



Whispered Silences: Japanese Americans and World War II

Gary Y. Okihiro

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Whispered Silences presents memories and images of the American detention camps to which 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of them U.S. citizens, were sent during World War II. Haunted by a visit to one of the detention camps, fine-arts photographer Joan Myers embarked on an odyssey to record all ten of the camps where Japanese Americans were held, from the deserts of California and the Southwest to the swamps of Arkansas. The result is a series of evocative black-and-white photographs of the camps as they appear today and of items left behind in them - barracks steps, guard tower footings, cemeteries, dried up ponds and rock work from abandoned gardens, children's toys. Historian Gary Okihiro tells the story of the camps almost exclusively from the reminiscences of former internees, giving voice to the photographs' stark images. His essay extends to the earliest days of Japanese settlement in America, interweaving historical background, personal accounts, and his own family's experience, moving between Japan, Hawaii, and the mainland United States. Whispered Silences relates a very personal and informal history of Japanese Americans and World War II. It compels us to feel the trauma of the wartime detention, which disrupted and ruined so many lives.

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