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## Review of *Jewel of the Desert: Japanese American Internment at Topaz* by Sandra C. Taylor

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**Jewel of the Desert: Japanese American Internment at Topaz.** Sandra C. Taylor. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Maps, photos and references. xix + 343 pp. \$35.00.

Until recently, the majority of the research dealing with the relocation and internment of Japanese Americans, or *Nikkei* as they are known among themselves, during World War II has been focused largely on the structural aspects of that experience. That is, how did the government of the United States come to the conclusion it was necessary, indeed imperative, to imprison over 120,000 men, women and children, of whom 70,000 were American citizens, singled out solely by the criteria of racial heritage. Those studies which have dealt with the internees themselves have tended to be either very broad, somewhat antiseptic accounts, or personal stories concen-

trating on the experiences of only a few individuals. What has heretofore been lacking is an in-depth study of the personal aspects of the internment and how it affected the Nikkei community both during and after the war.

Sandra C. Taylor's work admirably fills this void, examining the personal issues of the internment and at the same time painting a rich and detailed picture of the life of the Nikkei community that still exists in the San Francisco Bay area. Taylor begins her narrative with a brief overview of the arrival and settlement of the first Japanese immigrants to the San Francisco Bay area and the challenges they were forced to overcome to establish their homes, lives and businesses. She then rapidly moves to the catalyzing events of December 7, 1941 that forever transformed the lives of the people of the bay area—especially all Nikkei.

Like many historians who have studied the internment, Taylor contends that the relocation experience put considerable strain on the Nikkei people as a whole and that this stress inevitably resulted in major rifts and conflicts within the community. She agrees with Roger Daniels that a major source of contention among the internees was the question of whether or not to cooperate with the government during the evacuation. Taylor believes that this argument became especially divisive once the Nikkei were resettled when the issue then became whether or not to cooperate with the War Relocation Authority in the management of Topaz itself.

In her introduction, Taylor states that in researching this book she relied heavily on interviews she conducted at the fiftieth reunion of Topaz High School. As a result, her study places a great deal of emphasis on the effect that the internment had on people who were of high school age during their time at Topaz. The interviews pinpoint that besides the normal travails of teen age life, these young people were further forced to contend with the turbulent conditions inherent of life in a barbed wire enclosed concentration camp. Much of that disturbance, according to Taylor, was caused by the disruption of the two most important institutions in a young person's life: family and school. In her final analysis of this facet of internment life, Taylor believes that these factors directly lead to an increase in juvenile disobedience that formerly had been virtually unknown among the Nikkei.

This is only one example of the analytical approach utilized by Taylor in examining a larger phenomenon that ultimately effected the entire Nikkei community in so many ways. Looking at the people who were involved coupled with how relocation effected the rest of their community is probably the most important contribution made by the author. Taylor eloquently tells

the story of a community without losing sight of the individuals. **Matthew Toshiaki Estes**, *San Diego State University, Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego*.