They Called Us Enemy

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE TAKEI

George Takei was born in Los Angeles in 1937, and he was the oldest living child of three children. In the months after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, when Takei was five years old, he and his family were incarcerated—alongside many other Japanese Americans—in internment camps, meant to protect national security by sequestering Japanese Americans in secure locations away from the general public. Following their release in 1946, the Takei family returned to Los Angeles, where Takei's father returned to the dry cleaning business and eventually became a very successful real estate agent. Takei studied acting at UCLA and, after a number of smaller stage and television roles, was cast in the role of Officer Sulu in *Star Trek*. This role would catapult Takei to fame. In addition to acting, Takei has been a vocal activist for much of his adult life. He's been especially supportive of LGBT rights for decades. Though Takei didn't publically come out until 2005, his sexuality has been something of an open secret since the 1970s. He married his long-time partner, Brad Altman, in 2008. In addition to founding the Japanese American History Museum and speaking out about his experience in internment camps during World War II, Takei has also criticized moves to place restrictions on any ethnic or racial group, particularly Muslims.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As George Takei details in the memoir, life changed dramatically for Japanese Americans after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which created the legal framework for the internment camps in the U.S. Between 1942 and 1946, about 120,000 Japanese Americans were interned in the camps. Later investigations found that there was no legitimate reason for internment—the government targeted Japanese Americans based on racism alone. One figure Takei touches on briefly in the memoir is Fred Korematsu. Korematsu initially resisted relocation and went into hiding in the Oakland area. After his eventual arrest, the California ACLU chapter approached him about using his case to test the legality of Executive Order 9066. Korematsu ultimately lost his case—and though the Supreme Court *did* agree in 2018 that *Korematsu v. United States* was wrongly decided, it still hasn't been formally overturned. Also important to understanding the memoir and Takei himself is the role that the TV show *Star Trek* plays. First airing in 1966, *Star Trek* was groundbreaking television, especially in terms of its diverse cast. In addition to George Takei as Sulu, it featured a Black woman as the communications officer and a Russian navigator.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

They Called Us Enemy shares a focus on Japanese internment with works such as *No-No Boy* by John Okada, *When the Emperor Was Divine* by Julie Otsaka, and *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. A common comparison to *They Called Us Enemy* is Art Spiegleman's graphic novel *Maus*, which tells the story of Spiegelman's father's experiences in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. *Maus* is often credited with elevating graphic novels into a more accepted and highbrow art form, making it possible for a graphic memoir like *They Called Us Enemy* to garner positive reviews in publications such as the *New York Times*. It's also worth mentioning another graphic memoir by the same publishing imprint, Top Shelf Productions: Representative John Lewis's graphic autobiography *March*, which introduces readers to the Civil Rights movement. Generally speaking, graphic novels have been growing in popularity since *Maus* was first published in the 1980s, and they are sometimes used in schools to engage reluctant readers. Notable graphic novels and memoirs include *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel, and Craig Thompson's *Blankets*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** They Called Us Enemy
- **When Published:** 2019
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Graphic Memoir
- **Setting:** Los Angeles and Arkansas, 1937-present
- **Climax:** The Takei family leaves Camp Tule Lake to start their new life in Los Angeles
- **Antagonist:** Racism and fear
- **Point of View:** First-Person

EXTRA CREDIT

A Fitting Tribute. In 1994, astronomers named a newly discovered asteroid after George Takei. They chose to honor him in part because of his groundbreaking acting work as Officer Sulu on *Star Trek*, and in part because of other work in public service.

The Birthday Collector. In interviews, Takei has credited his grandmother with instilling in him his optimistic nature—and with convincing him that getting older is a good thing. She lived to 104 and Takei has said she was fond of saying that she

"collected birthdays." Over the last decade, Takei has partnered with AARP to produce web content encouraging seniors to embrace change and aging, and to treat it like an adventure as his grandmother did.

PLOT SUMMARY

They Called Us Enemy is George Takei's memoir of growing up in Japanese internment camps during World War II.

On December 7, 1941, as the Takei family decorates their Christmas tree, a news bulletin interrupts music on the radio. It tells listeners that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and the U.S. will declare war on Japan. Mama and Daddy are worried, and rightly so—over the next few months, elected officials like California's attorney general Earl Warren and Los Angeles mayor Fletcher Bowron purposefully stir up anti-Japanese sentiment. They insist that all Japanese Americans are loyal to the Japanese Empire and that Japanese Americans are conspiring against the U.S. This culminates in President Roosevelt signing Executive Order 9066, which creates the legal framework for the internment camps.

Soldiers escort the Takei family—Mama, Daddy, George, and George's little siblings Henry and Nancy Reiko—from their home in Los Angeles at gunpoint. The family goes first to the Santa Anita Racetrack, where they live in a horse stall. Then, a few months later, the family boards a train bound for Arkansas. Five-year-old George sees this as a grand adventure, since Mama packs a bag of sweets for them and Daddy says they're going on vacation. George and Henry have no idea that it's not normal to ride a train with armed guards posted on either end. For the adults, the journey is terrifying and demeaning.

At Camp Rohwer, in Arkansas, the family settles in. Mama reveals that she smuggled in her sewing machine and sets about beautifying the family's cabin, while Daddy begins to organize the community. He soon becomes the block manager, which allows him special privileges like taking the family on a jeep ride outside the camp. George and Henry throw themselves into discovering as much as they can about their new home. They catch insects, look out for dinosaurs supposedly hiding beyond the barbed wire, and become the victims of a mean trick played by two older boys, Ford and Chevy. Though conditions in the camp are sometimes horrific, George has many happy memories of this time.

In February of 1943, with white soldiers dying in droves, the military needs more soldiers. President Roosevelt decides that Japanese Americans should be able to serve—if they can prove their loyalty. This results in interned people being required to fill out a loyalty questionnaire with a ridiculous and racist premise: that Japanese Americans aren't real Americans and must give up loyalty to Japan before they can serve. Two loyalty questions become infamous: if people answer yes to both, they can join the military. But for those who answer no, some go to jail while others, like Mama and Daddy, are simply transferred to Camp Tule Lake, the highest security internment camp. George loves living near the mess hall at Camp Tule Lake, but the camp poses many other problems. The guards fear that internees have become radicalized, so there are often fights—both between guards and prisoners, and between prisoners themselves—and frightening middle-of-the-night arrests.

Unbeknownst to the Takei family, in the summer of 1944, one of the most damaging parts of internment begins to take shape. H.R. 4103 works through Congress and is signed into law. It gives Japanese Americans the "right" to give up their citizenship. Not long after it passes, the Supreme Court rules that the camps must shut down in six months to a year, causing panic among the internees who fear the racism they'll experience outside the camps. To keep the family together, Mama renounces her citizenship, though it means they'll be deported to Japan.

The following summer, internees get the news that the U.S. bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The war ends days later, and the government cuts services to the camps to convince people to move out. But the Takei family can't leave because Mama renounced her citizenship. A California lawyer, Wayne Collins, represents almost 1,000 Japanese Americans who were pressured to renounce their citizenship—and he saves nearly all of them, including Mama, from deportation. After this, the family relocates to Los Angeles.

As a teenager, George becomes curious about the internment camps. After dinner most nights, he and Daddy talk about the camps. Though George is angry that Daddy didn't protest internment, Daddy insists he did what he had to do to keep the family safe—and he shows George that protest can take many different forms. To show him one way of protesting, Daddy takes George to volunteer for Adlai Stevenson's 1952 presidential campaign. Daddy regularly insists that American democracy is the best in the world, because it's a people's democracy and it can always get better.

George attends UCLA, takes several acting jobs (including ones that allow him to spread awareness of Japanese internment) and, finally, he is cast as Sulu in **Star Trek**. There, he's able to show millions of TV viewers that Japanese Americans are honorable and competent. He also sits on a number of committees and speaks out about Japanese internment. Over the years, he watches the U.S. atone for internment: first by agreeing to formally apologize and pay reparations to surviving victims in 1988, and then by upgrading Japanese American veterans' military honors to the Medal of Honor in 2000.

Unfortunately, Daddy dies before he can see any of this happen. But George notes that while he's seen Daddy's idealized vision of the U.S. come to life, as with the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008, he's also seen the country

ignore the lessons of the past, as it did when the government separated migrant families at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2018. George continues to use his fame and his public standing to speak out about injustices and ensure that people don't forget the horrors and the lessons of Japanese internment. It's essential, he suggests, to learn from the past to avoid repeating it.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

George Takei – George Takei is the author and protagonist of the memoir. George is only five when the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declares war on Japan. Months later, the Takei family is incarcerated in an internment facility, first in Rower, Arkansas and later at Camp Tule Lake in California. Given his age, internment seems like a great adventure to George. He and his little brother, Henry, don't know anything different, so they don't think it's abnormal to, for instance, have to travel on a train with guards or eat meals on a set schedule in the mess hall. Rather, George and Henry throw themselves into discovering as much about their world as possible while they're in the camps. Though George gets occasional glimpses into the adult world of politics and danger, Mama and Daddy mostly shelter him, which means that George's childhood is as enjoyable as possible given the circumstances. It's not until he's a teenager in Los Angeles that George becomes curious about his childhood in the internment camps and speaks to Daddy about it. From Daddy, George is able to add context—often dark—to his happy childhood memories. Through these talks, George also becomes enraged with Daddy for not doing more to fight back against internment. But eventually, George comes to believe Daddy when he says that the family *did* protest by staying safe, alive, and fighting for their principles in ways aside from just attending rallies. These conversations with Daddy cause George to share his father's optimism and admiration for American democracy, optimism that shines through the narrative. As an adult, George becomes an actor—most notably on the TV show **Star Trek**—and dedicates himself to spreading awareness about Japanese internment. He sits on a number of committees and boards throughout his life that seek to educate people about Japanese internment or improve the lives of those who were interned. *They Called Us Enemy* is part of this project—Takei insists that if people don't learn about the dark moments in American history, the country is bound to repeat them.

Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei – Daddy is George, Henry, and Nancy Reiko's father and Mama's husband. Though Daddy was born in Japan, he spends most of his life in the United States. Due to discriminatory immigration laws, Daddy is barred from applying for citizenship. When the family is forced from their home and incarcerated in internment camps, Daddy initially struggles to maintain a hopeful outlook. But once at Rohwer, Daddy undergoes a major change. He believes that everyone in his block should feel like part of a community, so he begins to organize. In addition to volunteering to do whatever needs to be done, Daddy is elected block manager. He becomes a respected figure in the camp community and, because of his age, fluency in Japanese and English, and his education, he can connect with Japanese Americans from all walks of life. Like Mama, his primary goal is keeping the family safe and together. This is why he answers no-no on the government loyalty questionnaire, resulting in the family's relocation to Camp Lake Tule. After the war ends and the camps close, Daddy moves the family back to Los Angeles. As George grows, Daddy speaks with him about the internment camps, unlike many Japanese Americans of his generation who kept silent about their experiences. Through their conversations, Daddy impresses upon George that he did what he could to keep his family safe—and that doing so is, in and of itself, a valid form of protest. But he also reminds George that they've been participating in more conventional demonstrations and protests for years. Daddy is a firm believer in the "shining ideals" that guide the U.S., such as the right to equal protection and due process. But to him, what is most compelling about the American democratic system is that it's a people's democracy—and together, people can advocate, change things for the better, and atone for past mistakes. George notes sadly that Daddy never got to see the U.S. apologize for the internment camps, as he died in 1979, about a decade before President Reagan signed a bill calling for formal apologies and reparations for surviving victims of the internment camps.

Mama – Mama is George, Henry, and Nancy Reiko's mother and Daddy's wife. A Nisei, Mama was born in Sacramento—but to save her from attending segregated schools, her father sent her to Japan as a child. She and Daddy marry in 1935 and over the next several years, Mama gives birth to four children (her first son dies at only a few months old). When George's story starts in earnest in 1941, Mama is a devoted housewife who dedicates herself to caring for her children and husband. As soon as she and Daddy hear the news that the Japanese Empire bombed Pearl Harbor, they fear that bad things will happen to the family—and ultimately, they're correct. But rather than panic when the family is forced from their home and into internment camps, Mama instead throws herself into caring for her family in every way she can. She allows George and Henry to think that they're on vacation and packs bags of goodies to keep them occupied on the five-day train journey to Camp Rohwer. Once the family arrives at Rohwer, she reveals that she smuggled in her sewing machine—a symbol of her dedication to her family, and a way to be able to continue to care for them once they're in the camp. As the war progresses, Mama and Daddy's first priority is to keep the family safe and together. To achieve this goal, they both answer no-no on the government's loyalty questionnaire. Later, in a desperate bid to

keep the family safe, Mama chooses to give up her citizenship and doesn't get it reinstated until years later. Throughout the family's time in the camps, she teaches George and Henry to be good, kind, and to prioritize family and community. Mama fades from the narrative several months after the family leaves the camps, once she convinces Daddy to focus on their family instead of the wider Japanese American community.

Henry Takei – Henry is George's little brother and Mama and Daddy's middle child. He and George are extremely close, both emotionally and in age (though the memoir never states outright how old Henry is, he appears to be only a year or two younger than George). Henry follows George in everything he does. Like for George, living in an internment camp is a "great adventure" to Henry. At Camp Rohwer, George and Henry amuse themselves catching beautiful insects and, as they're still young children, their needs and desires are relatively simple. They want candy, to meet Santa at Christmastime, and they're able to find joy in the simple pleasures of seeing snow for the first time or taking a ride in a jeep. Like George, Henry struggles to adjust when the family leaves the camp for the Alta Hotel in Los Angeles. Following the family's move to a Mexican American neighborhood, Henry fades from the narrative.

Nancy Reiko Takei – George's little sister, Nancy Reiko is only months old when soldiers escort the Takei family from their home and place them in internment camps. She grows from an infant in Mama's arms to a plucky toddler during the family's years in the camps and struggles occasionally with illness. Nancy Reiko is one of the memoir's most heartbreaking examples of how internment affects children. Given her age, Nancy Reiko literally knows nothing else; the camps are normal to her. So when Daddy leads the family to their first temporary residence after leaving Camp Tule Lake, Nancy Reiko begs to go back home to the camp.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt – The 32nd president of the United States, President Roosevelt served from 1933 until his death in 1945 and was president during World War II. Though FDR is generally considered a very popular past president, *They Called Us Enemy* makes the case that FDR's legacy is mixed. As Daddy explains to George, FDR did amazing things to pull the country out of the Great Depression in the 1930s. But once World War II begins, Daddy and the Takei family's relationship to FDR—as well as that of other Japanese Americans—sours. After Pearl Harbor, FDR signs Executive Order 9066, which creates the legal framework for the Japanese internment camps and also allows the government to seize assets and property from Japanese Americans. He also okays the infamous loyalty questionnaire and signs H.R. 4103 (which pressures Japanese Americans into giving up their citizenship). Though teenage George is unwilling to give FDR any credit, Daddy encourages him to understand that FDR is a person like any other. This means that he's fallible and capable of making horrific mistakes, as he did with internment. In 2017, George gives a talk at the FDR museum about his experiences in the internment camp and narrates parts of the memoir from there.

Earl Warren – At the time of Pearl Harbor, Earl Warren is the attorney general for the state of California. But he desperately wants to become the state's governor, and he believes that stoking fear of Japanese Americans will bolster his popularity. In interviews, he denies any responsibility for the harm that Executive Order 9066 causes to Japanese Americans, and he regularly insists (untruthfully) that the state has found evidence of Japanese Americans spying and engaging in sabotage. He also states that Japanese people are "inscrutable," or that it's impossible to know what they're thinking at any given time. The only way to deal with this, he insists, is to incarcerate Japanese Americans before they have the opportunity to do any real harm. His ploy works: he serves three terms as the governor of California and eventually becomes Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Eleanor Roosevelt – As President Roosevelt's spouse, Eleanor Roosevelt is the first to address the nation after the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. She assures Americans that the U.S. will emerge victorious and, after this point, she fades into the memoir's background until the 1950s. At this point, she makes a visit to Adlai Stevenson's campaign headquarters in California, where Daddy and George are volunteering. George is thrilled to meet her and he admires her, but Daddy pretends that he's sick so he doesn't have to shake her hand. George realizes that Daddy still resents Mrs. Roosevelt for her complicity in FDR's policy of interning Japanese Americans.

Wayne Collins – Wayne Collins, a Californian lawyer, dedicates many years to fighting for Japanese Americans' rights during and after World War II. He first challenges the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066, which legalized incarcerating Japanese Americans in internment camps. Later, he dedicates his efforts to fighting the effects of H.R. 4103. The bill gives Japanese Americans, mostly Nisei, the supposed right to give up their citizenship and be deported to Japan. He believes this is unconstitutional and ridiculous, so he represents almost 1000 Nisei—including Mama—and saves most of them from being deported. The memoir casts Mr. Collins as a hero, as he saw the treatment of Japanese Americans as wrong and horrific when that was still a wildly unpopular stance.

Fletcher Bowron – Mr. Bowron is the mayor of Los Angeles in the early 1940s. After the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor in 1941, Mr. Bowron testifies in front of Congress on the matter of what to do about Japanese Americans. He believes that Japanese Americans—no matter how many generations they've been in the U.S.—are "nonassimilable" and he believes that any person of Japanese ancestry is loyal to Japan. In this way, he fuels the anti-Japanese hysteria that ultimately leads to Japanese internment.

Lt. General John L. DeWitt – An officer of the United States

Army, DeWitt is one of the most vocal supporters of Japanese internment. He oversees the Western Defense Command (the part of the U.S. Army responsible for overseeing defense of the West Coast) and divides the West Coast into the military zones after President Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066. Though there's no evidence that Japanese Americans are conspiring against the U.S. government, DeWitt insists it's nevertheless necessary to impose curfews, other restrictions, and ultimately incarcerate them in internment camps.

Florence – Florence is a young Japanese American woman at Rohwer whom Daddy engages to work as his secretary. She's efficient and good-natured, and she doesn't get angry with George when he presses keys on her typewriter. George and Florence reconnect in 2015, when Florence, now an old lady, comes to see a performance of *Allegiance*.

Ford and Chevy – Ford and Chevy are two brothers that George and Henry meet at Camp Rohwer. Ford is about 13; Chevy is a bit younger. Together, they play a trick on George and Henry by giving them a magic word that, when shouted at the guards, will supposedly cause the guards to give the speaker whatever goodies they ask for. However, George learns later that the magic word—sakana beach—actually just sounds like "son of a bitch" with the right inflection. Following this incident, Daddy and Mama warn George and Henry to stay away from Ford and Chevy.

Senator Daniel K. Inouye – Though Daniel Inouye is perhaps best known for his work as a senator from Hawaii, he served during World War II in the 442nd regiment (the segregated, all-Nisei regiment comprised of interned Japanese Americans who answered yes-yes on the loyalty questionnaire). George notes that he's one of the most famous veterans who was eventually awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery during World War II.

Herbert Nicholson – A Quaker missionary, Mr. Nicholson believes from the beginning that internment is wrong. He dedicates much of his time during World War II to driving boxes of books to internment camps for Japanese Americans incarcerated there. In addition, he helps those in the camps in other ways, such as by taking pets to outside vets and even delivering a loved one's cremated remains.

Mrs. Rugen – Mrs. Rugen is George's fourth grade teacher. She's chilly and rude to George, ignoring him in class and punishing him for minor infractions on the playground. Eventually, George overhears her referring to him by a racist slur. George never learns exactly why Mrs. Rugen treated him so terribly. But he suggests that in the decades after World War II, there were lots of people like Mrs. Rugen who harbored racist sentiments toward Japanese Americans, simply because the U.S. cast *all* people of Japanese descent as the enemy.

Mr. Gene Roddenberry – Mr. Roddenberry is the creator of the TV show **Star Trek**. When George has a meeting with him to discuss his prospective role in the show, Roddenberry impresses George with his openness, kindness, and his willingness to apologize for the way that Hollywood tends to portray Asian men. Roddenberry creates Sulu, the show's Asian science officer, to push back against unflattering and racist representations elsewhere.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor – Justice Sonia Sotomayor is a Supreme Court Justice. In 2018, she wrote a scathing dissenting opinion in *Trump v. Hawaii*, the court case that upheld the so-called Muslim travel ban. In her dissent, Justice Sotomayor noted that, although the Supreme Court was doing a great thing by finally invalidating the Court's earlier decision in *Korematsu* (which upheld Executive Order 9066), *Trump v. Hawaii* used the same racist, flawed logic that *Korematsu* did.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – Dr. King is a major figure of the Civil Rights Movement. George meets Dr. King when the cast of *Fly Blackbird!* performs before Dr. King's speech in Los Angeles. Meeting Dr. King is a meaningful experience for George, as Dr. King is kind, supportive, and inspirational.

