



WELCOME!

california READS OVERVIEW

Welcome to *California Reads*, a statewide program that brings Californians together to explore important topics through reading and discussion. This year, our theme is *Searching For Democracy*. What does democracy mean to us? What challenges has American democracy faced in the past? How can we strengthen our democracy in the future? How can we talk and work together despite our differences? What can we learn from the experiences of others who have struggled with these questions?

California Reads offers a choice of five superb books to act as a springboard for community discussion. These works include fiction as well as non-fiction, and were written by men and women of diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. There are many ways to experience and explore what democracy means, strives for in its promise, and requires for its success. No singular book can capture all of these complexities, and each selection offers the reader an opportunity to discover new perspectives by inviting us to think about individual responsibility, the importance of a free press, the collective good, and what it is needed from each of us to sustain a healthy democracy.

Cal Humanities and the California Center for the Book are partnering on this project because we feel books—and the conversations they spark—can make a difference in the world. We hope this will be just the first of many statewide conversations under our *California Reads* banner, providing Californians with opportunities to read and discuss stories and ideas that matter. Whether you are joining the discussion through a program at your local library, bookstore, school or elsewhere, we hope you will be inspired by these books and enjoy a new connection with your community and your state.

With gratitude,



Ralph Lewin
President and CEO
Cal Humanities



Mary Menzel
Director
California Center for the Book

California Reads is a new program of Cal Humanities developed in partnership with the California Center for the Book and the California State Library. It invites Californians from all walks of life throughout our state to participate in reading and discussion programs and related activities hosted by libraries, schools, colleges, bookstores and other community institutions.

We have selected a slate of books this year to stimulate a thoughtful reflection of, and lively discussion among, friends and neighbors, family and strangers about the past, present, and future of democracy. Five thought-provoking books were chosen from a pool of over 300 titles nominated by members of the public, and based upon the final recommendations of an advisory group of librarians, authors, scholars, publishers and critics.

These five books were selected:

- *The Penguin Guide to the United States Constitution: A Fully Annotated Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution and Amendments, and Selections from The Federalist Papers*, by Richard Beeman. Annotated by one of the nation's foremost Constitutional scholars, this compact edition of our nation's founding documents provides text and context for readers seeking to understand the framework of our democracy as well as its meaning, past and present.
- *Farewell to Manzanar*, by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston. A heartbreaking and compelling memoir about the Japanese American internment experience as seen through the eyes of young girl, this personal story bears witness to a failure of American democracy.
- *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*, by Rebecca Solnit. A masterwork of narrative nonfiction by a contemporary California writer reaches some surprising conclusions about our need for community and common purpose, which she argues are fundamental to democratic forms of social and political life.
- *It Can't Happen Here*, by Sinclair Lewis. This underappreciated classic by one of America's greatest novelists, first published in 1935, imagines a chillingly undemocratic America. It details the rise of a populist politician as he creates a fascist regime, and reminds us of the fragility of our democratic institutions.
- *Lost City Radio*, by Daniel Alarcon. A haunting novel by a young California writer explores the aftermath of a traumatic civil war in a fictitious South American country, and raises questions about the importance of historical knowledge, collective memory, and public access to information in a democratic society.

The discussion guides for each book—like this one—provide an overview of the book and author, a series of discussion questions to begin conversations, a brief author interview, bibliographies and other supplemental resources for interested readers. A K-12 curriculum guide for each book is also available to further support classroom activities. All of these materials, along with additional resources and information about *Searching for Democracy* and *California Reads* public programs and activities at libraries and other community venues, can be found at our web site at www.calhum.org/searchingfordemocracy.

SEARCHING *for* DEMOCRACY OVERVIEW

Leading into the national 2012 elections, *Searching for Democracy* is the culmination of a two year-long initiative that provides Californians with various ways to explore how the humanities can provide insight and opportunities to converse about the nature, state and needs of our vibrant American democracy. Cal Humanities and its partners will explore these complexities—through a series of local, regional, and statewide humanities-inspired activities—to accomplish a greater understanding of what is needed to sustain a healthy democracy in an increasingly interdependent world.

Students, families and people from all walks of life will explore—online and in person—what discoveries and lessons lie in works of fiction and nonfiction, provocative cultural exhibits and public conversations. The Cal Humanities website (www.calhum.org) will be an online hub for all activities, where participants in events, readers of the initiative's books, and people new to our effort can learn more and share what they have discovered.

