

Yuji Ichioka, *Before Internment: Essays in Prewar Japanese American History*. Edited by Gordon H. Chang & Eiichiro Azuma. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006. xxviii + 360 pages.

Yuji Ichioka (1936–2002) has prepared a brilliant volume of essays on Japanese-American history in the 1920s and 1930s. *Before Internment* is a sequel to Ichioka's 1988 work, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885–1924*. Carefully edited by two gifted historians, Gordon H. Chang and Eiichiro Azuma, this posthumous work examines the cultural divide between and the intergenerational experiences of the native-born *issei* 一世 (*lit.*, “first generation”) and American-born *nisei* 二世 (*lit.*, “second generation”) communities between the end of World War I in 1918 and the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Ichioka's essays introduce us to a kaleidoscope of individuals and topics which, when read together, present an intense look at the problems and conflicting issues facing Japanese immigrants and their children in the pre-World War II era. They had to confront intense pressure from a predominantly white society—one that overwhelmingly rejected them on racial grounds. “This racial animus toward the Japanese, unlike that toward the blacks, included a white fear that Japanese had superior traits, which made

them formidable opponents against whom Americans could not compete” (p. 25).

Ichioka brilliantly places the *issei* and *nisei* within the context of the anti-Japanese era in which they lived. “On the one hand, Japanese immigrants constituted a powerless racial minority. Denied the right of naturalization, they were unable to participate in the American political process in order to defend themselves. On the other hand, the anti-Japanese forces commanded overwhelming power and influence. They included among their number organized labor, the American Legion, various nativist groups, local Granger organizations, many local and state politicians, and much of the news media. In the face of such racist opposition, often of a violent nature, Japanese immigrants could only appeal to an abstract sense of American justice and fair play” (pp. 252–53).

Issei and *nisei* also had to contend with conflicting loyalties between their country of origin and their new home in the United States in a period when these countries were spiraling toward war. Many influential Americans shared a distrust of Japanese Americans, fearing that they were a potentially subversive element in American society that would come to the aid of Tokyo in the event of war. Ichioka demonstrates that some of these fears were not unfounded, because a number of Japanese Americans supported—and in a few cases even worked for—their mother country before and after Pearl Harbor.

The focus of the book is predominately on the *nisei* generation that grew up between the wars. Ichioka studies in detail the attempts by *issei* and by the Japanese government to teach *nisei* about their native culture and language. They created Japanese-language institutes and offered scholarships so that *nisei* could tour Japan. However, as a whole, *nisei* were far more influenced by the American culture(s) and values that they encountered in public schools. Ichioka notes that these schools “so successfully socialized the Nisei to American values that the Nisei became largely acculturated to American culture and society” (p. 46). As a result, many *nisei* faced an intense cultural dilemma in the days before Pearl Harbor, when Japan was fighting a brutal war in China: “Issei leaders expected them to champion Japan’s case in China and chastised them when they did not. On the other hand, if they stood up in defense of Japan, their loyalty to the United States came under a cloud of suspicion, making any public rationalization of Japan’s side in the Sino-Japanese War [1904–5] impossible” (p. 46).

Ichioka demonstrates the complexity of Japanese-American life and relationships between Japan and the United States through a series of beautifully researched portraits of individuals. We meet Dr. Honda Rikita (1893–1941), a former Japanese soldier and physician who later set up a highly successful medical practice in Los Angeles. His suicide—while undergoing FBI questioning after Pearl Harbor because of his alleged pro-Japanese

sympathies—gave the Japanese great ammunition to substantiate their portrait of the United States as a racist society. We are introduced to the infamous 1941 Tachibana Espionage case as well as the case of Kazumaro “Buddy” Uno (1913–54), a *nisei* who migrated to Japan in the 1930s to become a pro-Japanese journalist and propagandist. We also encounter Louis Adamic (1898–1951), an American writer who embraced the inclusion of all minorities into the American mainstream, including Japanese. And we meet James Yoshinori Sakamoto (1903–55), a journalist who initially sought to build a bridge between the United States and Japan but who then became a fervent American nationalist after Pearl Harbor.

Ichioka was well prepared to write this book. A founder of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center and adjunct professor of history at UCLA for many years, he coined the term “Asian American” in the late 1960s to unify previously diverse Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino groups. His first book, *The Issei*, received positive reviews and several awards; *Before Internment* is a most fitting sequel. Ichioka was unable to finish the work before his sudden and untimely death, and Chang and Azuma decided not to tamper with the integrity of Ichioka’s work, even if it was only about 90 percent finished. With more time, I am certain that Ichioka would have resolved the only real flaw of the book: a rather annoying repetition of various incidents and biographies. An introduction and an epilogue by the editors place the book in the context of the times and remind the readers how lucky we are to be able to access Ichioka’s unfinished masterpiece.

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