President Reagan – President Ronald Reagan was the American president from 1981-1989. In 1998, he signed the bill stating that the U.S. government would issue apologies and $20,000 to living victims of the internment camps.

Fred Korematsu – Fred Korematsu is a young Japanese man who initially refuses to leave when the military orders him to relocate out of an exclusion zone. His case eventually makes it to the Supreme Court, which upholds the military's decision to discriminate against Korematsu and other Japanese Americans.

Nichelle Nichols – Though George first meets Nichelle backstage after a production of *Fly Blackbird!*, the two become even more connected several years later when Nichelle is also cast in **Star Trek** as Lieutenant Uhuru.

Adlai Stevenson – Adlai Stevenson ran for president twice, in 1952 and 1956. Both times, President Eisenhower defeated him. George and Daddy volunteer for Mr. Stevenson's 1952 campaign in California, and George describes Stevenson as a compelling speaker.

President Clinton – President Clinton was president from 1993-2001. He bestowed the Medal of Honor on surviving veterans of the 442nd regiment.

Fred Ishimoto – Fred Ishimoto is George's agent when George begins working in TV. He arranges for George to meet with Mr. Roddenberry about acting in the show **Star Trek**.

Attorney General Francis Biddle – Francis Biddle is responsible for drafting H.R. 4103, the bill that gives Japanese Americans the "right" to give up their citizenship.

Theodore "Ted" Tamba – Mr. Tamba is a young lawyer and an

associate of Wayne Collins. He delivers the news that Mr. Collins is going to be able save Japanese Americans who gave up their citizenship (like Mama) from deportation.

President Obama – George sees President Obama's election as proof that American democracy works and can do great things, such as elect the first Black president.

TERMS

Fifth Column – Fifth Column is a general term that refers to any smaller group within a larger group that works to overthrow the larger group from within. In *They Called Us Enemy*, the U.S. government considers Japanese Americans to be a fifth column group during World War II.

Issei – Issei is the Japanese term for first-generation immigrants—those who came to the U.S. from Japan.

Nisei – Nisei is the Japanese word for second-generation immigrants, or those children born in the United States to Issei (first-generation immigrants).

No-no – "No-no" is the term for prisoners in Japanese internment camps who answered no to two particular questions on a government questionnaire judging their loyalty to the U.S.

Sansei – Sansei is the Japanese term for third-generation Japanese immigrants, or those born to Japanese American parents who were themselves born in the U.S.

Yes-yes – Prisoners in Japanese internment camps who answered yes to two particular questions on a government questionnaire were called yes-yeses. The questionnaire was intended to judge their loyalty to the U.S. and their willingness to serve in the military. Yes-yeses were allowed to enlist and were placed in a segregated, all-Japanese unit.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

They Called Us Enemy follows five-year-old George Takei and his family as, in the months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, they are incarcerated in a Japanese internment camp. The graphic memoir details George's personal experiences of growing up in internment camps, as well as the larger story of Japanese internment in the United States and the policies that enabled it. The story of Japanese internment poses a challenge to foundational American myths: that the nation is welcoming to immigrants, that the constitution protects vulnerable citizens, and that all Americans are entitled to liberty and due process. But even as he is deprived of his rights, George's father, Daddy, remains optimistic about the future of American democracy, citing its potential to grow into its own ideals—especially if Americans remain civically engaged and vigorously protest when the nation is doing something wrong. Thus, *They Called Us Enemy* suggests that while the ideals of American democracy are easy to corrupt and manipulate, democracy is also a system that, thanks to engaged citizens who agitate for change, can always be improved. To Takei, no matter its wrongs, the country is still worth fighting for.

They Called Us Enemy makes it clear that Japanese internment betrays democratic ideals, such as the right to due process and equal protection under the law. In the days and weeks after Pearl Harbor, government officials—from mayors and military personnel, all the way up to President Roosevelt—actively stoked fears that Japanese Americans were conspiring against the U.S. This wasn't at all true, but these government officials used racist rhetoric to justify seizing Japanese Americans' assets and, ultimately, incarcerating them in the internment camps. This is a major departure from the country's democratic ideals. The right to due process, simply put, means that a person can't be deprived of liberty or property without just cause and approval from the courts. For Japanese Americans, this means that it *should've* been illegal to seize their assets and incarcerate them in internment camps without any evidence that they'd done something wrong. Equal protection, meanwhile, means that the state has to treat one person the same as it would treat any other person in a given situation—so targeting a single racial group, as the government did during World War II, should also have been illegal. The fact that internment happened at all, then, suggests that it's not hard—and, perhaps, is shockingly easy—to betray American democratic ideals. Each of the bills and executive orders that enabled internment went through the proper legal channels, showing that these legal channels alone aren't enough to guard against abuse.

Rather, the memoir makes the case that in order to maintain and protect American democracy, citizens must be involved in the process and protest when they see abuses taking place. Throughout the memoir, George Takei shows that protest can take many different forms. Some people, like Mama (and to a degree, Daddy) protest by making their lives in the camp as beautiful and homey as possible. This is why Mama smuggles her sewing machine into the camps. The government wants to dehumanize and demoralize Japanese Americans, but by keeping her family's spirits up, Mama resists the government's actions. Other Japanese Americans protest in ways that are

perhaps more conventional. For instance, when the government distributes a loyalty questionnaire, every adult in the internment camps has to decide how to answer two questions in particular, one that asks whether the respondent is willing to serve in the military and one that asks respondents if they're willing to swear loyalty to the United States—and give up any loyalty to the Japanese Empire. George notes that the questions' premises are faulty, exclusionary, and ridiculous, as they ask Americans to serve a country that treats them like criminals and assume that anyone of Japanese ancestry has "racial loyalty" to Japan. While some answer yes-yes to the questions and serve in the military, others like George's parents answer no-no to protest the questions' premise. For the Takei family, this lands them in the highest security internment camp—and some young men go to prison for their refusal to serve. This draws on a long tradition of Americans going to jail for standing up for their rights, something that George touches on later in the memoir when he meets the civil rights icon Martin Luther King, Jr. This is all in addition to the various marches and protests that crop up in the camps at various points. With this, George Takei shows that those who were interned didn't sit quietly and simply accept the government's discriminatory treatment. Through various methods, Japanese Americans fought for their rights and made others recognize them as Americans.

But despite chronicling the nation's abuses, *They Called Us Enemy* also shows that what makes American democracy special is its ability and willingness to right past wrongs and continue to move the country forward. While George details several of these improvements in the memoir, something that affects him personally is the fact that, beginning in the early 1980s, Congress began to investigate the internment camps. In 1988, Congress decided that the government would issue formal apologies and $20,000 to every Japanese American who was incarcerated. This, George argues, is proof that the U.S. can live up to its ideals and deal effectively with its mistakes. And this is why George—and Daddy, up until his death—remain firm in their support for the democratic system. They acknowledge that the people who make up the government are fallible and can make grave mistakes. But *They Called Us Enemy* ends on a hopeful note, one that encourages readers to believe in the U.S.'s ability to continually improve. It suggests that what sets the American system apart, and what makes it great, is its ability to self-correct and its willingness to admit and then right wrongs.

RACISM AND WAR

Though racism and anti-Asian sentiment existed in the United States prior to the country's entry into World War II, *They Called Us Enemy* shows that, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, anti-Japanese sentiment exploded. Several passages in the graphic memoir depict white civilians destroying a Japanese family's car and painting racial slurs on it, while others show how powerful people in the military and government accused Japanese Americans of conspiring against the U.S. without any evidence to support this outrageous and racist claim. This widespread racism culminated in the country incarcerating more than 120,000 Japanese Americans in internment camps for the duration of the war. Through this, *They Called Us Enemy* shows that while racism certainly exists during peacetime, the onset of war can make racism worse by painting minority groups as enemies of the nation and framing racism against them as patriotic.

Throughout the memoir, there's a tension between America's pervasive racism and the nation's claim to be welcoming to immigrants. Daddy—an immigrant from Japan—encapsulates this paradox. On the one hand, Daddy remains optimistic throughout his life that the U.S. is a land of opportunity for all. Prior to World War II, he was able to find success in America by starting a dry cleaning business and purchasing a home with Mama, and after the war, he was able to start over, raising a tight-knit family and succeeding in business once again. But despite thinking of himself as an American and believing wholeheartedly in the American Dream, racist immigration laws nevertheless kept Daddy from applying for U.S. citizenship. In addition, the government pulled the rug out from under him by seizing all his assets—his home, business, and bank accounts—at the beginning of the war, and then by illegally depriving him and his family of liberty when they were forced to relocate to the camps. While the nation purports to be welcoming to immigrants, Daddy's life is an extreme example of how the government mistreats some immigrant groups.

The memoir points to war as being particularly dangerous, as it can intensify pre-existing racism. Many important figures, such as California's attorney general Earl Warren and Los Angeles mayor Fletcher Bowron, saw the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor as proof that racism against Japanese Americans wasn't just acceptable, but also necessary to protect the state. Both men insisted that it didn't matter how many generations a family had been in the United States—any person of Japanese ancestry must be loyal to Japan and therefore an enemy who was plotting against the U.S. These officials also accused Japanese Americans of being "inscrutable" (difficult to read, so perhaps duplicitous) and "nonassimilable" (unable to become American). Earl Warren even told white Americans that it was their "patriotic duty" to report if their Japanese American neighbors were violating curfew or otherwise acting suspicious. And while there was no evidence that Japanese Americans were loyal to Japan—rather than to the country they lived in, the United States—racist rhetoric against Japan exploited people's fears. The war was genuinely scary, and it was easy for public figures to scapegoat immigrant groups and whip up racism in the name of patriotism, building solidarity

against an "enemy" who wasn't really an enemy at all: Japanese American families. The result of this rhetoric was the internment of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans—more than two-thirds of whom were American citizens—with little to no evidence that any Japanese Americans were actually conspiring against the U.S.

In the memoir, George Takei illustrates that the racism that led to internment had devastating and long-lasting consequences on Japanese Americans. For Mama and Daddy, internment was an assault on their dignity and that stole everything they'd worked so hard to achieve. They went from owning a two-bedroom house in Los Angeles to living in horse stalls and tiny rough-hewn cabins. Being tagged with identification numbers was even more demeaning, as it created the impression that interned Japanese Americans were little different than livestock. The squalid conditions in the internment camps made it clear to those held there that because of their race, the quality of their life didn't matter. But perhaps the most difficult consequence to deal with was shame. Takei explains that many adults who were interned refuse to speak of their experiences—even to their children. They were ashamed of having been interned, even though they did nothing wrong; they were the victims. Takei himself felt some of that shame as he got older, once he realized that he essentially grew up in a prison. Shame, the memoir suggests, results in silence—and silence only allows racism to flourish.

To Takei, the best way to help people who feel ashamed—and the best way to keep events like Japanese internment from happening again—is to talk about what happened. Daddy and George, for instance, speak often about what happened in the camps, and this inspires George to, later in life, advocate for reparations to be paid to victims of the camps, and to eventually found the Japanese American National Museum. Racism, the memoir acknowledges, can be uniquely damaging to victims of it—but people can only begin to heal and move on by speaking out and ensuring that racist rhetoric isn't allowed to flourish again.

HISTORY AND EDUCATION

Near the end of *They Called Us Enemy*, George Takei says that one of the biggest issues in the United States is that the darker chapters of American history—such as the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II—aren't commonly talked about. Indeed, when teenaged George becomes curious about his childhood in the internment camps and searches through his textbooks and library books for information, he finds next to nothing about what happened. Thus, George Takei positions his graphic memoir as a teaching tool and a way to increase awareness of the history of Japanese internment. The memoir proposes that it's essential to learn about this history because it's only by remembering the past that people can prevent repeating horrible events in the future.

George Takei shows that when people purposefully remain silent about the past, it can be profoundly damaging for future generations. As a teen, he goes looking for information about internment during World War II in his history and civics textbooks, but he finds no mention of the camps. At the time, this makes George angry—it makes it seem as though something important and horrible that he and his family experienced never actually happened. But George also notes that many Japanese Americans of his parents' generation also refuse to speak openly to their children about internment. This is because they're ashamed of what happened, even though the memoir makes it clear that the victims of internment have nothing to be ashamed of. While George, fortunately, doesn't suffer in this way (Daddy is more than willing to talk to teenage George about the camps and fill him in on what he didn't understand as a child), those who stay silent contribute to the sense that internment is something to be ashamed of that is best forgotten. And while the memoir insists that this outlook is understandable, it also suggests that ignoring the history of internment has dire consequences.

Indeed, one of *They Called Us Enemy*'s greatest takeaways is that it's essential to remember the past in order to avoid repeating it. The memoir, for instance, draws a direct line from Japanese internment during World War II to the 2018 immigration policy of separating immigrant families at the U.S.-Mexico border. Though more than 70 years separate Japanese internment and these family separations, the memoir shows that both policies rest on the same flawed logic: that it's acceptable to imprison someone based solely on their nationality or heritage. Essentially, the memoir proposes that family separations could have been avoided had people remembered the lessons from Japanese internment.

More than simply knowing about past events in broad strokes, the memoir insists that it's necessary to have a nuanced understanding of exactly what happened *They Called Us Enemy* does this by telling several intertwined stories about internment: George's happy childhood memories, his parents' significantly less happy memories, and the legal and bureaucratic aspects of internment. It's essential, the memoir insists, to not focus on just one of these versions of events at the exclusion of all the others. To look only at the legal and legislative aspects of internment, for instance, would mean ignoring the major emotional toll on the people affected by those policies. And focusing only on personal experiences, like those of George and his parents, divorces the history of internment from important context. History, this shows, is impossible to distill down to one singular narrative—it does the past a disservice to package history into a simple, neat story.

Finally, *They Called Us Enemy* offers several methods of ensuring that future generations learn about and remember the past. In addition to implying that more information about

internment should be in school textbooks, George Takei positions the memoir itself as a way to make the history of internment feel real and personal for modern readers. As a beloved public figure with a massive following, Takei has a unique opportunity to demonstrate that internment affected real people who had families, histories, and dreams for the future. In addition, Takei mentions his work on the Japanese American National Museum at several points and ends his memoir with an image of a commemorative monument to internment victims at the site where Camp Rohwer once stood. These perhaps offer a more long-term method of ensuring that future generations don't forget the horrors of internment and take steps to avoid repeating history. Monuments and museums will help advance Takei's goal of spreading awareness about internment camps long after Takei himself is gone.

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND TRAUMA

George Takei is only five years old when the U.S. enters World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Mere months after the country's entry into the war, the government incarcerates just over 120,000 Japanese Americans in 10 internment camps around the country. For George's parents, Mama and Daddy, their goal as they face internment is simple: to keep their young family of five together, safe, and as happy as possible. But as the children grow, Mama and Daddy's responsibility to them changes—rather than continuing to preserve their children's innocence, they feel a duty to educate them about the truth of what happened and instill a sense of pride and civic responsibility. By walking through Mama and Daddy's evolving parenting style, the memoir gestures towards the importance of community, the value of family, and the role of speaking honestly about shared experiences.

Though the Takei family stays together throughout their internment, *They Called Us Enemy* also suggests that this was lucky—many families were separated. At Camp Rohwer, Daddy meets two women whose husbands were both arrested and imprisoned when the families were relocated out of the military exclusion zones. The men's only crime, George Takei explains, was holding a job that made them highly visible in the Japanese American community. Because these men were arrested and their families were then interned, their wives have no way of knowing where their husbands were—or indeed, *how* they were. And the memoir never revisits these two women's fate, leaving it unclear whether their families were ever reunited after internment ended. Internment, this shows, fractured families and communities.

All internees, regardless of whether their families were separated, were ripped from their communities when they were forcibly relocated. This meant that they had to form a community among strangers and find ways to keep their lives as normal and bearable as possible. Mama, for instance, throws herself into beautifying the Takeis' cabin at Rohwer, while Daddy dedicates himself to becoming a community organizer and, eventually, the block manager. Daddy is vocal in his belief that it's necessary for people to come together and form a new community in the camps. Only by working together and standing together, he suggests, will they ever be able to successfully advocate for better treatment from the government that imprisons them. A bigger community, Daddy shows, is a stronger one.

The memoir's depiction of family life also creates a tension between the value of innocence and the importance of truth. When their children are younger, Mama and Daddy go out of their way to preserve their innocence, not telling them important details of their situation so that they don't experience debilitating terror in their day to day life. This has many positive consequences—George has almost nothing but fond memories of his childhood in internment camps, even though his family was being unjustly imprisoned. In a way, this is a form of resistance—by preserving George and his siblings' innocence, Mama and Daddy give them a semblance of a normal American childhood, despite the government's attempts to dehumanize and demoralize them.

However, *They Called Us Enemy* suggests that as children grow, it's important they learn difficult truths. For George, this happens during a number of after-dinner talks with Daddy where Daddy speaks openly and frankly with him about the horrors of the internment camps, adding important context to George's happy childhood memories. Mama and Daddy also impress upon George the importance of the Japanese American community, and how the end of internment came about in part because interned Japanese Americans worked together to protest and mount legal battles challenging the legality of the camps. Most importantly, though, these after-dinner talks with Daddy help George to realize that what motivated his parents throughout their internment was love for their family. Mama and Daddy protected their young children from as much as they could. While it may be impossible to totally protect a child from trauma or harm, the memoir nevertheless shows that by forming robust communities and doing everything possible to preserve a child's innocence, parents can mitigate some of the worst effects of traumatic events.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

STAR TREK (THE STARSHIP ENTERPRISE)

As George Takei tells his story in *They Called Us*

Enemy, he uses the television show *Star Trek* to represent an ideal vision for America, one where the racism that led to the Japanese internment camps during World War II doesn't exist. Taking place on a spaceship (Enterprise) in the 23rd century, *Star Trek* follows the ship and its crew as they travel "where no man has gone before." But Takei makes the case that when he talks about going "where no man has gone before," he's not just referring to the various planets the crew visits during each episode. In addition, *Star Trek* (which began to air in the mid-1960s), went where almost no television shows had gone before by featuring a cast that was, at the time, one of the most diverse on television. In the show Takei plays Sulu, a science officer—and unlike most roles for Asian men at the time, Sulu is competent and honorable. Takei brings up his time on *Star Trek* at various points throughout the memoir to illustrate how far the U.S. has come since World War II. This, he suggests, is yet more proof of the United States' exceptionalism and the power of American democracy: it is possible for the country to admit its failings and mistakes and, ultimately, to get to a place where the diversity *Star Trek* portrays is no longer just fiction.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Top Shelf Productions edition of *They Called Us Enemy* published in 2019.

They Called Us Enemy Quotes

"In the meantime, *we*, the people, are already prepared for action."

That same day the president signed a proclamation declaring that every adult Japanese citizen inside the U.S. was now an "alien enemy" and must follow strict regulations.

Related Characters: George Takei, Eleanor Roosevelt (speaker), President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

On the day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt addresses the nation, saying that the American people are prepared for action. But later in the day, President Roosevelt declares that all Japanese Americans are "alien enemies."

It's interesting to compare the difference in word choice between Eleanor Roosevelt and FDR. In Mrs. Roosevelt's address, she makes it seem like the United States—and all of its people—are ready to unite behind the war effort and ensure that the country emerges from the conflict victorious. Saying "we the people" like this would, at first glance, suggest that she includes Japanese Americans in this collective. They are, after all, Americans like any other. But FDR's proclamation the next day puts severe limits on who is considered American, and who isn't. By insisting that Japanese Americans are "enemy aliens," FDR essentially insists that they're not Americans. They're enemies, and they can be treated as such. This forms the basis for denying Japanese Americans essential American rights, such as the right to due process and the right to equal protection under the law. If they're not Americans, FDR's logic suggests, they don't deserve these rights—and later, this leads directly to their internment.

In California at that time, the single most popular political position was "lock up the Japs." The attorney general of California, Earl Warren, decided to get in front of that issue.

He wanted to run for governor... and would do anything to get that office. He saw the division his rhetoric caused.

He knew that he was talking about a hundred thousand people who had not been charged with any crime. But he made an amazing statement for not just any lawyer... but the top lawyer of the state.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Earl Warren

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

In the days and weeks after Pearl Harbor, the attorney general of California, Earl Warren, spreads anti-Japanese hysteria, believing that it will help him later become California's governor. Again, looking at language is important. The phrase "lock up the Japs" refers, presumably, to anyone of Japanese ancestry, whether they're citizens of Japan (like Daddy, for instance) or whether they're actually American citizens, like George and his siblings. Essentially, this phrase shoves all these different people who share one simple characteristic—having Japanese heritage—into a single category. This dehumanizes them and, later, makes it easier to justify their incarceration in internment camps. If they're all the same, and they're not Americans, and they're enemies of the state, it's easier to convince the general

public that locking them up is the best thing to do.

