



Jewel of the Desert: Japanese American Internment at Topaz

Sandra C. Taylor

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In the spring of 1942, under the guise of "military necessity," the U.S. government evacuated 110,000 Japanese Americans from their homes on the West Coast. About 7,000 people from the San Francisco Bay Area—the vast majority of whom were American citizens—were moved to an assembly center at Tanforan Racetrack and then to a concentration camp in Topaz, Utah. Dubbed the "jewel of the desert," the camp remained in operation until October 1945. This compelling book tells the history of Japanese Americans of San Francisco and the Bay Area, and of their experiences of relocation and internment.

Sandra C. Taylor first examines the lives of the Japanese Americans who settled in and around San Francisco near the end of the nineteenth century. As their numbers grew, so, too, did their sense of community. They were a people bound together not only by common values, history, and institutions, but also by their shared status as outsiders. Taylor looks particularly at how Japanese Americans kept their sense of community and self-worth alive in spite of the upheavals of internment.

The author draws on interviews with fifty former Topaz residents, and on the archives of the War Relocation Authority and newspaper reports, to show how relocation and its aftermath shaped the lives of these Japanese Americans. Written at a time when the United States once again regards Japan as a threat, Taylor's study testifies to the ongoing effects of prejudice toward Americans whose face is also the face of "the enemy."



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