Our *Searching For Democracy* program partners include: California libraries, California Center for the Book, California History-Social Science Project, Exhibit Envoy, and Zócalo Public Square, in collaboration with California State Library, California Community Colleges, California State University, and University of California Television.

about the book *Farewell to Manzanar*

by *Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston & James D. Houston*



Farewell to Manzanar is the true story of a dark chapter in U.S. history, when thousands of American citizens were stripped of their constitutional rights in the name of national security. The bombing of Pearl Harbor that led to America's entry into WWII also fueled a climate of fear and fanned the flames of existing anti-Japanese sentiment. This was the context in which

the government issued Executive Order 9066, ordering Japanese-Americans in the western states to take up residence in government-created internment camps. Jeanne Wakatsuki was seven years old in 1942 when her family was uprooted from their home and fishing business in Long Beach, California, and relocated to Manzanar in the foothills of California's Eastern Sierras, taking only the belongings they could carry. The Wakatsukis spent the next three years in the shadow of guard towers behind barbed wire, virtual prisoners in their own country.

At age 37, Houston was finally able to come to terms with the experience and to record her recollections of life at Manzanar. She and her co-author, her husband James Houston, describe how she, her family, and other members of the community endeavored to adapt to this drastic upheaval and create some semblance of normality, as well as how, on release, they faced continuing discrimination as they struggled to rebuild their lives. With humanity and humor, the book tells of the dignity and great resourcefulness of Jeanne's fellow internees in the midst of demeaning circumstances, as well as the devastating psychological effect the internment had on individuals and families. The book also invites us to consider whether the events it portrays could happen again in our country during a time of crisis and, if so, how we would respond.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* named *Farewell to Manzanar* one of the twentieth century's 100 best nonfiction books from west of the Rockies.

about the authors

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston & James D. Houston



Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston was born in 1934 in Inglewood, California. The youngest of 10 children, she spent her early childhood in Southern California until 1942 when she and her family were relocated to the World War II

internment camp at Manzanar, California. At the close of the war, in 1945, her family returned to Southern California where they lived until they moved to San Jose in 1952. Houston was the first in her family to earn a college degree. She met James D. Houston while attending San Jose State University. They married in 1957 and had three children. In 1971 she decided to write about her family's experience during WWII and collaborated with her husband on *Farewell to Manzanar*.

Published in 1973, her book has become a part of many schools' curriculum on the subject of the Japanese American internment. In 1976 she adapted the book into a screenplay of the same name. Houston continued to write and to collaborate with husband, until his death in 2009. In 2003, her first novel, *The Legend of Fire Horse Woman*, was published. She is the recipient of numerous honors, including the Humanitas Prize and the Christopher Award, both for the screenplay *Farewell to Manzanar*. In 2006, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston received the Award of Excellence for her contributions to society from the Japanese American National Museum. She lectures in both university and community settings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Farewell to Manzanar

by *Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston & James D. Houston*

1 When the National Park Service opened an interactive center for visitors at the site of Manzanar Relocation Camp, one of its goals was to “provoke ... dialogue on civil rights, democracy and freedom.” The opening exhibit included side-by-side photos of the U.S.S. Arizona and the World Trade Center, making a link to the anti-Arab sentiment that had followed 9/11 and the sentiments towards Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Do you see a connection?

2 Jeanne writes that, in order for the internment to happen, “there has to be a kind of acquiescence on the part of the victims, some submerged belief that this treatment is deserved, or at least allowable.” What factors, in your opinion, led the majority of Japanese Americans to cooperate with the internment order? If internment camps were proposed now, do you think Americans would cooperate?

3 Jeanne writes that eating in the mess hall led to the collapse of her family as “an integrated unit.” Why do you think that the disruption in mealtime togetherness was so significant to her family?

4 Papa is put in an impossible position when he is questioned about whether American or Japan is his country. He asks, “When your mother and your father are having a fight, do you want them to kill each other? Or do you just want them to stop fighting?” How would you answer this if you were in his position?

5 The loyalty oath that the Japanese Americans are asked to sign is tremendously divisive to the Manzanar internees. Do you think that it was legitimate for the U.S. to ask first-generation Japanese-Americans, who were not allowed to become citizens, to renounce their love of Japan? What does “loyalty” mean under these circumstances? In today’s society, we see similar issues such as adherents of a religion being asked not to wear headscarves; they must choose between loyalty to their religion or peace with their country of citizenship. What other similarities do you see in today’s society?