With Earl Warren's story, George Takei illustrates how powerful figures at every level of government abused their stations to spread dangerously racist rhetoric. They did this for their own gain. As Takei points out, Earl Warren knew full well that there was no evidence that Japanese Americans were conspiring against the state—but casting doubt on their loyalty and their American-ness was an easy, convenient way for him to make himself look trustworthy and heroic to white Americans.

And indeed, it works—as George goes on to explain, Earl Warren becomes California's governor and then serves as Chief Justice on the Supreme Court. He's even responsible for authoring the majority, unanimous decision in the landmark civil rights case *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ruled that school segregation was illegal. It's important, the memoir suggests, to be aware of all parts of a historical figure's legacy. Nobody is one-dimensional, and even people who have done great things (like pave the way for desegregation and greater racial equality) have also done things that are deeply harmful and racist.

> On February 19, 1942, seventy-four days after Pearl Harbor... he issued Executive Order 9066.

The order never used the words "Japanese" or "camps"—it authorized the military to declare areas "from which any or all persons may be excluded," and to provide "transportation, food, shelter, and other accommodations" from persons excluded from these areas.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

After more than two months of rising anti-Japanese hysteria, President Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066. This creates the legal framework for the internment camps. As George explains, the language of 9066 was chosen very carefully. By not using words like "Japanese" and not saying "camps" outright, it's possible to read the text of the executive order and think that it makes sense. It's not exclusionary upfront—it just gives the military permission to be exclusionary. Further, there's no elaboration on what "transportation, food, shelter, and other accommodations" actually means. George goes on to show readers that the military did the bare minimum in all of these regards. Japanese Americans were transported on trains with armed guards posted on each end, as though they were criminals who needed heavy surveillance. The food at the camps, meanwhile, was subpar and even sometimes downright disgusting—the incident where the mess hall serves animal intestines, for instance, suggests that the military served Japanese Americans food they'd never feed their own families. The shelter provided, meanwhile, denies the internees their humanity and basic comforts—and the Takei family begins internment living in a horse stall.

Taken together, this illustrates the necessity of reading something like Executive Order 9066 and taking context into account. On the surface, it might not seem so bad. But by looking at the racism that led to it and the discriminatory, dehumanizing practices that came out of it, it becomes clear that Executive Order 9066 is terrible, racist policy.

> Each family was assigned a horse stall still pungent with the stink of manure. As a kid, I couldn't grasp the injustice of the situation.

But for my parents, it was a devastating blow. They had worked so hard to buy a two-bedroom house and raise a family in Los Angeles... now we were crammed into a single, smelly horse stall. It was a degrading, humiliating, *painful* experience.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei, Mama

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

When the Takei family first arrives at the Santa Anita Racetrack, they're assigned a horse stall to live in. At this point, George is only five years old. To him, sleeping in a stall is an adventure—it's new, it's different, and it's exciting. But this reflects his innocence as a young child; he doesn't fully grasp what's going on, why he's even here, and why being forced to sleep in a stall isn't actually something to be excited about in this situation.

As adults who are more aware of the political situation, Mama and Daddy are aware of the fact that the government doesn't see them and their family as people worthy of respect, dignity, and care. Being forced to sleep in a horse stall suggests that the government sees them like livestock,

not like human beings.

Noting that Mama and Daddy worked so hard to buy a house and have a family in L.A. illustrates one part of what the American Dream promises immigrants. It promises a better life, with economic opportunities, safety, and dignity. And while Mama and Daddy were able to live that dream for a while, the reality of Japanese internment suggests to them that the country isn't actually going to keep its promises to its immigrant populations. Because of the deep racism running through the country, many people—civilians, lawmakers, and military officials alike—see no problem with denying them opportunities and rights.

> As a teenager, I had many after-dinner discussions with my father... discussing everything from the government's forced incarcerations of Japanese Americans... to politics.

He taught me the power of American democracy—the people's democracy.

"People can do great things, George. They can come up with noble, shining ideals.

"But people are also fallible human beings, and we know they made a terrible mistake."

Related Characters: Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei, George Takei (speaker), Lt. General John L. DeWitt, President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

George Takei explains that he spoke often with his father about internment and democracy when he was a teenager. As Daddy speaks, it becomes clear how highly he thinks of American democracy. Though George Takei doesn't elaborate on this idea until later in the memoir, he and Daddy both firmly believe in the ideals of American democracy because, as Daddy says here, it's "the people's democracy." This means that regular people can work together to create change in their country. And working together, they can hold the country accountable to its ideals and change millions of people's lives for the better. This is what makes the U.S. a great country, and what makes democracy worth fighting for.

But Takei and Daddy also acknowledge that a government by the people, for the people comes with its own risks. It's impossible, for instance, to ignore human nature and, in some cases, greed and racism. Daddy implicates a number of people in government when he notes that they made a huge mistake about internment. This implicates Earl Warren, who insisted without evidence that Japanese Americans were conspiring against the government. He perhaps implicates FDR most of all, as FDR was the one who signed Executive Order 9066 and enabled the creation of the internment camps in the first place. But though George only implies so here, what also makes the U.S. democratic system great is that it can improve, and it can admit its mistakes. This, in fact, is the only way it will improve.

> Memory is a wily keeper of the past... usually dependable, but at times, deceptive.

Childhood memories are especially slippery.

Sweet and so full of joy, they can often be a misrendering of the truth.

For a child, that sweetness... out of context and intensely subjective... remains forever real.

I know that I will always be haunted by the larger, vaguely remembered reality of the circumstances surrounding my childhood.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Henry Takei, Mama, Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50-51

Explanation and Analysis

George Takei recounts what was, to him, a joyous, exciting train journey to Rohwer. But at the same time, the book's illustrations show George and Henry's game of hiding under the seats come to an abrupt end when a guard rips George out by the arms and gives him back to Mama and Daddy.

Here, Takei acknowledges that childhood memories often don't take the whole truth into account. Children—including him—might not be aware of any threats of danger and certainly lack a sophisticated understanding of the political climate. This means that childhood memories are often "sweet and so full of joy," even in horrific circumstances. To a child who doesn't understand, the excitement and adventure of whatever's going on is far more meaningful than anything else.

But Takei implies that from an adult perspective, childhood

memories begin to take on new meaning. As a child, he and Henry didn't totally grasp the significance or potential danger of being manhandled by an annoyed, armed soldier. Though nothing truly terrible happened to George and Henry, the situation could've turned out much worse—and no doubt, even if George wasn't aware of it, this was probably very frightening for Mama and Daddy. George's memories of a happy train ride may be real, but they don't tell the whole story. As an adult with context of what was going on and why he was even on the train in the first place, these happy memories seem suddenly sinister and incomplete.

> Mama began the impossible work of making a home for us out of the rough-hewn single room.
>
> She ran up curtains made from government surplus fabrics.
>
> Using strips of discarded rags, she braided together colorful floor mats.
>
> About the only thing Mama didn't have to do was cook.
>
> But to her it was no relief. The kitchen was just one more aspect of caring for her family that she was denied.
>
> One more loss. I realize that besides comforting us... perhaps everything she did was also her own statement of defiance.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Mama

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70-71

Explanation and Analysis

After the family arrives at Camp Rohwer and Mama reveals that she smuggled in her sewing machine, she throws herself into making Rohwer feel like home to her family. Mama's sewing machine is a symbol for her defiance and her willingness to protest. It's not allowed in the camps—but Mama smuggled it in anyway, knowing that without it she'd have a much harder time making the accommodations at Rohwer feel homey and comfortable. Indeed, the descriptions of her sewing projects make it clear just how essential her sewing machine was to making the rough-hewn room livable. Taking on these projects gives Mama a sense of purpose, which no doubt distracts her from the horrors of being interned in the first place. If she can care for her family, she feels like she's standing up to the government and doing her part to protest internment.

But there's only so much Mama can do; for instance, she can't cook for the family since they all eat in the mess hall with everyone else in camp. Mama, who takes pride in homemaking and caring for her family, finds this offensive and degrading. Her goody bag of treats that she packed for George and Henry on the train ride showed just how much she cares about demonstrating care and affection through sustenance—but in camps, she can't continue to express her love this way.

Despite this, though, Takei chooses to see every one of Mama's actions to care for her family as acts of defiance. In the face of a government who wanted to deny her humanity, dignity, and ability to provide for her family, Mama protested by demonstrating (to her family, if not to the government) that she could still provide. And this form of protest, the memoir suggests, is just as meaningful and important as any other.

> There were fishermen and farmers, shopkeepers and professionals. We were so diverse, all so different. And yet, we were the same. We were all Japanese Americans and we were all in Block 6 at Camp Rohwer. That was our common denominator. Daddy felt keenly that we needed to forge a community together.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

As the family settles in at Camp Rohwer, Daddy throws himself into helping out in the community—and specifically, into creating a robust community that can withstand the cruelty of internment. All the different professions that Takei describes make the point that when it came to internment, the government didn't care about anything other than a person's ancestry. It didn't matter whether a person was a highly paid professional, a struggling farmer, or something in between—because of their Japanese ancestry, all of those people were interned together. In this sense, this reflects the government's racism and habit of flattening the Japanese American population into a faceless, featureless group. Not paying attention to individual characteristics or qualities makes it easier to reduce these people to "just Japanese," rather than acknowledging all the other things that make them who they are.

But for Daddy, this isn't such a bad thing. Even though every person in the camp has their own story and their own experiences, he nevertheless recognizes that what they have in common is very important. But unlike the government, as Daddy looks around at all these different people, he sees how the different skillsets and histories make the community richer and stronger. It's possible, this shows, to connect with people based on only a few factors. When undertaken in the spirit of building a community, this can lead to meaningful change and positive results.

"Die, you Japanese cowards! Bang bang bang!"

"He got me! I'm dead!"

"Gotcha again! America wins the war!"

"Let's play again, but this time I'll be American."

The older boys would play "war."

"Nuh-uh, *you* be Japanese. *I'm* American."

"No fair! You're *always* American!"

It was like cowboys and Indians, but with Japanese and Americans instead.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

One day at Rohwer, George and Henry watch older boys play a game called "war." In this iteration, one boy plays the part of an American, and the other plays the part of a Japanese enemy.

At first, the game may seem innocent. It may simply reflect the young kids' understanding of what's going on in the wider world: the U.S. is at war with Japan, after all, and it's normal for kids to try to make sense of events like this through play. But these boys' dialogue suggests that the game is more than that: this is, perhaps, where young Japanese Americans learn to feel ashamed of their heritage. Note, for instance, that as they negotiate the terms of the next game, the American soldier is the coveted role. Though the boys don't say so outright, they imply that the American soldier is white—not Japanese American, like they are. And on the other side of that coin, being Japanese is the role nobody wants, suggesting that these boys don't value their heritage.

And it's perhaps unsurprising that they don't. After all, they're growing up and developing amidst the backdrop of their government calling them "alien enemies" and loudly insisting that Japanese Americans are awful people. Amid this, it makes sense why they wouldn't want to be Japanese in the game—the Japanese, according to the U.S. government, are inferior and are going to lose the war to the superior, righteous Americans anyway. But even if this is just play, this lays the foundation for young people like George to internalize that being Japanese (and being who they are) is bad and shameful.

Childhood memories come rich with sensations...

... Fragrances, sounds, colors, and especially temperatures. That golden afternoon when Daddy took the family on that wonderful jeep ride...

... Is a fond memory that glows radiantly with *warmth*.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei, Nancy Reiko Takei, Henry Takei, Mama

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

After describing a time when Daddy arranged to borrow a jeep and take the family for a ride outside of the camp, George considers what make childhood memories so memorable. The accompanying illustrations show the family happy and content, with Mama and Daddy holding hands as the children sleep.

For Takei, this memory of the jeep ride exists in the same realm as his earlier memories of the delightful train ride to Camp Rohwer. It's a happy memory and he implies that he can recall clearly what the woods smelled like, what the landscape looked like as Daddy drove along, and how it felt to be sitting with his family in the jeep. But though Takei doesn't force readers to acknowledge the greater context of internment here, it's nevertheless important to do so—not because it diminishes the importance and the warmth of this memory, but because, in a way, it makes the memory all the more important.

Throughout the memoir, Takei implies that it's necessary and important to take note of happy moments, especially when they occur against a backdrop that's frightening and dangerous. So in this situation, it's important to remember

that Daddy is able to arrange the jeep trip in spite of internment. The family may feel free and happy in this moment, but they nevertheless have to return to the camp at the end of the afternoon to resume being prisoners. Both parts of this are true at once: the memory itself can be warm and happy, and it can still be true that this jeep trip took place as part of a larger situation that never should've happened.

> From the moment the war began, our loyalty as Americans was constantly under suspicion.

General John L. DeWitt, the commanding general of the western theater of operation:

"A Jap is a Jap... It makes no difference whether he is theoretically an American citizen, he is still a Japanese."

Senator Tom Stewart (D-TN):

"They cannot be assimilated. There is not a single Japanese in this country who would not stab you in the back."

Never mind that in the early days of the war, Japanese Americans showed up in great numbers to register for military service.

This was an act of patriotism, but it was met with a slap in the face. They were denied military service and categorized as 4-C: enemy aliens.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Lt. General John L. DeWitt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Takei explains the circumstances that led to FDR choosing to allow Japanese Americans to serve in the military, which leads into his explanation of the loyalty questionnaire. The loyalty questionnaire was intended to judge whether Japanese Americans were actually loyal to the U.S.—and consequently, whether they should be allowed to serve.

These quotations from General DeWitt and Senator Tom Stewart illustrate the kind of racist rhetoric that was circulating at this time. To white Americans, and particularly those in power, it was important to make sure that the public believed that anyone of Japanese ancestry couldn't actually be American—and for that matter, wasn't trustworthy either. Keep in mind that Takei has already made it clear that there's no evidence Japanese Americans were conspiring against the U.S. during World War II. All of this is made up—and it only reflects these officials' racism.

For that matter, Takei makes it clear that Japanese Americans did consider themselves Americans and many wanted to serve their country. However, because of this racist rhetoric (which began circulating in earnest after Pearl Harbor), the government refused to allow willing and ready Japanese Americans to serve. In this way, the country only hurt itself. It needed soldiers, and yet it refused to allow willing young men to become soldiers, purely because of their ancestry. It told them they weren't real Americans—they were "enemy aliens"—and then turned around and made them swear their loyalty.

> Question 27 wanted us to pledge our lives for a country that had upended our families and put us behind barbed-wire fences.

Question 28 rested on a false premise: that we all had a racial allegiance to the emperor of Japan. To answer "yes" would be to agree that we had such a loyalty to give up. Yes or no, either response would be used to justify our wrongful imprisonment—as if they'd been right to call us "enemy aliens" and lock us up in the first place.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

Takei explains for readers what the two most controversial questions on the loyalty questionnaire were really about: the government's racist preconceptions about Japanese Americans. Previously, Takei explained that many Japanese American men attempted to enlist when the war began, but the military refused to allow them to join. And now, several years into the war, those Japanese Americans who once wanted to serve are imprisoned in internment camps after having their assets and homes seized by the government. The government is asking a lot of the Japanese Americans—it's asking them to essentially ignore the government's racist, exclusionary policies and promise to serve anyway. In this way the government doesn't have to accept any wrongdoing or admit it made a mistake—if a Japanese American answers "wrong," it's their fault.

Then, question 28 takes this a step further. It continues the government's project of making it clear that, in their eyes,

Japanese Americans aren't American, even if the United States is their home. It suggests that ethnicity and ancestry create stronger ties than citizenship and where a person is raised—and it suggests that Japanese Americans, whether they're new immigrants or natural-born citizens, aren't able to fully control their loyalty. This is dehumanizing and insulting, as it implies that Japanese Americans aren't as in control of their mental faculties as other people. It suggests they're automatons, simply because of their ancestry.

And to make matters worse, Japanese Americans can't win no matter how they choose to answer. If they object to the racism baked into the questionnaire and answer no, they look like the "enemy aliens" the government thinks they are. If they answer yes, they give into the racist premise and imply that they used to be "enemy aliens"—but now, they've changed their ways thanks to internment.

> As President Clinton said that day, "Rarely has a nation been so well-served by a people it has so ill-treated." These brave soldiers clung to their belief in the shining ideals of their country.

Related Characters: George Takei, President Clinton (speaker), Senator Daniel K. Inouye

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

George Takei recalls an awards ceremony in 2000 in which President Clinton upgraded members of the all-Nisei 442nd division's military honors to the Medal of Honor, the highest military honor of the country. Prior to this, Takei explains that the 442nd was able to rescue another battalion that seemed impossible to save, thereby proving their bravery and their willingness to serve their country.

President Clinton's statement acknowledges outright that the United States made a mistake, first in denying Japanese Americans the right to serve in the military in the first place, and then by using the loyalty questionnaire to force them to serve when it needed more soldiers. The country, in other words, did nothing to earn these soldiers' loyalty and perhaps didn't deserve the service it received. But part of being an American, the memoir suggests, is continuing to fight for the country and make it better and more welcoming, even when the country's institutions seem to refuse to improve. This is what Takei means by the "shining ideals of [the] country." It's possible, Clinton's actions show, for the country to atone for its mistakes and try to make things right for the people it's wronged in the past. Takei suggests that the men who served, and particularly those who eventually received the Medal of Honor, knew this and perhaps joined the military in the hope that one day, they'd be treated with respect and dignity—respect and dignity that every veteran, no matter their ancestry, deserves.

> Though they responded in different ways—caring for their families...

Fighting on the battlefield...

Or serving time for their principles—all these Japanese Americans showed incredible courage and heroism.

They proved that being American is not just for *some* people. They all made difficult choices to demonstrate their patriotism to this country even when it rejected them.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mama, Senator Daniel K. Inouye

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

After detailing the many different responses to the loyalty questionnaire, Takei makes the case that however people responded, they contributed in some way to proving that Japanese Americans are, in fact, Americans. This gets at the memoir's insistence that protest can take many forms, and that it's essential to protest in a variety of different ways in order to create change.

Insisting that caring for their families was a way to protest validates the experiences of people like Mama. Mama, as a woman, couldn't serve in the military anyway. But by caring for her family, keeping her children happy and well, and showing that she's a wife and mother like any mother, she demonstrated that it's possible to look all sorts of ways and still be an American.

Those who fought in the military, meanwhile, demonstrated that Japanese Americans were just as loyal—and just as able to do heroic, important things—as white soldiers. The military, they showed, was wrong to deny them the right to serve in the first place.

Finally, those who went to prison for answering no-no on the questionnaire are part of a long history of Americans

going to prison for insisting on justice. Though the right to assemble and protest is a right guaranteed in the constitution, various groups and people—from the suffragists, to the abolitionists, to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. later in the memoir—have spent time in prison for fighting for what's right. And every time these groups experience a victory, it expands the definition of who gets to call themselves an American. This, the memoir insists, is one of the most amazing things about the United States. The definition of who counts is always expanding, something that makes the country and its culture increasingly richer and more diverse.

❝ It was there I discovered the power of movies. I remember Charles Laughton in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* most vividly.

I empathized with this love-starved character whom people scorned.

That movie was a transporting experience. Old Paris was fascinating.

Other nights the movies were Japanese, and often missing the audio track.

Daddy explained to me how a *benshi* provided the soundtrack for the film.

I was mesmerized by the *benshi*—how he could be so many voices from one.

In the days of silent movies, Daddy said, *benshi* were considered artists, similar to actors.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131-32

Explanation and Analysis

When the family is relocated to Camp Tule Lake, young George has the opportunity to see movies for the first time. When he connects with The Hunchback of Notre Dame as "a love-starved character whom people scorned," he uses Charles Laughton's character as a stand-in for Japanese Americans. In many ways, Japanese Americans are also love-starved: they want their country, which they love, to respect them and love them in return. This shows young George that movies may present fiction—but fiction can be a way to mirror what's going on in the real world and get important messages to people.

Then, George's fascination with the benshi performer perhaps plants the seed that one day, he could be a performer too. A benshi, like an actor, can embody all sorts of people, sounds, moods, and emotions—something that as an actor, George goes on to do. Taken together, George's early experiences with film impress upon him the importance of reaching people through various media.

❝ During out after-dinner discussions, Daddy would reveal more details about that time in our lives... filling in some of the gaps that escaped me.

"It was a demonstration in protest of the arrest of a man accused of being a radical."

"Was he?"

"No! But regardless of whether he was or not... it was important to exercise our right to assemble. Send a message that we were united as a group and opposed to their actions."

It dawned on me in that moment... I had been participating in democracy as far back as I can remember. That is the strength of our system. Good people organized, speaking loudly and clearly. Engaged in the democratic process.

