, "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.' It is a story of ignorance and prejudice, but also a story of perseverance and nobility. What happened should never be forgotten so that it should never happen again." Johnson continues, "This is not only an art exhibition, a history lesson, or a study in race relations; it is all three. The hope is that it educates us about an unfortunate moment in the country's history that must be better understood. It also should serve as a warning as to what can occur when emotion and fear overwhelm clarity and courage."

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.

The exhibition was organized by Photographic Traveling Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA.

Note: The Japanese lettering above is the word for "Manzanar."

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ANSEL ADAMS

Ansel Adams was born in San Francisco in 1902 and died in Carmel, California, in 1984. During his influential life as a photographer, his contributions were prodigious. He helped establish Group f/64 devoted to straight photography with Edward Weston and others in 1932, the department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in 1940, the department of photography at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco in 1946, and the Friends of Photography in Carmel in 1967. He was an internationally known teacher of photography, and photographers from around the world came to study in his annual photography workshops in Yosemite.

A close personal friend of President Gerald Ford, he was well known as a pioneering conservationist and director of the Sierra Club from 1934 to 1971. Ansel Adams authored numerous books on photography of both a general and technical nature. His photographs are represented in major museum collections worldwide and he is considered one of the foremost landscape photographers in the history of the medium.



FOREWORD

From the book *BORN FREE AND EQUAL*, 1944

“Moved by the human story unfolding in the encirclement of desert and mountains, and by the wish to identify my photography in some creative way with the tragic momentum of the times, I came to Manzanar with my cameras in the fall of 1943. For many years, I have photographed the Sierra Nevada, striving to reveal by the clear statement of the lens those qualities of the natural scene which claim the emotional and spiritual response of the people. In these years of strain and sorrow, the grandeur, beauty, and quietness of the mountains are more important to us than ever before. I have tried to record the influence of the tremendous landscape of Inyo on the life and spirit of thousands of people living by force of circumstance in the Relocation Center of Manzanar. ...

“I believe that the acrid splendor of the desert, ringed with towering mountains, has strengthened the spirit of the people of Manzanar. I do not say all are conscious of this influence, but I am sure most have responded, in one way or another, to the resonances of their environment. From the harsh soil they have extracted fine crops; they have made gardens glow in the firebreaks and between the barracks. Out of the jostling, dusty confusion of the first bleak days in raw barracks they have modulated to a democratic internal society and a praiseworthy personal adjustment to conditions beyond their control. The huge vistas and the stern realities of sun and wind and space symbolize the immensity and opportunity of America—perhaps a vital reassurance following the experience of enforced exodus. ...

“I trust the content and message of this book will suggest that the broad concepts of American citizenship, and of liberal, democratic life the world over, must be protected in the prosecution of the war, and sustained in the building of the peace to come.”

—Ansel Adams, *Born Free and Equal*, 1944



CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

Amendment XIV

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state in which they reside.

No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

—Enacted July 9, 1868

“As a nation we began by declaring that ‘all men are created equal.’ We now practically read it ‘all men are created equal, except Negroes.’ When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read, ‘all men are created equal, except Negroes and foreigners and Catholics.’ When it comes to this, I shall prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty ... where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.”

—Abraham Lincoln, from a letter to
Joshua Speed, written at Springfield,
August 24, 1855

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PREJUDICE

“A Jap is a Jap”

—General John DeWitt, in charge of the
Western Defense Command, 1941

“... that all Japanese, whether citizens or not, be placed in inland concentration camps. As justification for this, I submit that if an American-born Japanese, who is a citizen, is really patriotic and wishes to make his contribution to the safety and welfare of this country, right here is his opportunity to do so, namely, by permitting himself to be placed in a concentration camp, he would be making his sacrifice. ... Millions of other native-born citizens are willing to lay down their lives, which is a far greater sacrifice, of course, than being placed in a concentration camp.”

—Secretary of War Henry Stinson,
January 16, 1942

“The Pacific Coast is in imminent danger of a combined attack from within and without. ... It is a fact that the Japanese navy has been reconnoitering the coast more or less continuously ... There is an assumption [in the Justice Department] that a citizen may not be interfered with unless he has committed an overt act. ... The Pacific Coast is officially a combat zone. Some part of it may at any moment be a battlefield. And nobody ought to be on a battlefield who has no good reason for being there. There is plenty of room elsewhere for him to exercise his rights.”

—Walter Lippmann, February 12, 1942

“Do you get what Lippmann says? ... The Japanese in California should be under armed guard to the last man and woman right now and to hell with habeas corpus until the danger is over.”

—Westbrook Pegler, 1942

“The area lying to the west of Cascade and Sierra Nevada Mountains in Washington, Oregon, and California, is highly critical not only because the lines of communication and supply to the Pacific theater pass through it, but also because of the vital industrial production therein, particularly aircraft. In the war in which we are now engaged racial affinities are not severed by migration. The Japanese race is an enemy race and while many second and third generation Japanese born on United States soil, possessed of United States citizenship, have become ‘Americanized,’ the racial strains are undiluted. To conclude otherwise is to expect that children born of white parents on Japanese soil sever all racial affinity and become loyal Japanese subjects, ready to fight and, if necessary, to die for Japan in a war against the nation of their parents. That Japan is allied with Germany and Italy in this struggle is no ground for assuming that any Japanese, barred from assimilation by convention as he is, against this nation, when the final test of loyalty comes. It, therefore, follows that along the vital Pacific Coast over 112,000 potential enemies, of Japanese extraction, are at large today. There are indications that these are organized and ready for concerted action at a favorable opportunity. The very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken.”

—General John DeWitt, in charge of the
Western Command, 1942

“A viper is nonetheless a viper wherever the egg is hatched—so a Japanese-American born of Japanese parents—grows up to be a Japanese, not an American”

—*Los Angeles Times*, 1942

In the entire course of the war, ten people in the United States were convicted of spying for Japan. All of them were Caucasians.