6 When the government indicates that military service is a way for the internees to prove their loyalty, the Japanese American Citizens League argues that “the most effective way Japanese Americans could combat the attitudes that put them in Manzanar was to shed their blood on the battlefield.” Do you agree? Was it fair? Do you see any connection with the present day, either with “don’t ask, don’t tell,” with the role of women in the military, or with giving immigrants who serve in the military a fast track to citizenship?

7 As the months turned to years, Manzanar became the only reality for the internees: “It was as if the war was forgotten, our reason for being there forgotten... You learn to contain your rage and despair, and you try to recreate, as well as you can, your normality...” Thus the camp has sports leagues, beauty parlors, glee clubs, Boy Scouts, and other elements of an ordinary American small town. Do you think these social structures and activities had any positive value for the internees? Or were they an example of “normalizing the unthinkable”?

8 Eventually the family is told that the camps will be closed and they must return to the west coast, where they know they’ll face the suspicions and distrust of their neighbors. Jeanne says, “That continuous, unnamed ache I had been living with was precise and definable now. Call it the foretaste of being hated.” At the age of ten, Jeanne thinks “...something about me deserved it.” Is there anything that could have been done to rescue her from this feeling?

9 It seems as if news of the war’s end was met with a mixture of feelings in many of the internees. Can you understand their ambivalence?

10 When the family returns to Long Beach to find most of their possessions stolen or confiscated, Papa never really recovers from the loss but he never quite gives up, either. Jeanne says, “One of the amazing things about America is the way it can both undermine you and keep you believing in your own possibilities, pumping you with hope.” Do you agree?

11 On her first day in sixth grade, after being released from Manzanar, Jeanne reads aloud in class and another girl says, “Gee, I didn’t know you could speak English.” From that day on, Jeanne says, “part of me yearned to be invisible.” Do minority children still experience similar feelings of alienation and isolation in our present-day society?

12 In school post-Manzanar, Jeanne excels in academic work and activities such as the yearbook, but the band teacher has to get permission from the school board to appoint an Asian majorette. She writes, “I was apologetic for imposing such a burden on those who had to decide... I was determined to try twice as hard to prove they’d make the right choice.” Have you seen any other groups or individuals in the US, or your own town, feel the need to try twice as hard to prove their worth? Do you think people in our society still feel this way?

In what ways is your book a book about democracy?

Farewell to Manzanar is a true story about one family's experience during WWII, told from the perspectives of a child experiencing the event and as an adult looking in retrospect and finally understanding the impact it had on her identity as a Japanese-American. The larger picture of this story is the flagrant violation of the United States Constitution - the imprisonment of a group of individuals (120,000, of which 70% were native born American citizens) because of their race. "They looked like the enemy". This act was instigated by the military and carried out by Executive Order 9066 without a trial or hearing.

Do writers have special roles or responsibilities in democratic societies?

Most writers I know indulge in writing because they love to write. In my experience, the writing of *Farewell to Manzanar* was personally cathartic. The collaboration began when my husband, writer Jim Houston, realized there was a story to be told when I finally revealed to him that part of my life I had kept secret for the seventeen years we had been married. In 1973, I had the idea to write a "family memoir" for my seven nieces and nephews born in Manzanar. As I began, I opened wounds I wasn't aware existed and was unable to follow through. I turned to Jim for assistance. He remarked, "This is not a story just for your family. This is a story every American in this country should know. Let me help you." Thus, began a long process of interviewing - of myself, my family and other internees willing to talk about it. I feel, in this case, Jim truly felt the role of a writer as a responsible chronicler of a historical event that flagrantly abused the basic tenets of the Constitution and foundation of democracy.

What relationship do the literary arts and humanities have to democracy?

Democracy is dependent on the participation of the population. Literary arts and the humanities voice ideals, hopes, thoughts and creative imagination that can be shared among readers in an inclusive and affordable way. No entry fees to museums—just an ability to read.

Do you think American democracy is fragile or robust?

I think American democracy is as strong as the populace is willing to VOTE and thus, participate in the political process. It is also dependent on education, on being able to read and having awareness between truth and "advertisement" and "propaganda" passed off as news on TV.

What concerns you about the current state and the future of our democracy? What makes you hopeful?