Related Characters: Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei, George Takei (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144-45

Explanation and Analysis

After teenaged George recalls the frightening experience of being separated from Daddy during a protest and almost being run over by a Jeep, he and Daddy talk it over. Daddy is able to help George make sense of an experience that was extremely traumatizing—and put it in a broader context.

As Daddy speaks to George, it's possible to see that, in some ways, not much has changed in the way that Daddy speaks to his children. Just as he did when he spoke to them in the camp about being kind, not making assumptions, and not spreading rumors, here he encourages George to understand that some questions aren't worth asking—they don't help anything, and they only distract from the real issue. In this situation, Daddy makes the case that it really shouldn't have mattered whether the arrested man was radical or not. The government still shouldn't have arrested him without proper evidence; they denied him due process

by arresting him the way that they did.

In this moment, it also occurs to George that Daddy didn't just sit by and take the abuse in the internment camps, as he previously accused Daddy of doing. Rather, Daddy was organizing from within the camps to make sure that the government knew Japanese Americans were united and unhappy with the situation. And though this may not be as radical as young George might like, protesting like this also gave Daddy the ability to ensure his family's safety. Protesting, the memoir insists, is something very personal to every person. Each person must choose a way to protest that takes their own goals and risk factors into account—and Daddy did this by protesting within the camps, with his sons, rather than doing something different like enlisting.

"We're free! We can finally go home!"

"Don't be a fool! You think our homes are still there? You think white people will welcome us with open arms?"

The irony was that the barbed-wire fenced that incarcerated us also protected us.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

After people in the camps get the news that, per a Supreme Court ruling, the camps will close in six months to a year, people begin to worry. For some this is a good thing—the first man who speaks here is excited to go home and resume life outside the camps. But the other man points out that they have racism to contend with outside, in addition to the fact that after Executive Order 9066 was signed, Japanese Americans lost their homes and assets. And though Takei profiles a few white people who stood up for Japanese Americans' rights during World War II, he implies that the vast majority of white people didn't stand up for their neighbors or see internment as a bad thing. Racism, the memoir suggests, is baked into American society and permeates every level. Now, after several years of war with the Japanese, the second man insists that this racism will have only gotten worse.

In this way, young George (who's overhearing this conversation between the two men) begins to see that Japanese Americans face a major dilemma. Internment upended their lives, fractured their communities, and separated families. But after spending almost four years in the camps with people who have experienced all the same things, the camps have become a robust community where internees don't have to deal with racism the same way they would outside. Though they still have to deal with the sentries' racism and violence, they don't have to worry that their neighbors will hurt them, report them to the police, or otherwise make their lives dangerous and miserable.

Our childhoods continued to be made up of grotesquely abnormal circumstances...which would eventually become our "normal."

It had become routine to line up three times a day to eat lousy food in a noisy mess hall...but the routines of incarceration had all been thrown out. Now we found ourselves in constantly noisy surroundings with a perpetual stench.

But children are amazingly adaptable. We would survive this experience too.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Nancy Reiko Takei, Henry Takei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

The Takei family leaves Camp Tule Lake and moves into temporary lodgings at the Alta Hotel in Los Angeles. The hotel is on skid row, which is noisy, frightening, and populated with drunks. For George, Henry, and Nancy Reiko, this is like nothing they've ever seen before—and though this is freedom from the internment camps, it feels far less comfortable to them than internment did.

In some ways, this is an unsurprising product of the fact that, as George says, children are adaptable. Indeed, George has made the case throughout the memoir that, as a child, he didn't see internment as the jail it really was. It was a place where he could discover and grow, and where he made many happy memories. This isn't to say it was all good—but from a child's perspective, it wasn't bad.

The Alta Hotel, meanwhile, seems to throw the three children into a world that's scary and dangerous. Even if the food at the mess halls wasn't exceptional, eating there every day still represented a routine that made life feel normal and safe. Even if the latrines were horrific in the camps, using communal latrines was just part of life. Essentially,

George suggests here that though children can adapt to all manner of things, change is still hard—even if it's for the better. And because a child's perspective inevitably misses important information that might make a change make more sense, a change like this can be especially traumatic.

> I had an unsettling feeling...
>
> "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America..."
>
> That her calling me "Jap boy" had something to do with our time in camp.
>
> "...and to the republic for which it stands..."
>
> I was old enough by then to understand that camp was something like jail...but could not fully grasp what we had done to be sent there.
>
> The guilt which surrounded our internment made me feel like I deserved to be called that nasty epithet.
>
> "One nation, indivisible...
>
> "with liberty and justice for all."

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Mrs. Rugen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

One day, as George and his classmates recite the pledge of allegiance in school, George wonders why his teacher, Mrs. Rugen, called him the slur "Jap boy." George is in fourth grade by this point, and his understanding of internment is beginning to change. While he considered internment normal only a few years ago, he's no doubt starting to realize that his classmates (many of whom are Latinx, given that his family lives in a Mexican *barrio* at this point) didn't also experience internment during the war. He feels, in other words, alone in having experienced internment.

Further, it's not clear to George why his family ended up in internment camps in the first place. As far as he knows, his family didn't do anything wrong. But the notion of being incarcerated simply for being Japanese American undoubtedly feels like hazy logic that doesn't square with what George learns in school about his country's values and practices, so it's no wonder that George starts to feel ashamed and wonders if his family actually did do something to deserve how they were treated. This illustrates the far-reaching, negative effects of the government's racist policies: young kids like George learn that their identities aren't acceptable and are, instead, shameful.

Pairing this with the pledge of allegiance drives home again that his experiences with internment aside, George—and his family—are all Americans. He still feels loyal to his country, and he still feels compelled to salute the flag every morning. This is one of the most common ways that children in the U.S. are taught to demonstrate their patriotism. But for George, doing this doesn't seem to line up with his experiences. Instead, he exists in an in-between space, where he goes through the motions of being an American—all while fearing, on some level, that he's done something wrong and doesn't deserve to be here.

> I had to learn about the internment from my father, during out after-dinner conversations. That remains part of the problem—that we don't know the unpleasant aspects of American history...and therefore we don't learn the lesson those chapters have to teach us. So we repeat them over and over again.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

When George can't find anything about Japanese internment in his history or civics textbooks, he seeks out Daddy for information and advice. This, Takei suggests, reflects poorly on the country as a whole. The United States should, he believes, be open about its shortcomings and its past mistakes—this is the only way he thinks future generations can avoid making the same mistakes that past generations did. And especially with something as damaging and impactful as Japanese internment, it's essential to make sure that others don't suffer the same way that George, his family, and countless others did.

This is why Takei, throughout the memoir, touches on the various ways he tries to spread awareness about Japanese internment and many other social issues he cares about. He uses his platform as a famous actor to speak out, both in person (from the screen or stage) and on social media. He also founded the Japanese American National Museum to educate people, and he wrote this book to make sure

everyone has access to the information. It's essential, he suggests, to make sure that everyone can access the country's history in some fashion—especially if they can't find the information they need in their school textbooks.

Of course, I did get that role.

As Lieutenant Hikaru Sulu, I had the chance to represent my Asian heritage with honor...to millions of viewers on television...

And six times on the silver screen as (Lt.) Commander Sulu, eventually reaching the rank of captain.

But most importantly, my unexpected notoriety has allowed me a platform from which to address many social causes that need attention.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

Following George's meeting with Mr. Roddenberry about Star Trek, George explains to readers what he's been able to do with the fame that Star Trek brought him. His character, Lieutenant Sulu, was the science officer on the show—and unlike many Asian characters on television at the time (mid-1960s when the show first aired), Sulu was competent and smart. This meant that George could show audiences that their preconceived notions about Japanese Americans (and Asian people more generally) were wrong: Asian people aren't just capable of being amazing actors, they can also excel in leadership roles and in scientific fields.

Mentioning how Sulu's character evolved in the following Star Trek movies, meanwhile, shows that the creative directors behind Star Trek gave George even more opportunities to shatter preconceptions of what Asian Americans can do and be. Putting him in control of the ship as the captain suggests that he—and by extension, Asian Americans more generally—are trustworthy, competent, and capable of leading. And seeing this on television means that hopefully, audiences will come around to seeing Asian Americans in leadership positions in the real world. Media, this suggests, is a major contributor to social progress. And again, it's because of Takei's role in the media landscape that he's able to advocate for change on a broader scale. By becoming a beloved and trusted public figure, Takei is able to level with fans and lead them in the direction of progress and greater equality.

It was not until 1991 that I received a letter of apology...with a check for $20,000 signed by George H.W. Bush. As my father would say, "the wheels of democracy turn slowly."

That makes an amazing statement about this country.

It took a while, but it did apologize. That apology came too late for my father. He passed in 1979, never to know that this government would admit wrongdoing.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Daddy/Takekuma Norman Takei, President Reagan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

Though the fight for apologies and reparations for formerly interned Japanese Americans began in the early 1980s, President Reagan didn't sign an act calling for reparations until 1988—and it took another few years before that act actually came to fruition.

In George Takei's understanding, its amazing that the United States did eventually apologize at all. This act shows that the country is willing and able—in time—to recognize its mistakes, apologize, and take concrete steps to make things right for as many people as possible. This, the memoir suggests, is one of the things that makes the United States and American democracy more broadly great. Democracy in America is a system that is constantly improving and constantly agitating for change. Sometimes—as in this case—things actually do get better, which is worth celebrating. This offers hope that the U.S. can move on from its past and continue to make things right for other people who have suffered as a result of various policies. The fight, in this sense, isn't over, just because the country apologized once. Rather, this just offers hope that the country has the ability to improve in other areas.

By noting that Daddy never got to see the country apologize, though, George Takei makes the point that racist and exclusionary policies, like internment, nevertheless do lasting harm. Though Daddy eventually built a wonderful life after internment, he never got the satisfaction of knowing that the governmental system he so adored would ever make things right for him. This asks readers to consider

all the other Japanese Americans who also didn't live long enough to receive an apology and compensation for what happened to them. These victims matter too—and to prevent this from happening to anyone else in the future, it's essential to take the lessons of internment to heart and ensure that nobody else will ever end up in Daddy's position.

> It was a disastrous depression that Roosevelt pulled us out of.

It took that man, and his determination and creative energy...

To establish all those programs, and lift the fortunes of our great country.

But as we were driving here today, I thought, "I'm going to the home of the man who imprisoned me."

And now I'm here in his home...

Only in America could that happen.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

Speaking at the FDR museum in 2017, George Takei tells audiences that he sees his presence at the museum as proof of America's greatness. It's proof that the U.S. is capable of change, reconciliation, and apologies—and only by apologizing and making things right for people like George will the country ever be able to fulfill its ideal of being a welcoming place for immigrants.

But even more than that, George insists that it's essential to think about figures like FDR in a holistic manner. It's possible, he suggests, to accept multiple things as true: that FDR did amazing things, but that he's also responsible for interning 120,000 innocent Japanese Americans. Takei suggests that FDR should receive credit for pulling the country out of the Great Depression. Indeed, George notes that FDR established a number of programs in the 1930s that are still in place and very popular today, from Social Security to the Federal Housing Administration. But it's also impossible to separate this amazing legacy from the way that some of FDR's other policies devastated the lives of Japanese Americans. But in the United States, with time, Takei believes that it's possible for things to change; people formerly thought of as "enemy aliens," such as himself, are increasingly in positions of power. In this way, Takei urges readers to be optimistic about the country's fate. It can always improve if people remain active and protest for what they know is right.

> These rulings, which found Executive Order 9066 to be constitutional...were never officially overturned by the Supreme Court...

Until June 26, 2018.

Justice Roberts' statement went on to say the ruling "has no place in law under the constitution..."

But in a cruel irony, the court struck down *Korematsu* in a mere side note in *Trump v. Hawaii*...

The very same ruling that upheld President Donald Trump's ban on immigration from Muslim countries.

Related Characters: George Takei (speaker), Fred Korematsu

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

George Takei brings around the idea that the United States is always improving by noting that it took until 2018 for the Supreme Court to overturn *Korematsu vs. United States*. *Korematsu* is Fred Korematsu's case; he initially resisted relocation, hid out in Oakland, and was eventually arrested. Wayne Collins took on Korematsu's case, hoping that the courts would declare Executive Order 9066 (which created the legal framework for internment) to be illegal. But when the case finally made it to the Supreme Court, Korematsu lost—the Court held that it was legal to exclude Japanese Americans in the name of national security. It wasn't until 2018, as part of a different Supreme Court case, that the justices acknowledged that *Korematsu* had been wrongly decided—the law was unconstitutional after all.

While Takei allows that overturning *Korematsu* would be a great thing under other circumstances, the context is actually more complicated. The ruling that overturned *Korematsu* was the same one that upheld the Trump administration's so-called Muslim travel ban, and the logic of that travel ban, Takei argues, is quite similar to the racist logic underlying the initial *Korematsu* decision: that it's legal and appropriate to exclude people based on a particular identity characteristic (such as race or religion). So while overturning *Korematsu* might be a symbolic step forward in that it rights a horrific wrong from the past, the ruling was

overturned in the process of upholding another policy that demonized immigrant groups. This shows that the United States still has work to do to become the open and accepting place it purports to be. The memoir suggests that there's always work to be done to expand the definition of who's welcome and who's American to more people—and it's essential that people step up and advocate for this kind of change. It's part of what makes the country great.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THEY CALLED US ENEMY

Two little boys, George and Henry, sleep peacefully in their bedroom—but suddenly, Daddy rushes in, turns on the light, and tells them to get up. As he gets Henry dressed, he tells George there's no time to explain. He sends the boys to wait in the living room while he finishes packing. In the living room, the boys look outside and see armed soldiers. The soldiers pound at the door and Daddy comes to answer it. They ask for Daddy by his full name—Takekuma Norman Takei—and inform him that under Executive Order 9066, he and his family must immediately leave their home. The soldiers give Daddy 10 minutes to be ready.

When the peaceful scene of George and Henry sleeping is interrupted by soldiers, it makes it clear that whatever's happening here is going to dramatically interrupt George and Henry's idyllic life. Though the boys are no doubt scared to see armed soldiers outside, Daddy seems cool, collected, and in control. This likely gives George and Henry the impression that everything is going to be okay—they're young enough that Daddy seems like he should be able to protect them from anything.

Daddy turns away from the soldiers, who remain in the open doorway. He crouches down to George and Henry and tells them to wait while he helps Mama and their sister—then they'll take their bags to the driveway. Minutes later, out in the driveway, Henry asks George what's going on and where they're going. George says he doesn't know and turns around when he hears the door close. Mama stands on the doorstep, holding a baby, crying.

The memoir drives home George and Henry's innocence here when the boys reveal that they have no idea what's going on. Mama's tears and obvious distress reinforce this—clearly what's happening is frightening and horrible, but only the adults know what the implication of this episode is. Again, though, Daddy seems in control and intent on making the boys feel safe, despite knowing how serious this is—a thread that will persist throughout the memoir.

Jumping forward to a 2014 Ted Talk in Kyoto, George Takei tells the audience he'll never forget that moment. He explains that he's a veteran of the **starship Enterprise** (a reference to *Star Trek*, the TV show that made Takei famous). On Enterprise, he traveled through the galaxy with a crew comprised of people from around the globe to explore new worlds and find new life. They went "where no one has gone before." Takei is also the grandson of Japanese immigrants who traveled to America. Like those on Enterprise, his grandparents sought opportunity in a new world.

Throughout the memoir, Takei uses Star Trek *to represent a world where the kind of racism that affected him as a child doesn't exist. And by comparing his immigrant grandparents to the crew of the Enterprise, he positions immigrants as amazing, brave explorers as they start lives in new countries. By noting that his grandparents were looking for opportunities, he gets at an important part of the American Dream: that the U.S. is welcoming to immigrants and offers them opportunities to thrive and grow.*

George's parents met in Los Angeles, California, in 1935. His father, Takekuma Norman Takei, was born in Japan. He immigrated to America as a teen and attended school in California's Bay Area. Later, he started a successful dry-cleaning business. George's mother, Fumiko Emily Nakamura, was born in California, but her parents raised her in a traditional Japanese way—and even sent her to Japan to save her from experiencing the segregated schools in Sacramento. George's parents married in the brand new Los Angeles city hall and celebrated with friends and family.

George's parents' stories highlight a disparity between how the U.S. purports to treat its immigrants and how immigrants are treated in practice. For Daddy, the U.S. represents a place of opportunity where he can achieve economic success. For Mama and her family, though, they struggled with the racism in the U.S. to the point of feeling like it was better for Mama to grow up in Japan. The U.S. might promise immigrants a lot, this suggests, but an immigrant's experiences can vary a lot.

The narrative shifts to Los Angeles in 1937; Mama has just given birth to a baby boy. He's Mama and Daddy's second child, but their first died at only three months old. This baby seems even more precious after the loss of their first, and Daddy—an anglophile—decides to call the baby George after King George VI of England. Baby George is, to Daddy, "as great as a prime minister, even a king." Later, George's brother Henry (named after Henry VIII) arrives, and finally, Mama gives birth to a daughter, Nancy Reiko. She's named Nancy for a beautiful friend of Mama and Daddy, and Reiko is Japanese for "gracious child."

Naming their children after English kings drives home just how fully Daddy embraces his life in America and in the English-speaking world more broadly. These names suggest that he's looking forward to his family's future in the U.S., and he wants his sons to feel like they're important and powerful and can control their destiny. Nancy Reiko's name, though, suggests that Mama and Daddy also want to connect their children to their Japanese ancestry.

It's Sunday, December 7, 1941. As "Silent Night" plays on the radio, George helps Daddy put lights on the Christmas tree while Henry plays with a train set. Mama feeds Nancy Reiko a bottle. The evening is calm and peaceful. Suddenly, "Silent Night" cuts out and a voice announces a special news bulletin: the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. A journalist in Washington says the details will be available in a few minutes—but the attack will mean war. There will have to be a counter-attack, and the president will certainly ask Congress for a declaration of war. Congress will, no doubt, grant that request. The voice says officials believe that Japan "has now cast the die." As the radio urges citizens to stay calm and avoid hysteria, Daddy and Mama exchange worried looks.

This idyllic family scene paints the Takei family as an American family just like any other. (The Takei family was Buddhist; they may have celebrated Christmas to connect with the U.S. culturally rather than for religious reasons.) The news of the attack on Pearl Harbor, notably, doesn't say anything about Japanese Americans living in the U.S.—but Mama and Daddy's worried looks suggest that they know that, given the circumstances, they and other Japanese Americans may find themselves at risk. They understand that war can intensify emotions—and perhaps, intensify racism as well.

Later, Eleanor Roosevelt addresses the nation. On her Sunday radio program, she acknowledges the gravity of the situation, explaining that the cabinet and congress are meeting with the president. In the meantime, "we the people" are already preparing to act. Later that day, President Roosevelt signs a proclamation declaring that all adult Japanese citizens in the U.S. are now "alien enemies" and will be subject to strict regulations.

It's worth considering the fact that mere hours apart, Eleanor Roosevelt talks about "we the people" as though she's talking to all Americans—and then, her husband essentially declares that Japanese Americans aren't *Americans. As Mama and Daddy feared, the attack by the Japanese is fueling racial animosity and will have dire consequences for innocent people.*

Daddy loves the United States, and by this time, he's been in the country for 25 years. But the U.S. never allowed him to apply for citizenship—and now, they think of him as an enemy. War hasn't even been declared yet.

The simple fact that Daddy is barred from applying for U.S. citizenship reinforces that, even before the war, the U.S. wasn't very welcoming to Asian immigrants—no matter how much they love their adopted country.

The following afternoon, everyone in the U.S. listens to President Roosevelt address Congress. He says that yesterday—December 7, 1941—will live in infamy. The Empire of Japan attacked the Hawaiian Islands yesterday, damaging the American military and taking many lives. As he speaks, white Americans destroy a Japanese couple's car, writing "Get Out" and the slur "Jap" on it. FDR continues that yesterday's events speak for themselves, and people have already made up their minds about what's going on. The country will always remember this attack.

Pairing President Roosevelt's address with images of white Americans vandalizing a Japanese couple's car suggests that, at least in time of war, patriotism and racism can end up going hand in hand. Indeed, FDR's insistence that people have already made up their minds seems to excuse the white Americans' violent behavior. It seems to suggest that people who (erroneously) blame anyone of Japanese ancestry for something that the Japanese government did are correct to do so. This only fuels racism more, sending the message that it's okay—and even patriotic—to treat anyone with Japanese heritage as the enemy.

As President Roosevelt speaks, a barber sets out a sign offering free buzzcuts for enlisting soldiers and hangs an American flag. Several white Americans look threateningly at Daddy. FDR insists that Americans will win; it's impossible to deny that the U.S. and its people are in grave danger, but with the military and a determined attitude, the U.S. will undoubtedly win. Finally, he asks that Congress authorize a declaration of war on the Japanese Empire. Within 33 minutes, Congress does just that.

