

Prisoner in My Homeland Part 2

Guiding Question: What was it like for Japanese Americans to live, work, and go to school in prison camps like Manzanar?

Document Analysis

“The Years Between” by Kaizo Kubo

Kaizo was a high school junior at Poston Incarceration Camp in Arizona and won honorable mention for this essay in a national contest sponsored by Scholastic Magazine in 1945. This was printed in the Poston Chronicle. Read the essay and respond to the questions that follow.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• left• silent disbelief• focus on my misery• for less money than they were worth	<p>My name is Kaizo Kubo. I have a story to tell. It concerns three years of my past, years which will no doubt leave their marks on me to the end of my days. My name probably sounds strange, foreign; so will my story.</p> <p>I am American, although for the last three long years I have been so in name only. I am writing these very words behind the shadows of barbed wire. I've done no wrong. My only crime is that my hair is black, my skin yellow, my eyes slant; because I am of Japanese ancestry. This is my personal account of prejudice and of human blindness...</p> <p>I was born in a small town in California not far from the Pacific Ocean. If not for an unfortunate quirk of fate, I would in all probability have never <u>stirred from</u> the scene of so many happy memories. That black day I read the news in the daily papers left me momentarily paralyzed. I stared in <u>mute incredulity</u> at the words emblazoned in bold print: GOVERNMENT ORDERS MASS REMOVAL OF ALL JAPANESE FROM COAST HOMES TO INLAND WAR CENTERS.</p> <p>I took it hard. It meant leaving the only life I knew, parting with my boyhood friends. It spelled goodbye to life. Was this what I had believed in? Was this democracy?</p> <p>In the ensuing weeks I was spared little time to <u>brood</u> or to think. In the upheaval that followed, we lost our home. Our belongings were either discarded or at best sold <u>at pitiful losses</u>. Before my very eyes my world crumbled.</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strange • foolish confidence • ghost • heartbreakingly • someone forced from their home • housed • in this situation • being forever angry • learned • learning experience 	<p>From the instant I stepped into the barbed wire enclosures of our destination, I felt that <u>queer alienable</u> presence within me. All the <u>rash bravado</u> I had saved for this precise moment vanished like a <u>disembodied soul</u>. I suddenly felt incredibly small and alone. So this was imprisonment.</p> <p>The oppressive silhouette of the guard towers looming cold and dark in the distance affected me in only one way. They seemed to threaten, to challenge me. I hated their ugly hugeness, the power they symbolized. I hold only contempt for that for which they stand. They kept <u>poignantly</u> clear in my mind the inescapable truth that I was a prisoner.</p> <p>Then my life as an <u>evacuee</u> began, with a government granted broom, a bucket, and a twelve by twenty foot room. We were <u>quartered</u> in converted horse stables... Men, women, and children shared these discomforts alike. I learned to eat with strangers, to wash and bathe side by side with unfamiliar faces, and I learned that to hear and not be heard was the best or at least the most healthful policy to follow...</p> <p>Three years of a hard existence behind steel and armed guards, no matter what the conditions, cannot go without its ill effects... Life as a prisoner offers little incentive for progress; hence, people have lost their sense of purpose. I did too...but I overcame it, and now I am thinking more clearly..</p> <p>Here is what I say: there is no need to be bitter. We are <u>situated thus</u> through no fault of our own, but there is nothing to gain by <u>eternally brooding</u> for things that might have been. I have <u>exacted</u> lessons from my past which I hope to put to advantage in my future.</p> <p>I shall be on my own. It will be no new experience for me. Evacuation was a <u>pioneering project</u>; re-establishing myself into the American stream of life can be looked upon as another such enterprise. Now I stand on the threshold of freedom. I face the</p>
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	<p>future unafraid, proud of my ancestry, but even prouder of my heritage as an American.</p> <p>--Kaizo Kubo Honorable Mention</p> <p>Scholastic Literary Contest</p> <p><i>Text adapted for student readability.</i></p>
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Close Reading Questions

1. What do you think Kaizo means when he says the past three years “will no doubt leave their marks on me to the end of my days?”
2. What does Kaizo mean when he says he has been “an American in name only”?
3. What is the “crime” that Kaizo is saying he committed? Why does he think he “did no wrong?”
4. Why did Kaizo take the forced removal of Japanese Americans so hard?
5. What were his initial thoughts and experiences when he first arrived at the prison camp?