The press and television fueling economic fears - politicians blaming immigrants, migrant workers and "the other" for job losses and the economic turn-down; and the thinking that a military problem overseas spurs economic growth in the U.S. I am hopeful when I become aware that there are movements and events countering this "scapegoat" thinking. Most inspiring is the fact that a Council for the Humanities, on a state level, can create and sponsor a program such as "California Reads", which furthers reading, which besides enlightening readers, highlights our libraries as the important bastions of cultural knowledge.

What questions would you like readers to keep in mind as they read your book?

I would like readers to keep in mind that my story is "just one" of many different stories surviving internees could tell about their experience of incarceration.

Your book raises the questions "Who are We the People? Who is really American?" in relation to the WWII period. Are these questions still relevant today?

Who Are We The People?

All Americans are either recent immigrants or descendants of immigrants from another country...except for two groups: Native Americans who were the original occupiers of the New World when the Europeans arrived; African Americans who were brought to America as slaves and not immigrants. Thus, being "American" is not a question of race or tribe with similar physical attributes. It is a non-physical identity; a state of mind that values freedom and governing by the people for the people. It values individuality, and hopefully will extend to cultural diversity, making the tapestry of varied cultures in American society a truly American value. Our differences are our strength and our power.

Has your interpretation of the personal as well as the political history you describe in FTM changed over time?

My interpretation of personal history and political history told in FTM has not changed over time...but has been enlarged and grown in terms of depth...emotional as well as historical. But that would be another book about which to write.

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTS *for further reading & viewing*

for adults

Citizen 13660 by Mine Okubo (1946): Illustrated memoir of a Japanese-American woman's life in an internment camp. Also good for teen readers.

Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment (2008): Photos taken by Lange when she was employed by the War Relocation Authority.

My Guantanamo Diary by Mahvish Khan (2008): Nonfiction from an Afghan-American lawyer who volunteered to translate for lawyers and detainees at Guantanamo.

for teens & tweens

Denied, Detained, Deported: Stories from the Dark Side of American Immigration by Ann Baumsum (2009): Tales of three immigrants offer a glimpse of troubling aspects of U.S. immigration policy.

Eyes of the Emperor by Graham Salisbury (2005): Teenaged Japanese-American boy in Honolulu lies about his age to join the army just weeks before Pearl Harbor—an event that changes his peers' impression of him.

And Justice for All: An Oral History of the Japanese-American Internment Camps by John Tateishi (1984): Recollections from 30 Japanese-Americans who were placed in detention camps.

for children

So Far from the Sea by Eve Bunting (2009): A Japanese-American girl and her family visit the grave of her grandfather who died in the Manzanar detention camp.

Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuk (1993): Picture book depicts a Japanese-American boy's internment and his baseball skills which help him to earn respect.

The Bracelet by Yoshiko Uchida (1996): The loss of a bracelet (a gift from a friend) weighs on a Japanese-American girl as she and her family endure an internment camp.

for viewing

Come See the Paradise (1991): Love story depicts a Caucasian soldier's service in WWII while his Japanese-American wife and their daughter are relegated to an internment camp.

Children of the Camps (1999): Six adults recount their years spent in Japanese-American internment camps as children in the 1940's.

American Pastime (2007): Feature film about the families of an internment camp guard and a Japanese American boy whose dreams of baseball stardom are shattered by the internment. A baseball game between the guards and the internees might be the way to unite the community.

online resources

www.densho.org/

A site dedicated to the preservation of the testimonies of Japanese Americans who were unjustly incarcerated during World War II. It offers first-person accounts, digitally archived photos and documents, videotaped oral histories, and resources for exploring the principles of democracy and the promotion of equal justice for all.

www.janm.org/collections/

The Japanese American National Museum's mission is to make known the Japanese American experience as an integral part of our nation's heritage. Its online collections feature highlights from the museum's permanent collection of over 60,000 unique artifacts, documents, and photographs. Much of the online archive focuses on images and stories from the Japanese internment during WWII.



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about cal humanities

Cal Humanities is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting a greater understanding of the human condition. We produce, fund, and support cultural experiences in media, literature, discussion programs and more. Through engaging and inspiring work, we encourage our audiences to learn more, dig deeper, and start conversations that matter to create a State of Open Mind.

To learn more about us, please visit www.calhum.org

about the california center for the book

As part of a network of Centers for the Book in every state of the Union, all affiliated with the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, the California Center for the Book develops statewide programs that celebrate California's rich literary heritage, encourage reading and discussion, and promote libraries as centers for community engagement and lifelong learning. It is supported by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.

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