Again, though FDR's speech brings out the best in some (such as actions to support soldiers, as with the free haircuts), FDR also (deliberately or not) suggests to many Americans that all *Japanese people pose a threat to the country, even Japanese Americans. But it's objectively bizarre to give Daddy threatening looks—he's been in the United States for 25 years and he's an anglophile with no intention of returning to Japan.*

The most popular political position in California at this time is "lock up the Japs." The state's attorney general, Earl Warren, decides to promote this position. He dreams of becoming governor and is willing to do anything to achieve this goal—so he tells reporters that the country must do something about "the Japanese situation" in order to prevent another Pearl Harbor. His words sow division and discord. Warren knows that he's talking about 100,000 innocent people, but that doesn't matter to him.

Earl Warren's story shows that this kind of divisive rhetoric can be a boon to politicians hoping to boost their careers. Sowing division and fear—and promising to protect people from whatever the threat is—can be a popular position. Taking this position, though, means dehumanizing and choosing not to care about thousands of people who haven't done anything wrong. It's possible, this shows, to subvert and corrupt American democratic ideals to achieve political success.

Earl Warren insists that the state has reports of Japanese Americans spying, committing sabotage, or engaging in fifth column activities. To top it all off, he insists that Japanese people are "inscrutable"—it's impossible to know what they're thinking, so it's essential to lock them up before they do anything bad. Thanks to the popularity he gained as a result of his rhetoric, Earl Warren ultimately became a three-term governor of California. He eventually became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Warren doesn't just become Chief Justice of the Supreme Court—only a little more than decade after this episode, he writes the majority opinion in the groundbreaking case Brown v. Board of Education, *the court case that deemed school segregation illegal. Due to this and other rulings, Earl Warren is generally remembered as a liberal icon who presided over a progressive court. But this book makes it clear that no historical figure is perfect. It's possible to acknowledge that Earl Warren did something awful in stoking fear and racist sentiment about Japanese Americans, while also giving him credit for his later work.*

Meanwhile, the mayor of Los Angeles, Fletcher Bowron, testifies in front of Congress. He insists that the Japanese are "nonassimilable." In his testimony, he says that no matter how many generations have been born in the U.S., Japanese Americans are still Japanese. Many of them may want to be loyal, he says, but when push comes to shove, he believes "blood will tell." He reminds Congress that they can't risk letting Pearl Harbor happen again.

Fletcher Bowron's rhetoric essentially insists that Japanese Americans aren't American—they're Japanese and are incapable of being anything else, no matter how tied they are to the United States. People keep bringing up Pearl Harbor in moments like this to scare people. They make it seem like in order to protect the country from another devastating attack, racism like Bowron espouses isn't just acceptable, but necessary.

Eventually, pressure in the U.S. grows and President Roosevelt has to do something. On February 19, 1942—74 days after Pearl Harbor—he signs Executive Order 9066. This order conspicuously avoids using the words "Japanese" and "camps." Instead, it authorizes the military to declare areas from which to then exclude people. Then, it asks the military to give those excluded people food, shelter, and transportation. Within 10 days, the entire West Coast and Arizona are declared a "military area," and it's obvious who will be excluded: anyone of Japanese ancestry.

Because Executive Order 9066 uses language very carefully, it means that FDR and other government officials can make a show of pretending it's not racist. But this only illustrates that what's implied can sometimes be more important than what is said. Something might not look racist and exclusionary on paper, but this doesn't make it acceptable. It's essential *to look at context. In this situation, the context makes it clear that Executive Order 9066 is going to target Japanese Americans.*

During the spring of 1942, more than 100 civilian exclusion orders are issued. Each one orders Japanese Americans living in a certain area to report to a local spot "for processing and removal." Soldiers load Japanese families onto buses and trains with only what they can carry. It's unclear where these families are headed.

The aside that Japanese Americans can only take what they can carry leaves an important part unsaid. This means that the families have to leave a lot behind, such as their homes, their jobs, and their communities. In this way, Executive Order 9066 decimates Japanese American livelihoods and communities. While the constitution guarantees Americans the right to life, liberty, and property, it seems like Japanese Americans may be about to lose all three.


By this point, many Japanese families have already lost many of their assets and possessions. Following Pearl Harbor, the government froze bank accounts belonging to anyone they suspected of "enemy activity"—and "enemy activity" even included traveling internationally after June 1940. Then, following Executive Order 9066, the government seized all financial assets, property, and businesses held by Japanese Americans. Japanese business owners were forced to accept ridiculously small amounts of money for their goods, and some people broke their possessions rather than selling them to white Americans. To stay afloat, they had to sell everything—from trinkets to their homes—for next to nothing.

Again, the "anyone" suspected of enemy activity very clearly refers to any person with Japanese ancestry. And here, Takei illustrates clearly how devastating this is for those affected. It means that Japanese Americans must resort to selling household items to stay afloat, since they can't access any of their money held in a bank. It's important to note that this is not simply unconscionable, but also unconstitutional—the government seized the property of Japanese Americans and did not give it back. But this doesn't mean all Japanese Americans accepted this. The aside that some people broke things rather than selling them suggests that for some, it was a point of pride to make sure a white American couldn't profit off of this racist system.



The government issues warnings, saying that any Japanese American farmers who stop tending their crops will be considered "wartime saboteurs." When the crops are ready for harvest, private entities seize them. Later, in 1943, California passes a law allowing the state to take any abandoned farm equipment. Earl Warren doesn't seem to care about the devastating effects of these policies. He tells curious reporters that he's aware of what's going on but hasn't investigated anything. Eventually, Mama discovers that the Takeis' bank account has been frozen, too.

Requiring farmers to tend their crops and then seizing the crops turns the farmers into forced laborers. This is another way that the government takes away Japanese Americans' livelihoods and their dignity. Earl Warren's reaction, moreover, suggests that the prevailing sentiment is that Japanese Americans don't deserve to be treated like human beings. Even though they've done nothing wrong, because their heritage connects them to the enemy, they're also seen as enemies.

By the middle of March, the Army begins evacuating districts and the government issues a curfew for all of the West Coast. Everyone of Japanese descent must stay at home between 8:00pm and 6:00am. According to Lt. General John L. DeWitt, the leader of the Western Defense Command, this is supposed to stop any attempts at sabotage or fifth column activity. Lt. General DeWitt is one of the men who holds the most responsibility for creating hysteria after Pearl Harbor.

Keep in mind that nowhere does Takei note that there was any evidence for the notion that Japanese Americans were plotting against the U.S. This idea is a total fiction, so the curfew and other restrictions are simply a way for the government to exert its power over Japanese Americans. Insisting that the Japanese Americans are conspiring against the U.S. also helps bring public sentiment to the government's side. Few are going to speak out against this kind of treatment if it seems justified.

Lt. General DeWitt tells reporters that the curfew is necessary because it's impossible to separate loyal Japanese from those who are disloyal. This is due to "racial traits." He insists that all of these measures are a military necessity, that the curfew will be strictly enforced, and that patriotic citizens must report violators to the authorities. President Roosevelt approves a law allowing police to arrest violators. Some people break the curfew on purpose to protest the unconstitutional regulations, even though the punishment is prison for a year, a $5,000 fine, or even both. Soon, the government creates more restrictions. Japanese Americans can't travel more than five miles from home or work. Soon, relocation notices go up in the Takeis' neighborhood. At this point, the soldiers come to the door.

Everything Lt. General DeWitt says here about Japanese Americans is extremely racist. He essentially proposes that because Japanese people look different (as implied by "racial traits"), they're also sneaky or dishonest. He also takes his racism a step further and makes racism seem positive by giving white civilians permission to report their Japanese neighbors. This further degrades the community and ensures that white neighbors won't be willing to stand up for Japanese Americans. The protests, though, offer hope that by making a fuss, Japanese Americans can show that they're human—and they deserve respect like anyone else.

It's February 19, 2017. George Takei has been invited to speak at the FDR museum and presidential library in Hyde Park, New York. This is where President Roosevelt was born, lived, and now rests. It's the 75th anniversary of Executive Order 9066—Japanese Americans observe this day as the Day of Remembrance. Entering the building on this date is a powerful experience. George takes his seat in front of the audience after one of President Roosevelt's descendants introduces him. Addressing the audience, George says it's an honor to speak here, and admits that he experienced many conflicting emotions on the drive (he took the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Parkway to get here). This place is "steeped in lore." He's familiar with the story of President Roosevelt's presidency—and, in a lot of ways, George's story starts here, too.

FDR is a complicated historical figure, especially for George Takei. He's responsible for something truly horrible in Executive Order 9066, but he's also a consistently popular past president who had significant achievements—including pulling the country out of the Great Depression. Noting that the museum is "steeped in lore" speaks to how large FDR looms in people's minds as a great president. But when George suggests that his story starts at FDR's former house, he insists that people understand that presidents aren't just mythical figures. They're people, and their actions have major consequences for other people—like George and his family.

It's the spring of 1942, and George and his family get off the train at the Santa Anita Racetrack. Every family is assigned a stall in the stables—and the stalls still smell like manure. George, at only five years old, doesn't understand how unjust the situation is. He's just excited to get to sleep in a horse stall. For his parents, though, this is devastating and humiliating. They worked so hard to buy a house in Los Angeles—and now they have to sleep in a barn.

As the family begins the journey to the internment camps, the narration highlights the fact that George and his parents had wildly different experiences. Because George is so young, this is just an adventure for him. It's cool to sleep in a stall. But to Mama and Daddy, this is proof that the government doesn't see them as human. Indeed, they're being treated more like livestock than like people.

Mama and Daddy do whatever they can to battle the unsanitary conditions. They take George, Henry, and Nancy Reiko to shower every day. But Nancy Reiko still comes down with a high fever. Mama takes the children to a stand in the middle of the stables, where people can get medicine. Eventually, George comes down with a cough too. He stays in bed and the lady in the next stall checks on him regularly.

Nancy Reiko and George's illnesses make it clear that the unsanitary conditions are bad enough to be dangerous. This is a further indicator that the government doesn't see Japanese Americans as people deserving of care—even if Executive Order 9066 requires the military to care for those interned. They seem to not even be doing the bare minimum.

George and his family settle into life at the stables and attempt to create some semblance of normalcy. Some other people start a garden, for instance. Despite these attempts, though, many people are angry and confront the soldiers guarding the camp. George starts school under the grandstands at Santa Anita.

For George, life seems to go on as usual. But other Japanese Americans make it clear that this isn't *normal, and they're not going to put up with unsanitary, dehumanizing living accommodations. Protesting and confronting the guards are the most effective ways to do this.*

Several months after their arrival, the guards order the Japanese Americans to pack up and prepare to leave. Those who arrived at the racetrack after George's family had the supposed luxury of getting to live in barracks constructed in the parking lot. To young George, they were lucky to live in houses. But for George's family, there's a long journey ahead of them before they'll reach a more permanent home.

George still reads as an innocent child here, which is in some ways a good thing. It'd no doubt be traumatizing to fully grasp the amount of hate and hysteria that landed him in the camp in the first place. But the fact that the military constructed barracks at all quietly highlights just how many people the nation interned.

On the platform at the train station, guards shout at the Japanese Americans to line up quickly. Before people board, soldiers give each person an identification tag that they're supposed to wear all the time. To Mama and Daddy, this is dehumanizing—but George thinks it's just his train ticket.

The identification tag no doubt gives the military a way to track Japanese Americans in much the same way, for instance, that farmers track livestock with ear tags or brands. This is why Mama and Daddy object; they're being treated like animals. But they allow George to maintain his innocence, which no doubt helps his outlook.

On the train, there are guards at each end of every car, as though the passengers are criminals. Many people are sick and coughing. George finally asks Daddy where they're headed. Daddy looks out the window at the passing desert and then says that they're going on a vacation somewhere called Arkansas. George is enchanted; he wants to know what it's like there. Daddy doesn't know, but George remains excited. He doesn't understand why people are crying—to him, it's normal to go on vacation by train, with guards posted in the cars. All of this is an adventure.

Again, the fact that so many people are ill drives home just how unsanitary conditions at the racetrack were—and by extension, how little the military cares about treating Japanese Americans like people. This exchange between Daddy and George is heartbreaking. Daddy certainly knows that there are awful things ahead, but he recognizes the importance of keeping George happy and upbeat. This helps George maintain his innocence.

Whenever the train approaches a town, the guards force the passengers to close the shades. Being so young, George and Henry don't understand. They think this is just the way things are. On the second day, the train screeches to a halt and guards shout for everyone to get off the train. People begin to panic; the train is stopped in the middle of nowhere, so people fear that the guards are going to kill them. A guard shouts that this is the passengers' opportunity to exercise, and some younger passengers translate the instructions into Japanese for older passengers who don't speak much English.

Given how poorly the military has treated Japanese Americans thus far, it's perhaps not surprising that people are afraid they're going to be shot in the desert. This further highlights how different this journey is for George versus his parents and the other adults. Adults recognize that their lives may actually be in danger. But kids like George and Henry don't have enough life experience to know that this isn't how things should happen, so they accept everything without much question.

Daddy leads George and Henry off the train. George promptly picks up a handful of dry dirt and throws it in Henry's face, causing his little brother to chase him. Another man finally catches George, ending the game, and compliments Daddy on his "lively boys." Daddy thanks the man and looks at his sons sadly. The boys continue to grin, and George believes that his father is in control. Now, he can only imagine what he was thinking during that journey, as they were forced to travel into an unknown future and leave everything behind.

George and Henry are little kids like any other—and the exercise break, to them, presents another opportunity to pester each other and play. As kids, they're adaptable and willing to go with the flow, especially since Daddy seems so in charge. Daddy likely looks so sad because he fears what internment is going to do to his "lively boys." He may fear that internment is going to break their spirits, as it seems to be breaking his.

Back in his 2017 talk at the FDR museum, George Takei tells the audience that his father took the brunt of the pain and anguish for his family. He says that when he was a teenager, he used to talk to his father after dinner about politics and the forced incarceration (internment) of Japanese Americans. During those conversations, Daddy taught George about "the power of American democracy." He insisted that people can come up with wonderful ideals and do great things—but people, he warned, are also fallible. He knows that during World War II, people made horrible mistakes.

It's possible that Daddy took on so much of the emotional pain to try to save the rest of his family from it. It may seem surprising that Daddy remains so convinced that American democracy is powerful and wonderful, even after internment. But Takei begins to suggest here that part of what makes democracy so great is that it requires people to make democracy work. And people, Daddy tells teenage George, can always make mistakes they'll regret later.

Jumping back to the exercise break, people mill around while soldiers lean against the train whistling. Henry and George giggle as one man urinates, and then a soldier shouts for everyone to get back on the train. George watches a soldier help a woman onto the train—and then he reaches out to touch the soldier's gun. The gun is hot from the sun and it burns George, so he shouts and jumps. The soldier tells George not to do that again and then lifts him onto the train. Daddy follows behind with Henry and they rejoin Mama and Nancy Reiko.

Young George might not be fully aware that guns are dangerous weapons; the gun might just be a fascinating new thing he's never seen before. When it burns him, though, it reinforces that the gun is something dangerous—and by extension so is the soldier, even though he doesn't do anything awful to George in this moment. But the simple fact that the soldiers are armed speaks to how intense the anti-Japanese hysteria is. Readers can tell that these are just families and children. And yet, they're being treated like they're dangerous enemies.


Mama offers Henry and George their own water canteens. To George, this isn't anything exciting or worth remembering. But later, he learns that Mama packed the canteens because she was concerned for her sons and was worried about the water supply on the trip. In addition, Mama goes to great lengths to stave off boredom. She has a bag of goodies filled with candy and snacks. This bag turns George and Henry's journey into "an adventure of discovery" and makes it unforgettable. But for Mama and Daddy, the trip is anxious and frightening. Mama stays busy all the time so she doesn't have to think about what she can't control. She feeds Nancy Reiko and cleans Henry up when he gets motion sickness. She's unwilling to let anything hurt her family.

Though Mama didn't voice any fears that the soldiers were going to shoot the train's passengers, it seems clear that she doesn't trust the military one bit. Instead, she believes it's her responsibility to protect her family from whatever might happen, whether that be bodily harm or dehydration. Her goody bag in particular shows that one way she protects her family is by helping George and Henry retain their innocence throughout the journey. This no doubt will also make things easier for her, as the boys will be easier to parent if they aren't terrified and traumatized.

George remembers Mama's concern and Daddy sitting by the window, looking melancholy. But those memories are vague compared to his "bright, sharp memories" of discovering, playing games, and happiness. He acknowledges, though, that memory can be tricky. It's dependable, but sometimes, it can play tricks—and childhood memories can be especially "slippery." They can be joyful and sweet, but it's also possible that those memories don't fully get at the truth. To illustrate this, George shows how a game of hiding under the train seats came to an abrupt and—for his parents—frightening halt when a soldier hauled George out by his arms. As a kid, these memories were sweet, and these memories are real. But now, as an adult, George feels he'll always be haunted by the reality of what was happening, which he barely understood at the time.

Again, George Takei makes it clear that there are two different journeys happening here. For George and Henry, this train ride is fantastic. They can learn about their world, and the train car is their playground. But this doesn't mean it's an entirely safe playground. Indeed, the way that George frames the soldier pulling George from under the seat suggests that George and Henry might be in danger if they're too rambunctious and annoy the guards just a little too much. But this seems to not register for young George. As an adult, now that he knows what was happening, his childhood memories are still happy—but he recognizes they don't tell the whole story of this train ride.


The train finally leaves the desert on the third day. In a town in Texas, Daddy pulls the shade down as the train screeches to a halt. George surreptitiously peeks under the shade and sees a group of old, weathered Black men sitting on a bench. He and Henry are awed, but Mama snaps the shade closed before a soldier notices.

When Mama pulls the shade closed, it reminds readers that the boys' happiness could end in an instant if the armed soldier chooses to take issue. The fact that they have to keep the shades closed when anyone could see inside the train also hints that the U.S. government understood that, at the very least, the optics of what they were doing was bad—they were forcibly imprisoning innocent Americans, and they didn't want other Americans to see that. Perhaps they worried that, despite the prevalent anti-Japanese rhetoric of the time, some Americans might find internment a bridge too far and start to fight back.

On October 7, 1942, the train passes the border into Arkansas. Soldiers begin to shout, "Roar," confusing George and Henry—they imagine lions dressed as soldiers. But the soldiers are actually shouting "Rohwer," the name of the easternmost internment site. The passengers get off the train and line up alongside it, sweating in the sun. Finally, a guard calls for the Takei family. On the back of Daddy's identification tag, without taking it off of Daddy's shirt, the soldier writes their housing assignment—Block 6, Barrack 2, Unit F. A driver will take them there.

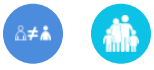
George and Henry's innocence is perhaps even more pronounced here, when they clearly don't know exactly where they're headed. Forcing the passengers to line up in the sun reads as another power trip, as does the soldier's choice to write the housing assignment on Daddy's tag without asking first or removing it. As a soldier and a guard, he has the power to invade Daddy's space without asking—and Daddy can't push back.

Daddy leads the family to a pickup truck. They load their things into the back and then climb in with a few other people—George is thrilled to be able to ride in the truck. As they drive, Japanese families wave to them. George explains to readers that Camp Rohwer was comprised of 33 blocks, each able to house 250 people. At its highest capacity, 8,500 Japanese Americans lived in the camp.

Noting how many people were once incarcerated at Rohwer is stunning—the facility is the size of a small town. To forcibly relocate and intern that many people did tons of harm to people, families, and communities.

The truck stops at Block 6 and everyone helps unload. Daddy leaves Mama with the children while he goes to find their lodging. George and Henry look past the barbed wire fence into the foreboding woods. They hear something making a scary "ca-caw" noise in the trees. A slightly older boy sitting nearby whispers conspiratorially that it's a dinosaur. George and Henry have never heard of dinosaurs, but they sense they should be afraid. The boy explains that dinosaurs were monsters who lived—and died—millions of years ago. He gets nervous when George asks why they can hear dinosaurs if they're dead, but he quickly adds that the only place they didn't die was in Arkansas. The boy insists that the fence is to keep the dinosaurs trapped.

Despite everything else going on, George and Henry remain kids like any others—and there's a lot for them to explore in their new home. This exchange, in other words, highlights the idea that George and Henry weren't thinking about internment, even as they sat in an internment camp. Instead, they were busy learning about dinosaurs and meeting other kids. What the other boy says about the fence keeping out the dinosaurs, though, is very sinister. It encourages the boys to see the fence as something meant to protect them, not as something dehumanizing.



When Daddy returns after finding their unit, George and Henry are still peering into the woods. Some young men arrive to help the Takei family move. One reaches for a heavy-looking bag that Mama always carries, but Mama pulls it away from him. She never lets anyone carry it for her, not even Daddy. The family trudges through the heat to Unit F and Daddy opens the door. A wall of heat rushes out; it's as hot as a furnace inside. Daddy thanks the young men for their help and stands, staring at the cabin. He finally tells Mama to wait while he opens the windows to air it out. Mama worriedly wipes sweat off his face when he comes back out, and they decide to wait for a bit before they go in.

Even though Daddy and Mama don't seem to know any of these people, it still seems like there's a robust community in Rohwer willing to help new arrivals. This offers hope that while internment may have destroyed many communities on the West Coast, Japanese Americans will be able to form new ones in the camp. Meanwhile, the heat in the unit reveals just how inadequate the lodging is for internees. The horse stall at Santa Anita may have been an adventure for George, but this seems like something entirely different—and perhaps, way worse.

When the family does go inside, the cabin is still boiling hot. Daddy stops George from touching the potbelly stove, which must be hot enough to burn him. He then tells Mama that they're handing out army cots at the end of the block; he'll head out to grab some. As he turns to leave, though, Mama and Daddy hear their neighbors through the thin wall; they're complaining about the heat. Mama whispers that they don't have any privacy. In Japanese, Daddy murmurs that they can't do anything about it. Soon after, he returns with the army cots.

For the people who built these barracks, privacy for Japanese Americans certainly wasn't their concern. This reinforces how little the government and the military care about the Japanese American internees. It's normal and part of American culture to desire privacy, so denying internees privacy further deprives them of their humanity.

Finally, it's time for Mama to open her secret, heavy bag. George and Henry are excited—they assume it contains some massive treat for them. Instead, Mama pulls out her sewing machine. George, Henry, and Daddy are shocked and confused. Mama explains to Daddy that she couldn't leave it, and the children will need new clothes. They stare at each other for a minute, and then Daddy reminds Mama that sewing machines aren't allowed. She repeats that the children will need new clothes. After a minute, Daddy snorts and he and Mama break down into raucous laughter. George doesn't understand what's funny. To him and Henry, the sewing machine is a huge disappointment.

After Mama's overflowing goody bag on the train, it makes sense that George and Henry would expect this bag contains another treat for them. But what Mama reveals is even more meaningful. By smuggling in her sewing machine, Mama takes control of the situation and ensures that she's going to be able to care for her family going forward. Mama and Daddy laugh about it because it is somewhat ridiculous that a sewing machine can be such a symbol of protest—but desperate times call for desperate measures.

Mama and Daddy throw themselves into setting up their new lives. Mama turns their single room into a home by sewing curtains and braiding rugs—and before long, Nancy Reiko is taking her first steps. The only thing Mama doesn't have to do is cook, but this doesn't make her happy. Instead, not being able to feed her family is just another loss. Now, George wonders if *everything* Mama did in the camp was an act of defiance. Daddy, meanwhile, throws himself into the community. He leaves behind the anguish he felt on the train and volunteers wherever he's needed. He also gets to know the people in Block 6.

Mama protests her internment by doing everything in her power to make their unit feel like a home, not a prisoner's barracks. In a situation where the government seems to want to dehumanize Japanese Americans, it's an act of defiance for Mama to insist in this way that she and her family are human. And thankfully, Daddy seems to finally find his feet. He recognizes the importance of building up a community, which is why he makes a point to meet people.

Daddy meets Mrs. Takahashi, a mother of four whose husband was arrested for being a Buddhist minister. He also meets the Yasuda family. Federal agents arrested Mr. Yasuda for the supposed crime of teaching the Japanese language to schoolchildren. Both men's only crimes were being highly visible in the Japanese American community, and for these crimes their wives are now on their own.

In order to further demonize Japanese culture, the government arrests Mr. Takahashi, Mr. Yasuda, and others like them. This also shows how traumatizing internment was for individual families. Internment may have not affected the Takeis like this, but they're still watching it happen and internalizing the messages it sends about Japanese culture.

In the camp, there are people from all over California and even some from Hawaii. There are Issei (immigrants from Japan), Nisei (second-generation immigrants), and some Sansei (children of Nisei). People in the camp held all sorts of professions before being incarcerated; the community is wildly different, but they're the same in that they're Japanese Americans in Block 6 of Camp Rohwer. Daddy feels strongly that they need to create a sense of community.

Japanese Americans at Rohwer aren't a faceless mass—they're people, with their own dreams and lives. While the government doesn't see or care about this, Daddy does. This is why Daddy wants everyone to band together and form a community, since together, they'll be able to work to make the government see them as people. Having a community will also make internment easier in the interim.

The land where Rohwer sits used to be swamp, and this becomes painfully obvious when the rains arrive. There's mud everywhere and George doesn't want to leave the cabin to use the latrine. George isn't sure whose idea it is, but soon, men gather to build a sort of boardwalk above the muck. It makes traversing the muddy roads bearable. Problems continue to crop up, though, from the latrines not having any privacy dividers between toilets to disgusting meals consisting of animal intestine. Daddy sees all of this and realizes that someone needs to represent the community.

Given the description of Rohwer as a swamp, it seems likely that the military built the camp somewhere where nobody else wanted to live—more proof that they don't see Japanese Americans as deserving the same comfort and quality of life as other Americans. As Daddy takes in all these insults, he sees that things are only going to get better if the internees work together to force the issue. The "someone" to represent the community will, presumably, be Daddy.

Daddy doesn't think of himself as a leader, but he knows he's qualified to lead. He speaks fluent Japanese and English, he's only 39 (so he can relate to both the elders and the youth), and he's experienced enough to seem credible but not out of touch. He willingly and proudly agrees to serve as block manager. This means he immerses himself in government bureaucracy, filling out forms and attending meetings. Daddy has so much to do in this capacity that he asks a young woman named Florence to be his secretary. She taps away on her typewriter and playfully scolds George when he touches it while her back is turned.

Daddy has a number of skills and qualities that make him an exceptional leader, even if he doesn't think of himself as being all that important. Indeed, the skills the memoir lists, such as his language skills and his experience, suggest that being a leader is as much about being able to make connections with people as it is about anything else. Daddy's intuition that, in the face of dehumanization, he must organize the community to advocate for better lives ties into his general love of American democracy. He clearly believes that politics and organizing are the way to make change, and that it's possible to build and strengthen community even in the worst circumstances. His relative optimism here foreshadows his ability to remain optimistic about America's future, even though the nation mistreated him terribly.

At the same time, George and Henry have the whole of the camp to explore. They amuse themselves catching beautiful butterflies, but they are startled into letting them go when older boys run past playing a loud game. Older boys play "war," which is a lot like cowboys and Indians—but instead, it's with Japanese and Americans. They shoot each other with sticks and argue over who *has* to be Japanese and who *gets* to be American. George is too young to want to play, so he and Henry continue to stalk insects.

The game "war" shows how shame starts to fester among Japanese Americans. Note that the older boys prefer to be American; it's a sacrifice and no fun to be Japanese. The boys, in this sense, are learning that it's better to be American (which in this case means white) than it is to be Japanese American. Fortunately, George doesn't seem to internalize this, allowing him to maintain his innocence a little longer.

One day, two older brothers named Ford and Chevy approach George and Henry. Ford asks George if he wants to learn a magic word that will give him power over the guards in the tower. George is thrilled that such a magic word exists, especially when Ford insists that the magic word will make the guards give him anything he wants. As Chevy smirks, Ford tells George to first shout everything he wants at the guard. Then, he must shout the magic word at the guards and they'll give him everything he shouted for.

To savvy readers, Ford and Chevy seem like bad news from the beginning. George and Henry are clearly gullible kids who are probably missing Mama's bag of candy, and it seems like Ford and Chevy are preying on their innocence and gullibility. It's also worth considering that what Ford tells George to do could put George in danger—the guards, after all, are armed, and even though George hasn't described any violence towards internees, that doesn't mean it's out of the question.

George's eyes grow huge. As Ford and Chevy giggle, he imagines candy raining down around him. He asks again for the magic word, and Ford reminds George that he has to say it right. George promises. Very slowly and clearly, Ford says the word: sakana beach. George is perplexed; *sakana* means fish and this doesn't seem very magical to him. He and Henry exchange a confused look as Ford says again that George has to say it just right. Ford explains that to say it right, he has to say it very fast and loud.

Ford and Chevy's trick on George and Henry may turn out horribly, but the trick itself shows that kids in the camps are just like kids everywhere. They sometimes do mean things to each other and string younger kids along—and that doesn't change because these kids happen to have Japanese ancestors. Put another way, this trick makes it clear to readers that these are children, not horrible prisoners who need to be guarded by armed guards.

George turns toward the guard tower and confirms that he has to shout for everything he wants and then say "sakana beach" quickly. Henry asks him to get bubble gum, and Ford warns him that if he says it wrong, the guards will get angry and might shoot. This prospect is terrifying, but George tells himself he's not a coward. He gets within 10 feet of the tower and starts yelling sweet treats at the confused guards. After yelling "tricycle," George gathers his strength and hollers "sakana beach" at them. He keeps yelling it as one soldier picks up a rock and tosses at him. It bounces off of George's head. George retreats, figuring he didn't say it right. He grabs Henry and runs away while Chevy and Ford laugh uproariously.

George doesn't want to look like a fool or a coward in front of the older boys. He's still really young and even if he's not interested in playing games with the older boys, he probably still wants to impress them—and he wants to get candy for himself and Henry. Given how the guard reacts by tossing a stone, it seems that Ford just wanted to frighten George by suggesting the guards might shoot. And again, George seems very young and innocent when he reasons that he just didn't say the magic words right.

Later, George asks Mama what's so magical about sakana beach. She translates the words from Japanese to English and insists there's no magic there; it's just mixed-up words. George finally asks Daddy to help him figure it out. He recounts yelling for bubble gum and popsicles and finally yelling, "sakana beach." Daddy thinks it over for a minute and then laughs, putting his head in his hands. He explains to his confused sons that the words sound like bad words in English, words that George and Henry should never use. He says that Ford and Chevy are bad for teaching them the words and they should be avoided. George agrees happily, but it's not until much later that he understands that with the right inflection, sakana beach sounds like "son of a bitch."

It's a testament to the strong bond between George and his parents that he takes this mystery to them to solve. It also speaks to George's youth—he has no idea that he said something rude that might, under other circumstances, get him in trouble. Daddy's sense of humor shines through when even he is able to laugh at the trick. Even if he doesn't want his sons saying "son of a bitch," he may find it secretly gratifying to know his sons (and possibly other gullible kids too) are unwittingly calling the guards rude names.


One day at breakfast, Daddy asks George and Henry if they'd like to go on a special outing outside the fence. He's arranged to borrow a Jeep. George and Henry are ecstatic and can't wait for tomorrow afternoon. The next 24 hours pass slowly. George tells all the boys he knows about their special trip. The boys insist that George is lucky, but George knows they get this privilege only because Daddy is the block manager.

Though George is probably right that they get to take this trip thanks to Daddy's position, the other boys are also right. George is lucky to have his family together, able to take a fun trip that might help them forget their troubles for a few hours. Other families are surely experiencing far worse.

Finally, Daddy pulls up in the jeep and honks the horn. George and Henry climb into the jeep and honk the horn, yelling for Mama to hurry up. Mama ties headscarves onto herself and Nancy Reiko and then climbs into the front seat. After Daddy signs a form at the gate, guards let him through. Daddy drives as fast as he can to thrill his sons and make Mama smile. They finally stop at a farm with chickens—and a terrifying creature that George thinks must be a dinosaur. But a farmer appears and explains that the creature is just a hog. Daddy says that the spam in the mess hall comes from hogs, and the farmer tells the boys to eat it so they grow big and strong.

This trip outside of the camp seems to revive everyone in the family. Daddy clearly wants to make this a memorable experience for everyone, and even Mama is smiling in the images. Even though they're going through an awful experience right now, in some ways, life goes on for the family. Further, the farmer who introduces the hog to George is white and doesn't treat George with any obvious animosity. This offers hope that there are white Americans who don't hold racist views of Japanese Americans.


As dusk arrives, Daddy speeds back to the camp. Mama turns around to see Henry asleep on George's shoulder. She motions for George to not wake Henry up, and he silently agrees. George is getting sleepy too, but he vows to stay awake the entire time. Mama gazes at Nancy Reiko, also asleep, as she holds Daddy's hand. Now, George thinks that childhood memories are so full of sounds, colors, smells, and temperatures. That afternoon trip in the jeep is still a fond memory that seems to "glow[] radiantly with warmth."

It's important, the memoir suggests, to savor moments like these when it seems like nothing in the world is amiss. Moments like these make life worth living—even in the midst of something as awful as internment. And as George mentioned earlier, these memories aren't any less real because he made them while his family was interned. It's true that he had a wondrous childhood—and it's also true he experienced something traumatic.


Winter arrives with snow. George has never seen snow and he's excited. It seems like magic to him. On the day of the first snow, George and Henry are the first ones out of the house and they immediately pelt Mama and Daddy with snowballs when they step outside. Daddy wastes no time in joining in the fun and helping the boys roll a massive snowball. This winter remains in George's mind as a warm, happy time, despite the cold.

Even though the Takei family is living through internment, George is still a kid. He's still enchanted by snow, and like a lot of kids, throwing snowballs is grand fun. Mama and Daddy encourage George to think this way in part to save him from having to learn about how horrible and demeaning so much of the situation really is.

It's soon Christmastime. The rumor spreads that Santa is coming to visit them, but it's not clear when. George asks Daddy when Santa will come, but Daddy's answer isn't satisfactory: he'll come sometime on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning. George is distraught. With a sob, he asks if Santa can get here any faster. Daddy reminds George that Santa has to visit kids in all 33 blocks, and he wants to spend time with each child. George is looking forward to it.

Given George's reaction, it seems likely that Santa—whenever he arrives—is going to fulfill his purpose of making Christmas brighter for the kids in camp. This gives the kids something to focus on and look forward to, while also distracting them from the bigger issues that are probably plaguing their parents.

Dinner on Christmas Eve is a special meal of roast chicken, sweet potatoes, and even chocolate cake. George wolfs his food down, reasoning that if he finishes sooner, Santa will arrive sooner. But as time goes on, Santa still hasn't come. George puts his head down and pokes at his chicken bones as a choir sings Christmas carols. Just when George is about to give up, he hears jingle bells. Santa bursts into the mess hall and asks each child—including Ford and Chevy—if they've been good. Henry and Nancy Reiko stare up at Santa with big eyes and accept their gifts.

Even though the food is special, it doesn't matter to young George—nothing can hold a candle to Santa. His excitement highlights his youth and his innocence. The scene itself, with the food and the Christmas carols, mimics the earlier scene when the Takei family listened to the radio and decorated their Christmas tree last year. In some ways, many things haven't changed—they're still celebrating Christmas, and it's still a bright, happy time despite the circumstances.

Then, Santa turns to George and asks if he's been good. George has, but something seems off. As he accepts his gift from Santa, he makes sure to poke the belly. It's obviously fake, and upon closer inspection, this Santa is clearly Japanese. This isn't the real Santa. George knows because last year, he got to sit on the real Santa's lap. But George chooses not to spoil it for Henry and Nancy Reiko, so he stays quiet. He figures the real Santa couldn't get past the barbed wire. Regardless, the fake Santa does make everyone's Christmas a little brighter.

George's understanding of what makes Santa real highlights another way that Japanese American kids are taught that being white is better. It seems obvious to George that Santa must be white—but Santa is a fictional character, though the legend's origins are European. When George chooses not to spoil it for his siblings, it's a mark of his growing maturity. He has a long way to go, but he's nevertheless developing compassion in choosing to protect his siblings' innocence. He seems also to be following in his parents' footsteps, as they've protected his own innocence all along.

Not all of George's memories are as happy as these. In January 1943, he wakes up to his parents talking about something "outrageous" having to do with allegiance to the emperor. Mama is crying, so George sits up and tells her not to cry. Mama and Daddy smile, tell George everything is fine, and say they're just talking about adult things. George goes back to sleep.

Introducing what comes next in this way makes it impossible for readers to ignore George's youth and innocence. He—and at this point, the reader—has no idea what's going on; his primary goal is to keep Mama from crying. This begins to hint to him that there are lots of things he doesn't understand about his situation.

For the reader, George explains that white Americans began to call Japanese Americans' loyalty into question as soon as the war started. Lt. General DeWitt insisted that a Japanese person was still Japanese—even if they were technically an American citizen. Meanwhile, Senator Tom Stewart declared that it was impossible for Japanese people—and even for Japanese Americans—to assimilate into American society.

Lt. General DeWitt and Senator Stewart both espouse racist rhetoric that essentially insists that nobody with Japanese heritage could possibly be truly American. This goes against the idea—or the myth—that America is welcoming to immigrants. As immigrants from Japan (or even as first- or second-generation Americans), their motives and their loyalties will often be called into question.

To make things even worse, young Japanese-American men tried to sign up for the military in droves early in in the war. But recruiters denied them and declared them "enemy aliens." Any Japanese-Americans in the armed forces by the time of Pearl Harbor had their weapons taken, even though most of them had never even been to Japan and considered themselves entirely American. It's insulting and ridiculous that the government believed they had "racial loyalty" to the Japanese emperor.

Here, George Takei tries to drive home how racist and wrong the government's logic is—and how harmful it is to Japanese Americans. It's insulting and demeaning for those Japanese American soldiers when the military confiscates their weapons and considers them enemies, just because their ancestors came from Japan. In other words, just because they look like *the enemy, they're considered enemies.*

Early in February of 1943, President Roosevelt declares that *any* loyal citizen should be able to serve in the military, no matter where in the world their ancestors came from. Essentially, as the war drags on and the need for soldiers increases, the government has come around to allowing Japanese Americans can serve—as long as they're "loyal citizens." To judge whether Japanese Americans are loyal or not, the government and the army distribute questionnaires to all adults in the camps and ask everyone over the age of 17 to fill them out. The questionnaires want to know about any relatives in Japan, a person's criminal records, and even what magazines they read.

Though FDR's proclamation that anyone should be able to serve in the military may seem, at first glance, to be reasonable, it's again important to look at the context. The U.S. needs soldiers to keep fighting effectively, so Japanese Americans essentially become their last choice. This in and of itself is demeaning, but the loyalty questionnaires make it even worse. To judge someone's loyalty based on what magazines they read or whether they have relatives in Japan is ridiculous; what matters is how a person acts. And George has already showed that Japanese Americans in the camps think of themselves as Americans and, as much as they can, love their country. The questionnaire should be unnecessary.

But two questions, questions 27 and 28, become infamous. Question 27 asks if the respondent is willing to serve in the military on combat duty. Question 28 asks respondents if they're willing to swear "unqualified allegiance" to the U.S. and defend the country from attacks—as well as give up any loyalty or obedience to the Japanese emperor, foreign governments, and foreign organizations. These two questions spark outrage in all the camps.

Question 28 in particular rests on a faulty pretense: that anyone of Japanese ancestry must feel loyal to Japan, just because of that ancestry. (By asking Japanese Americans to relinquish loyalty to the emperor of Japan, the question implicitly assumes that every Japanese American has this loyalty in the first place, which was very offensive to many people in the camps.) This doesn't take into account people like Daddy, who aren't American citizens but who still love and idealize America—there's no evidence that even Daddy, who is still a Japanese citizen, feels loyalty or obedience to the emperor.

Mama and Daddy answer no to both questions, which gets them labeled "no-nos." George explains that question 27 asks them to give their lives to a country that imprisoned them. Question 28, meanwhile, rests on the false pretense that all Japanese Americans feel a "racial allegiance" to Japan's emperor. Answering affirmatively would mean agreeing that the respondent had any loyalty to give up. But whatever people answer, Japanese Americans realize that the government will use their responses to justify imprisonment. Either way, the U.S. government will feel they were right to lock up Japanese Americans and call them "enemy aliens."

The logic might be faulty, but that means there's no way to win with the questionnaire. If a person answers no to both questions, they'll be treated as though they are loyal to Japan and feel no love for the U.S. Answering yes, meanwhile, means accepting the questions' racist premises to then put one's life on the line for the U.S. It's also worth considering that this also only helps young men gain the ability to serve. For women like Mama, the questionnaire just counts against her since she can't join the military as a woman.

Daddy was raised in America, though he was born in Japan—and like all Asian immigrants, he couldn't apply for U.S. citizenship. Question 27 asks him to agree to serve a country that denies him rights and then imprisons him for being Japanese. Being middle-aged, with a wife and three kids, serving also seems risky. Question 28 wants him to give up all his memories and heritage for a country that doesn't want him anyway. For Mama, question 27 is just absurd, but question 28 frustrates her. She's an American citizen, as are her three children. Her country, though, rejects her husband and has taken everything. The question asks her to prioritize her country over her family.

Though Mama and Daddy's reasons differ somewhat, they both understand that the questionnaire is asking them to choose either their family or the United States. Given their desire to keep the family safe and together, answering no-no seems like the best choice: it won't take Daddy away from them by having him enlist in the military, and it won't force them to give up their principles. In explaining Daddy's reasoning, George also notes that it's wrong to ask immigrants to totally forget their home countries. Immigrants don't lose all connections with their home country when they immigrate—and this makes the U.S. richer.

Other people, mostly Nisei, answer yes-yes. Although they find the questions ridiculous, they want to fight for their country and prove that they're true patriots. So in early 1943, the army creates the 442nd regimental combat team, which is an all-Nisei unit consisting of thousands of Japanese Americans from the internment camps. When the Germans surround the 1st battalion, 141st regiment of the 36th Texas division in France, all hope seems lost. Two missions to save the battalion fail and finally, in the fall of 1944, commanders send in soldiers from the 442nd. After four days, the 442nd prevails and rescues 211 men. It suffers more than 800 casualties, and 42 soldiers are sent to Bavaria to a P.O.W. camp. By the end of the war, the 442nd is the most decorated unit of its size.

The 442nd prove themselves to be loyal citizens in every way—though again, they shouldn't have had to prove anything in the first place. But their brave actions in Europe make it clear that they are valuable members of American society who are willing to risk their lives for their country. Diversity, in the military as well as elsewhere, makes a community richer and means there's a larger skillset to draw on during difficult times. The fact that they rescue, presumably, an all-white battalion drives home even further that the 442nd took the high ground, rescuing people who may not have wanted them to be a part of the military in the first place.

President Truman honors many soldiers from the 442nd with the Distinguished Service Cross in the summer of 1946. This is the second-highest honor possible. More than 50 years later, in 2000, the government upgrades the cross to the Congressional Medal of Honor. At this time, President Bill Clinton had already asked George to serve on the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission, and George watches the surviving members of the 442nd receive the award.

Here, George shows that the U.S. didn't forget about internment once it ended—it continued to try to make up for internment, decades later. This offers hope that, as heartbreaking as George's story is, the United States can improve its treatment of its people and make amends, celebrating Japanese Americans for their contributions to the country.

The most famous soldier to receive the medal is Senator Daniel K. Inouye, a senator from Hawaii. (Years after this, he helps George found the Japanese American National Museum.) Several years before, another senator from Hawaii, Daniel Akaka, pushed the Army and Navy to review whether they had unfairly denied Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who served in World War II the Medal of Honor. President Clinton said that day that "Rarely has a nation been so well-served by a people it has so ill-treated."

On the surface, upgrading the 442nd's honors to the Medal of Honor makes it clear that the U.S. is trying to atone for its mistakes and make things right. But that's also a pretty narrow solution, as it only honors a subset of Japanese Americans who were affected by internment. It's also worth noting that interned Japanese Americans went on to do great things after internment, serving in government or becoming huge names in entertainment like George Takei. They make the country richer.

Other young men see things differently. Some are willing to fight, but only if they can sign up in their hometowns, like all other Americans. They refuse to leave their families in the camps so they can wear the same uniforms as the sentries who guard the camps. In 1944, several dozen men who resisted in this way are taken to Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary in Kansas. George is proud of them; he thinks they're as heroic as the Japanese Americans who fought in Europe. Through their different responses—caring for families, fighting, or going to jail—Japanese Americans demonstrate their courage. They prove that "being American is not just for some people." Their choices are difficult, but they all demonstrate their patriotism.

These other no-nos stand up for their principles and protest the government's mistreatment. Though they go to prison for their protest, this also places them in a long line of Americans who have gone to prison for their ideals, from the suffragists in the early 20th century to Martin Luther King, Jr. later in the memoir. As George notes, the Japanese Americans who protested in these different ways demonstrated that they're Americans, even if their country refuses to treat them as such.

On May 9, 1944, George's family prepares for another relocation, this time to Tule Lake. They're being relocated because of their answers to the survey questions. On the platform, George asks Mama why everyone is crying. She explains gently that people might not see their friends again. George looks out the window at his friends' and neighbors' faces. The barracks were his home—and the guard towers, once terrifying, are just part of the landscape. Nancy Reiko screams as the train pulls out. They're all scared of what might come next.

At Rohwer, the Takei family had a community and felt at home. By moving the Takeis (and presumably, other families who answered no-no), the government punishes them by ripping them away from their new community. George's insistence that the guard towers are a part of the landscape speaks to how adaptable children are. What should be foreboding is, to him, normal. This is also why Nancy Reiko screams. Rohwer is probably all she knows, given how tiny she was when the family was interned.

Five days later, the train pulls into Camp Tule Lake in northern California. It's very different from Rohwer. There are three layers of barbed wire fences, and it's a maximum-security "segregation camp for disloyals." Guarding the camp are battle-ready troops, machine gun towers, and tanks. When Henry asks George why they're at Camp Tule Lake, George says it's because Mama and Daddy are no-nos. Henry doesn't know what this means.

Both George and Henry are pretty oblivious to what's actually going on. George knows the broad strokes—that his parents are no-nos—but it's unclear if he even knows what this refers to. Given the description of Tule Lake as a "segregation camp for disloyals," it's clear that the government sees no-nos as "disloyals" who need to be heavily guarded.

George Takei explains to readers that many Japanese Americans responded no-no on the questionnaire. Though a few applied for repatriation, most people didn't want to go to Japan, which at this time was war-torn. Those who didn't apply for repatriation ended up at Camp Tule Lake. This camp was the cruelest, most notorious, and the biggest of the internment camps. At its height, it held 18,000 prisoners—almost half of them children.

Repatriation would return people to Japan, which George makes clear isn't most people's first choice at this point. Presumably, many people like the Takeis feel as though the United States is their home and they have a better chance staying there, where they're dealing with racism, than relocating to a country that's struggling with major economic issues and damage due to the war. Noting that Tule Lake's internees were almost half children drives home the absurdity of having battle-ready troops guarding the camp. The internees are families, not hardened criminals or an enemy army.

At Camp Tule Lake, George loves living across from the mess hall, but Mama hates it. The clang of the bell annoys her every morning. However, Daddy points out that this spot means they get two rooms, which is better for their family of five. They finally have an actual living room. In addition to the constant noise, Mama complains often about the smells from the cleanup crews. The other downside is that their unit is far away from the latrines. One night, when Henry has to use the toilet, George races with him across the camp. They return when Henry wets himself. After this night, Mama starts to save coffee cans to keep in the bedroom, just in case.

Again, because of George's youth, Tule Lake presents many opportunities to play, discover, and delight in the small moments. This is why he's so happy to live across from the mess hall. But Tule Lake challenges Mama's ability to keep her family safe and cared for, especially since the latrines are so far away. Saving coffee cans certainly isn't ideal, but it's Mama's way of making do with what she has.

Since the family lives so close to the mess hall, George is able to get front-row seats for movie nights. Here he discovers what power movies can have. He vividly remembers *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* starring Charles Laughton and empathizes with his character. Some nights, the camp shows Japanese movies without the audio track. But instead of showing them silent, the camp employs a *benshi* to provide the soundtrack. Daddy explains what *benshi* do: when movies were silent, *benshi* were considered artists and could create many voices and sounds. George is fascinated.

It's possible that George's interest in acting starts here, watching a benshi *provide the audio track for otherwise silent films. George seems to recognize that performing can have a major impact on viewers—it certainly seems to brighten his experience and give him something to look forward to, in addition to showing him characters (like the hunchback) who don't easily fit into their society. In this sense, the camp shapes George's future in a number of ways, paving the way for him to become a performer later in life.*

Once again, Daddy becomes a block manager. He works hard and because of this, he doesn't spend as much time with Mama and his children. This is hard for George—and for Mama.

At Tule Lake, family life becomes a bit more strained. It seems as though Daddy has to prioritize the wider community over his family, at least to some degree—which is no doubt hard for Mama, who now has to parent alone.

One morning, George wakes up to discover young men marching and chanting "wah shoi!" They all wear headbands featuring the Japanese Empire's flag. They're disillusioned and feel betrayed by the U.S. after suffering years of abuse, so they've decided that if the government is going to treat them like enemies, they might as well act like it. They've become radicalized—or, at least, that's how the camp's sentries, who are U.S. soldiers, view them. To the sentries, the entire camp is filled with "disloyal Japs."

Even though George's family doesn't become radicalized, George Takei suggests that it shouldn't be surprising that some people do. The pressure and the pain that the government inflicts on the internees is, in some cases, enough to make Japanese Americans feel like they have no reason to stay loyal to the country.

George explains that anyone who answered no-no on the questionnaire, even in protest like Mama and Daddy, is lumped in with real radicals. Soldiers raid barracks at night to arrest radical leaders, but they often arrest the wrong people. They bar people from working if they suspect them of being radicalized, which disrupts food and fuel deliveries and hurts the entire camp. Even worse, though, is that internees turn on each other. Some men accuse their fellows of being informants and sometimes the fights escalate to include insults and punches. George and Henry watch a fight wide-eyed and don't understand why one man called another "inu," which means dog. The camp command sends the boys home.

Though George Takei makes sure that readers get a nuanced view of why people answered no-no on the questionnaire, he proposes here that the government didn't care about any nuance. They instead lump all Japanese Americans who answered no-no in one faceless mass, with no acknowledgement that people may have answered no-no for a variety of reasons. Especially for George and Henry, this begins to shatter their innocence. It's no longer possible for them to ignore that bad, scary things are happening.

Since Daddy knows everything, George and Henry ask him about what they saw and heard. Daddy explains that the man called the other man a dog because he's upset, and perhaps he thinks the other man did something bad to the Japanese to curry favor with the guards. When George asks if people have done stuff to the Japanese, Daddy says he doesn't know—but they shouldn't guess about that sort of thing and fuel rumors and division. Finally, George asks what "ketoh" means; both men shouted that at the guards. Daddy says it's another word that hurts people, but the guards weren't hurt because they don't know what it means. It means "hairy breed." George muses that white people *are* very hairy, but Daddy says it's still a bad word.

Even as George becomes more aware of the turmoil around him, he's still a small child—and to a small kid who loves his father, it makes sense that he thinks Daddy would know everything. It's important to note that as Daddy talks to his sons about what they saw, he tries to teach them to be comfortable with gray areas. Some things, he suggests, aren't worth speculating about—and speculation can do more harm than good. But he also impresses upon them that most of all, they need to be kind to others. Even if that means being kind to someone who isn't kind to them, it's still important.

It seems like every day the tensions between the guards and internees increase. One day, Daddy, George, and Henry see guards carry off a man. Another guard yells at the surrounding crowds to go home, otherwise they'll end up in the stockade with their "radical friend." Daddy leads the boys away quickly, but George says they need to help the man. Daddy pulls his sons away anyway.

Even though Daddy insists it's important to stand up for what you believe in, he demonstrates here that sometimes, safety and family come first. This is why he drags George and Henry away—he seems to believe it'd be too dangerous to get involved, even if George can correctly identify that that'd be the right thing to do.

Traumatic experiences like these haunt George for years. He explains that most Japanese Americans of his parents' generation prefer not to talk about internment with their children. They all live "haunted by shame for something that wasn't their fault." Shame, George says, is cruel. Perpetrators *should* feel shame, but victims tend to feel more of it. However, unlike most parents, Daddy is willing to talk to George. As a teenager, when George asks why Daddy allowed the family to go to the camps when he knew it was wrong, Daddy encourages George to see that everything was stacked against him. He had kids to consider, and they were escorted from their house at gunpoint.

George suggests that shame, in many cases, leads to silence—even if a person has nothing to be ashamed of. And silence, George implies throughout the memoir, means that future generations won't be able to learn from this historical event. So Daddy's willingness to talk to George is extremely important. Even though George doesn't fully understand Daddy's reasoning, Daddy still levels with George and treats him like he has a right to know. With this, the memoir shows that as kids grow, they'll inevitably lose their innocence. But it's important that parents step in to add context and help their children understand.

Teenage George angrily accuses his father of consenting to the abuse. Daddy asks what George thinks he should've done instead. George shouts that he would've protested, organized his friends, and done everything to stop the incarceration. The Japanese, he insists, are too passive—someone needed to speak up. Daddy says that it would've made sense for a teenage George to protest, but he had the family to think about. He says George will understand someday. Enraged, George asks if he'll understand when he grows up, and then he insists he's *already* grown up, and he knows that Daddy led them into a prison with barbed wire. Daddy says that perhaps George is right and leaves the room. Today, it pains George to think about what he said to his father. He suffered and understood far more than George will ever understand.

Though Daddy doesn't say it outright, he implies that a person can protest simply by keeping their family together and staying alive. For that matter, George was able to make many happy memories of his time in the camps—something that he probably wouldn't have been able to do had Daddy been arrested or killed for protesting. But as a young teen interested in justice, George is unable to see this. Though nothing he says is incorrect, he also doesn't yet feel able to forgive Daddy for not joining in on the protests that did take place. This is in part because he doesn't yet understand that Daddy had responsibilities to his family that, for him, transcended his responsibility to the community.

By the time George is a teenager, Rohwer and Tule Lake aren't history yet. One day, George and Daddy talk about one of George's most frightening memories: being in a crowd of shouting people, having guards break up the crowd with batons, and being separated from Daddy. George shouted for Daddy as a jeep bore down on him, and Daddy pulled George to safety at the last moment.

This terrifying vignette makes it clear just how bad things were getting in the camp. It became impossible for young George to miss the violent, dangerous events happening. Moreover, it seems as though the guard driving the jeep was poised to knowingly run George over. This is a far cry from the way that guards treated George earlier in the memoir, by just scolding him or even tossing a rock. Now, they seem to not even acknowledge that George is human, let alone an innocent child.

Daddy explains to teenage George that the assembly was a demonstration protesting the arrest of a supposed radical. The man wasn't a radical, but it didn't matter if he was or not. It was important, he says, to exercise their right to assembly and show the camp command that they opposed the arrest. At this moment, George realizes he's been participating in democracy since he was a small child. This, he insists, is proof of the strength of the American system: people can organize, speak up, and engage in the democratic process.

George might not have understood what was happening at the time. But because he and Daddy have this rapport, he's able to add more context to his frightening childhood memories. This allows him to see that Daddy didn't just stand by, as he'd accused him of doing earlier. Rather, Daddy did *protest—and young George did too. This marks them as Americans, since the right to protest is an essential right that Americans have, and protesting is a way of participating in American democracy and society.*

George resumes his childhood narration from the camp. He says that, in the moment, some people already know the internment camps are wrong and want to do something about them. Every month, a Quaker missionary named Herbert Nicholson brings books from a local bookstore to the camps. Though the camp director gives him permission to come and go, not everyone is happy about what he does—and once, armed men attack his truck. The people in one of the camps he frequents believe he won't come back after the attack, but he returns the next month with more books. He continues his work delivering books and once even brings an internee their relative's cremated remains. He sometimes takes pets to veterinarians outside the camp. After the war, he continues to advocate for Japanese Americans.

Here, George acknowledges that the Japanese Americans who protested from within the camps aren't working totally alone. Rather, there are people outside the camps who are willing to stand up to the government's racism and bigotry. Herbert Nicholson's actions show that bravery can take many different forms—and that it doesn't take much to show a person he values their humanity. In particular, delivering the cremated remains is such a simple gesture—but it means the recipient will be able to treat their loved one with dignity and respect.

On July 1, 1944, George senses something off. He asks Daddy if something is wrong. Daddy says that there are lots of things wrong, but everything's okay today. In some ways, Daddy is wrong: in Washington, D.C., a few months ago, the House took up a bill that would create one of the most complicated issues to come out of incarcerating Japanese Americans. Attorney General Francis Biddle drafted H.R. 4103, which would give interned Japanese Americans the "right" to give up their rights as citizens. He explained to the House that it would expatriate those who have been openly disloyal to the U.S., despite being born in the country. It passed, 111 to 23.

Keep in mind that "those who have been openly disloyal" probably refers to all *Japanese Americans, regardless of their loyalty or behavior. At this point they are, after all, still referred to as "enemy aliens." The legislation reads as a way for the U.S. to legally do away with Japanese Americans they don't want living in the country, while making it seem like a good thing for those affected. The fact that the bill does experience some opposition in the House suggests that some Representatives see it as racist or illegal.*

In June, H.R. 4103 goes before the Senate. Several senators speak in support of the bill, hoping that Japanese Americans will take advantage of it. This will mean that the U.S. can offer them to the Japanese government in exchange for imprisoned American citizens. The bill passes with little debate and no opposition. Days later, on July 1, the president signs the bill into law. Now, Japanese Americans have "the 'right' to become 'enemy aliens.'" The group most likely to be affected is the Nisei, like Mama.

The fact that the U.S. government wants to essentially trade its own noncombatant citizens (interned Japanese Americans) for American prisoners of war in Japan drives home the absurdity of the situation. In general, a prisoner swap involves soldiers, not civilians—and there's no justice in making innocent Japanese American families relocate to a foreign country in order to bring white American soldiers back home. In this way, the country once again ignores Japanese Americans' humanity—and their identity as Americans.

In October of 1944, Mama leads George, Henry, and Nancy Reiko past a man speaking. He shouts that America treats them like garbage, and they shouldn't take it anymore. Instead, they must take pride in their heritage. Back in the cabin, Mama and Daddy discuss what they should do, since it seems like everyone wants them to go to Japan. Daddy assures her that together, they'll choose the best path.

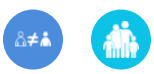
Though the man may have a point—it's good to take pride in one's heritage—George and Daddy's optimism about the U.S. throughout the memoir suggests that Daddy doesn't totally agree with the man. Rather, he and Mama have to do what's best for their family, while also weighing the fact that they'd still like to stay in the U.S.

On December 18, 1944, headlines run in all the papers announcing that the Supreme Court ruled that it's illegal to hold "loyal Nisei" in camps. This means the camps will close in six months to a year, and the family will have to leave Tule Lake. This news terrifies and confuses people. People come to Daddy, concerned that they have nowhere to go. They're aware that anti-Japanese sentiment is as strong as ever outside of the camps, but Daddy assures everyone that he'll share more information as he gets it.

The government creates an impossible situation with the news of the camps' eventual closing. Japanese Americans are probably right to be afraid—they lost their homes and all their assets when they were interned in the first place, and few or no white Americans objected to their internment. The camps are horrible, but in some ways, they're a known quantity and may seem safer than going back into regular American life and trying to start over.

George stands by the fence that day, listening to young men debate the issue. One of them is excited to go home; the other insists that their homes are gone and white people aren't going to be kind. George notes that ironically, the barbed wire fences simultaneously imprisoned them and protected them. It was dangerous outside the fences.

The second man George hears makes the case that once they get out of the camps, life is going to be very different than it used to be. Home as they knew it—and their communities—have been fractured, and it will take time for the country (and Japanese Americans specifically) to recover from internment.



Only a few dozen Japanese Americans have renounced their citizenship by this time. Soldiers make rounds through the camps asking people if they're planning to renounce their citizenship, and they make it clear that if people renounce, they get to stay safely in the camp. It seems clear to Mama and Daddy that in order to keep the family safe and together, they'll have to renounce citizenship.

The government desperately wants Japanese Americans to renounce their citizenship, so they turn up the pressure. Renouncing means that people will be safe—and won't have to deal with the racism of the outside world. The government, in this sense, knows full well what horrors Japanese Americans have to look forward to outside of the camps and they understand that renouncing probably feels safer to many.

Weeks later, Mama stands in line to renounce her citizenship, along with thousands of other Japanese Americans at Tule Lake. To many, it seems worthless. Some protest the U.S. government with the pro-Japanese militants, but others—like Mama—have other concerns. Mama chooses to renounce her citizenship with the hope of being able to force the government into protecting her family. Mere months later, George's family learns that this was a grave miscalculation.

It's significant that this passage shows people protesting in multiple ways. There are those who march and join in organized protest, which is important. It makes the Japanese Americans visible and makes sure people hear them. But others, like Mama, are trying to protect their families and not give the government the satisfaction of destroying the Japanese American community in its entirety.

It's August 1945, and the news rips through the camp that Hiroshima no longer exists. Japanese Americans fret about family members living in Hiroshima, and many don't believe the attack actually happened. (Many people also didn't believe it when they got the news that President Roosevelt died; they figured it was propaganda meant to unsettle them.) But then, three days later, the U.S. bombs Nagasaki. Many families at Tule Lake, including George's, are devastated. Mama sobs for family members she assumes are dead. Daddy holds and comforts her, encouraging her to go on. The camp grows eerily silent.

The U.S. bombed Hiroshima and then Nagasaki with atom bombs in August of 1945. The bombs were devastating, leveling the cities and killing thousands of people. The clear lack of trust between the Japanese Americans and the government is perhaps unsurprising, given how the government has treated internees. The government has tried to manipulate them in various ways, including with H.R. 4103, so the bombings could easily seem like a hoax meant to further demoralize Japanese Americans.

Mere days later, on August 14, Daddy comes into the mess hall to announce that Japan surrendered and the war is over. Everyone stares at him silently until one man shouts that it's a trick. Daddy insists it's not a trick. Now they have to prepare for the camp to close.

As the block manager, Daddy holds a powerful position. It's up to him to prepare the internees to face the real world again—and to tell them the truth about what's going on, just as he does with his sons.

The government cuts services at the camps to encourage people to move out. The people who renounced their citizenship have no choice but to stay, though. Mama and Daddy worry about what they'll do in Japan. Mama is supposed to depart on the first ship of "enemy aliens" on November 15, 1945. Though she was born in Sacramento, she's going to be deported to a war-torn country.

Now, Mama and Daddy realize that renouncing Mama's citizenship was a mistake. Since she's a supposed "enemy alien," the government doesn't feel the need to provide camp services, making the family's situation even worse than it was before. Because Mama is of Japanese ancestry, the government feels no responsibility to care for her or treat her like a person.

A lawyer from San Francisco, Wayne Collins, has challenged Order 9066 to the Supreme Court. Now, he dedicates himself to helping with what becomes known as the renunciation crisis. Thousands of prisoners renounced their citizenship to protect their families, but now that the war has ended, everything is different. Mr. Collins insists that he'll keep fighting—and that it's ridiculous to think that people can renounce their citizenship. In September, about 1,000 people who renounced citizenship form the Tule Lake Defense Committee, with Wayne Collins as their representative. He argues in court that people renounced because they were forced to do so as a result of their internment and the poor conditions at Tule Lake—and that the government is responsible.

Like Herbert Nicholson, Wayne Collins sees clearly that targeting Japanese Americans is wrong and racist. He offers hope that there are others like him who, when they see injustice like this, will use their positions of power to speak out and advocate for what's right. He also proposes that H.R. 4103 isn't just morally wrong, it's illegal—those who renounced citizenship were coerced, and giving up one's citizenship shouldn't be so easy. By trying to make the government take responsibility, Mr. Collins tries to improve the democratic system and ensure that this sort of thing can't happen again.

Two days before the ship is supposed to depart, Wayne Collins files *habeas corpus* suits for almost 1000 plaintiffs. The next day, a Japanese American attorney, Ted Tamba, delivers the news that it worked. He explains that they're scheduling mitigation hearings, and Mama's will take place right away. Mr. Collins and the San Francisco branch of the ACLU lead the legal defense—but the San Francisco ACLU is the *only* branch of the organization to stand up for the rights of Japanese Americans.

The ACLU didn't want to seem adversarial during wartime, and many ACLU leaders supported President Roosevelt (recall that Mr. Collins began representing Japanese Americans at the start of the war). This shows that politics can, unfortunately, influence people into making immoral and dehumanizing choices for political gain.

The ship leaves on schedule, but George's family isn't on it. Nearly 90% of the people who received hearings are released. It takes years to get Mama's citizenship back, but in 1945, being freed from deportation means that the family can move anywhere in the U.S. George believes that Wayne Collins determined his destiny, as well as that of many other Japanese Americans.

When George notes that Wayne Collins determined his destiny, he suggests that being able to stay in the U.S. was essential to his life path. For him, the U.S. did turn out to be a land of opportunity—but only because Mr. Collins ensured that so many Japanese Americans could stay in the country.

Internees will receive a one-way ticket to anywhere in the U.S., so now the family has to decide where to go. Daddy wants to go back to Los Angeles, but Mama is concerned it won't be safe anymore. She suggests Salt Lake City, where Daddy's brother lives. Daddy won't have it, though—they have so many happy memories in Los Angeles. Finally, they decide that Daddy will go ahead to Los Angeles and see if it's safe. If it is, Mama, George, Henry, and Nancy Reiko will follow. Daddy leaves the week before Christmas. Though George remembers every Christmas in the camp, he doesn't remember this one without Daddy.

Now that the family isn't in danger of being separated, Mama turns her attention to keeping the family safe. Given how afraid other internees were of the racism outside the camps, Mama's fears seem reasonable—especially given the kind of racist violence the memoir depicted earlier, such as the white Americans destroying the car. For George, though, his love for Daddy means that his memories vanish when Daddy is gone. For him, it's important to be close to his family members—and life isn't worth remembering if they're not around.

On March 6, 1946, it's finally time for George's family to leave. He walks around the camp until the car arrives to take them to the train station. Finally, he and his family don't have to live behind barbed wire anymore. As the train approaches Los Angeles, George watches the glistening city. Mama points out city hall and other landmarks. George doesn't recognize them, but he feels an instant connection to the city of his birth. He and Henry race to Daddy as soon as they catch sight of him.

When George notes the connection he feels to Los Angeles, it drives home that he belongs here—and that other Japanese Americans who were interned also belong in the country. It's their home, whether they were born there or chose to travel to the U.S. later in life. Describing the city as "glistening," meanwhile, suggests that it's still a land of opportunity just waiting for George.

The family's first home is on skid row, where "derelicts and drunkards" live. George smells urine everywhere, and the people drinking and vomiting traumatize him. Nancy Reiko begs to go back home to the camps. Daddy leads the family to the Alta Hotel. George tells the reader that none of this was normal, but children are adaptable, and they survive. The most challenging part of this new chapter for the children is climbing stairs for the first time.

Presumably, the Takei family has to live here because it's what they can afford—remember that the government seized their assets at the start of the war. George suggests that his struggles as a kid were still pretty small compared to his parents' concerns. Nancy Reiko's plea to return "home" shows again that children can adapt, but the consequences can be heartbreaking. She knows nothing but life inside the camps, so of course this experience is even scarier for her than it might be for her brothers.

Daddy takes a job as a dishwasher and also opens a small employment agency in the Little Tokyo district. The Japanese Americans starting over turn to their former block manager to help them, and Daddy is happy to help. But this doesn't last long, since Daddy can't bring himself to accept payment. Finally, Mama asks him to stop. She says it's time to take care of the family, not everyone else. So after six weeks, the family packs up for a new job and a new life. They move into a Mexican American *barrio* in East Los Angeles.

Even though Daddy is no longer a block manager, he still steps into a leadership role. He recognizes that, even outside the camps, it's essential that Japanese Americans stick together, at least until they're on more solid ground. But Mama offers a different perspective. She insists that it's more important at this point to focus on their family and giving their children the best life they can.

While in the camps, news traveled slowly. It's not until the family is in East L.A. that Mama receives a letter from her mother, saying that she and Mama's father survived the bombing of Hiroshima. But weeks later, Mama gets another letter informing her that her sister and nephew died in the bombing. Their bodies were found in a canal, and it appears that they'd caught fire and thrown themselves into the canal. Mama holds George and cries. Their lives are normalizing, but the war continues to devastate them.

Learning this news weeks or months after the fact drives home that the war is going to affect George's family for years. They may be done with internment, but this doesn't mean they can simply move on and forget what happened. This is why, as George gets older, Daddy talks to him so much about internment. It allows them to process and, perhaps, grieve for everything they lost.

George starts elementary school and feels like "just your average American kid." But his fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Rugen, treats him rudely. She ignores him whenever he raises his hand and punishes him for every little thing on the playground. One day, George overhears her talking to someone else about "that little Jap boy." The slur cuts George open and makes him feel ashamed. George doesn't understand why Mrs. Rugen hates him so much, but he hates her in return.

To George, he's American. But to Mrs. Rugen, George is fundamentally different, just because he resembles America's enemies during World War II. It's unconscionable that she treats a little boy this way, but the fact that she sees no issue with it suggests that she doesn't see him as a little boy—he's still an enemy.

As George and his classmates stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance, George understands on some level that Mrs. Rugen's use of the slur is connected to the fact that he spent time in the camp. He knows by now that the camp was a bit like jail, but he doesn't understand what he did to end up there. He feels guilty about his internment, and he feels like he deserves to be called nasty names.

Pairing George's discussion of the camps with the Pledge of Allegiance creates tension. George is an American citizen and seems to feel great loyalty to the country and the flag—and yet, his country imprisoned him because of his ancestry. These complicated emotions make him feel guilty, and this is probably worsened by the fact that he seems to be the only Japanese kid in his class. He doesn't have anyone else to connect with.

When George is a teenager, he grows curious about the internment camps. He flips through civics and history books, but he finds nothing about the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans. Over the course of his civics and government classes in school, George starts to see internment as an assault on Japanese Americans—but also on the constitution. The constitution guarantees due process and equal protection, but fear, prejudice, and "unscrupulous politicians" won out. George can't reconcile the "shining ideals of democracy" he reads about in those books with his memories of imprisonment.

It's perplexing to George that, according to his textbooks, internment didn't happen. Scrubbing history like this may reflect that the country is ashamed of internment. But for those who experienced it, like George, not acknowledging that it happened is insulting. And as George ages, he becomes more aware of how democracy should *work—and how easy it is to corrupt during wartime. It's perhaps unsurprising that this makes him angry, as it may still seem like the country doesn't care about him and his experiences.*

Now, as an adult, he believes that this is emblematic of a larger problem: Americans don't learn about the worst moments in American history, so they don't learn the lessons those moments should teach. As a result, Americans repeat those moments over and over again.

This becomes one of the most important lessons of the memoir. It's essential to learn about history, but George implies that Americans don't learn because the country doesn't always want to admit what it's done wrong. And because of this, the country will struggle to improve.

As George gets older, he wonders why Mrs. Rugen hated him so much. He thinks that perhaps her husband or a son served in the Pacific theater and George looked like their enemies. But this speaks to another problem—Japanese Americans are Americans, but they were still seen as enemies.

This is a generous view, but it still doesn't excuse Mrs. Rugen's racism. It's shortsighted and mean to hate someone just because they look like the nation's former enemy. It denies the person their humanity and their dignity.

Several years later, George begins to study acting at U.C.L.A. When he sees the posters looking for actors to act in an original musical—*Fly Blackbird!*—about the issue of Japanese internment in World War II, George knows it's too important not to audition. The musical opens to rave reviews and over the course of its run, it touches many audience members. Most importantly, it champions "positive change and hope for a common future." Over the course of the show, George meets many people who become very important to him. One of these people is Nichelle Nichols, whom he meets backstage one night. She's an actor, too, and eventually, she and George will become "permanently linked."

Fly Blackbird! *is about civil rights in a broad sense, and it situates Japanese internment within a long history of minority groups fighting for rights and recognition. Internment is, in other words, not an anomaly—injustices like internment have taken place multiple times over the course of U.S. history. Nichelle Nichols is later cast as Lieutenant Uhura in* Star Trek, *which is how she and George become "linked." As a Black woman in a position of power, she and her role were groundbreaking for the time.*

On June 18, 1961, George and the cast of *Fly Blackbird!* perform at the Los Angeles sports arena. This isn't unusual; the cast often performs songs from the show at rallies. But this one is special: the speaker is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When the cast finishes their number, Dr. King takes the podium and speaks about the American Dream. He defines it as a dream unique to the U.S., in which people—no matter their race, nationality, or faith—can live as brothers. Dr. King notes that the U.S. often talks about democracy, but it sometimes fails to uphold the principles of democracy. It's important now, he says, that people challenge America to make its dream a reality. The people working to make the American Dream a reality, moreover, are the "true saviors of democracy."

Dr. King articulates much the same thing that Daddy did during his and George's after-dinner talks. And though by 1961 Dr. King is speaking specifically about rights for African Americans, it's possible to apply what he says here to every minority group's fight for rights. When he notes that the U.S. talks the talk but doesn't walk the walk, it's a nod to many things—from Japanese internment, to slavery, to the fact that the Declaration of Independence says that "all men are created equal" while, at the time of its writing, leaving out anyone who wasn't white, male, and landowning. And finally, Dr. King proposes that the only way to save and preserve democracy is to protect, participate in democracy, and expand American rights to more people.

George is spellbound. Dr. King's words resonate with him, both as an American and as a performer. He loves that Dr. King was able to connect with the whole arena with just his voice. After the rally, the cast of *Fly Blackbird!* gets to meet Dr. King backstage. Though George only gets to speak with Dr. King for a moment, Dr. King's words stick with him even today: he thanked George for his contribution to the rally and complimented his performance. Not long after, George marches with Dr. King in Los Angeles, another experience he can't forget.

Just as George was taken with the benshi *performer in the internment camps, he sees Dr. King capturing audiences in much the same way. This creates the underlying sense that to George Takei, performance is a very effective way to reach people and introduce them to new ideas. While the* benshi *may have inspired him to become an actor, as a performer, he can now inspire people to uphold these democratic ideals.*

However, George acknowledges that Daddy inspired him to become an activist much earlier. Jumping back in time to an after-dinner talk during George's teenage years, Daddy tells George about American democracy. He insists that American democracy is a participatory democracy that depends on people who truly believe in its ideals—and, as a result of that belief, who engage in politics. To show George how this works, Daddy takes him to volunteer for Adlai Stevenson's 1952 presidential campaign. This, Daddy insists, is democracy in action. They see Adlai Stevenson speak; he notes that in the U.S., anyone can be president. This, Daddy suggests, is one of the big risks of the system.

Part of democracy, Daddy suggests, is that anyone can participate at the grassroots level—and as long as a person is born in the U.S., they can be president. Adlai Stevenson never becomes president, but the memoir implies that this is also part of how democracy works. Anyone can run, but there's never a guarantee that any one person will win. What matters most is the opportunity, and the fact that a candidate can convince hundreds or thousands of others to unify behind their message.

One day while George and Daddy are volunteering, excited whispers whip through the campaign office. One volunteer lines everyone up for a special guest: Eleanor Roosevelt. She shakes hands with everyone in line, including George, and even thanks George by name for his help. George is ecstatic that she knows his name—and then he remembers he's wearing a nametag. The only thing missing in that happy moment is George's father. Earlier that day, when the rumors had started to circulate of Mrs. Roosevelt's visit, Daddy began to feel unwell and went home early. Only later did George realize that Daddy wasn't sick. He just didn't want to shake hands with the spouse of the man who locked his family up.

At first, this is an exciting moment for George. Eleanor Roosevelt remained very popular and active in politics after FDR's death and, as she demonstrates here, used her position to help candidates she supported. But George also comes to realize that Mrs. Roosevelt's legacy, like FDR's, is mixed. She championed great causes—but she's also complicit in interning thousands of innocent Japanese Americans, including Daddy. It makes sense that Daddy wouldn't want to shake hands with her, even if he might respect some of her work.

Following his role in *Fly Blackbird!*, George takes more guest roles in various Hollywood productions, such as *Playhouse 90*, *The Twilight Zone*, and *Mission: Impossible*. In many of them, George's nationality was a big factor in being cast. In these three shows in particular, George's lines had him speak about being American, despite his Japanese heritage.

The fact that George is being cast because of his nationality suggests that, at this time, there was some demand for Japanese actors. The way he describes his lines suggests there was an underlying motive to these roles: to insist to the American public that Japanese Americans are still, and always have been, American.

But the show that changes George's life begins with a meeting at R.K.O Studios, now known as Desilu Studios. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, both former actors, own the studio—and even better, Arnaz is a Cuban immigrant. George's agent, Fred Ishimoto, arranges for George to meet with someone about filming a series pilot. This would mean steady work. George struggles to read the scribbled name on the note from Fred and hopes everything works out as he enters the office. Embarrassingly, George doesn't read the name correctly and tells the secretary he's here to meet with Mr. Rosenbury. The name, she explains, is Mr. Roddenberry, but she asks him to have a seat. George is mortified and hopes he didn't blow his opportunity. He gets increasingly nervous as he waits.

For George, it's heartening to see a Cuban immigrant like Desi Arnaz achieve this kind of success. It shows him that in the U.S., immigrants can do anything—even own a successful film studio. Even though George isn't an immigrant like Arnaz (George, after all, was born in Los Angeles), he's still fighting racism and prejudice as he works in the film industry. It seems possible that working with this studio, he may experience less of it. The fact that this interview is for a series pilot means that Mr. Roddenberry believes a Japanese American belongs on television—regularly, not just as a guest. This is a big step forward.

Finally, the secretary sends George into Mr. Roddenberry's office. The man is genial, spontaneous, and immediately makes George comfortable. They chat for a bit and discuss how to properly pronounce George's last name (it rhymes with okay). Finally, Mr. Roddenberry tells George about the TV pilot. It takes place in the 23rd century aboard a spaceship, and the character's name is Sulu. Sulu is a young science officer, and he must be Asian to represent that part of the world. Mr. Roddenberry assures George that Sulu will be "strong, sharp, and likeable." This is a major departure from how Hollywood usually depicts Asian men as menaces or unintelligent. But Mr. Roddenberry even apologizes for this history and says that Sulu will be a real officer.

Especially compared to the way that, for instance, the sentries treated George's family during internment, Mr. Roddenberry's kindness and openness stands out. He clearly sees George as a human being, regardless of his race. Indeed, as he describes George's prospective character, he suggests that he wants to humanize Japanese Americans for all television viewers through this show. He wants to move the country forward in terms of race relations by showing that an Asian man can be competent and "likeable." In a way, the memoir suggests that television can also be a way to protest and change the U.S.

After the meeting, at lunch with Fred, George finally thinks to ask what the title of the show is. It's going to be called **Star Trek**. Fred admits the title is good, but he reminds George that they still have to sell the pilot—a tough job. As they leave the restaurant, George says very seriously that he must have this role. Fred says, without much hope, that it's a long shot to believe that something about outer space is going to sell. But as George goes on with his life, he hopes constantly that he'll get it.

Readers even remotely familiar with Star Trek *will know that today,* Star Trek *is a cultural institution that's still wildly popular. Fred's unwillingness to get excited about the show's prospects speak to how radical it was at the time—it had one of the most racially diverse casts on TV and, as Mr. Roddenberry explained, put those diverse actors in positions of power.*

George does get the role. As Lieutenant Hikaru Sulu, George is able to give an honorable representation of his Asian heritage to millions of television viewers. Later, he even acts in six films as Lt. Commander Sulu—and Sulu eventually becomes the captain. Most importantly, though, George's fame gives him a platform. From his platform, he can address social causes important to him.

Thanks to Star Trek*'s popularity, George Takei is able to repair some of the damage done by Japanese internment. He's able to show people that Japanese Americans are just like any other people, thereby combatting the racism that drove internment. And outside of the show, George is able to use his fame to advocate on behalf of other minorities and social causes.*

In 2015, George stars in the Broadway musical *Allegiance*. The talented cast is made up of mostly Asian American performers, and the musical tells the story of the Japanese internment. Over 120,000 people see the show—which is about the same number of Japanese Americans as were interned in the camps. One evening, George receives a special visitor in his dressing room: Florence, Daddy's secretary from Rohwer, who is now an old lady. George is able to introduce her to his husband, Brad.

By introducing readers to Allegiance, *George makes the case that it's important to not forget something like internment, even though it happened long ago. 2015 isn't too late to bring it up and put it onstage—people have to remember, or they'll repeat the mistakes of the past. And introducing people to internment via a Broadway musical means that George can reach people who want to be entertained, who may think just reading about history is boring.*

Jumping then to his 2017 talk at the FDR museum, George says that in 1988, President Ronald Reagan apologized on behalf of the U.S. government for interning Japanese Americans. He signed an act granting former internees $20,000. Years earlier, George had testified before the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, telling the commission about his experience in the camps. By 1988, when President Reagan gives a speech explaining what happened, it's been more than 40 years since internment. In those 40 years, Japanese Americans had been elected to serve in Congress and other important offices. President Reagan insists in his speech that it's impossible to make up for the years Japanese Americans lost in the camps, but it's important to admit wrongdoing and commit to championing equal justice under the law.

Notice how where Japanese Americans were once "alien enemies," now, they're "civilians." In essence, this shows that the government recognizes that they imprisoned innocent Americans, not enemies. President Reagan echoes one of the memoir's major points: that admitting when the government makes a mistake is necessary in order to move forward. Signing the bill guaranteeing surviving internees $20,000 does not make up for the assets internees lost during the war, but it symbolically shows that the government is committed to doing the right thing and changing its ways.

George doesn't receive his letter of apology and a check for $20,000 until several years later, in 1991. George H.W. Bush, now president, signed the check. George remembers his father saying, "the wheels of democracy turn slowly." Though this turn of events says amazing things about the U.S., the apology was too late for Daddy. Daddy died in 1979 and never knew that the government would later apologize.

By noting that Daddy never got to see the U.S. atone for its crimes, George more broadly implies that there were lots of people who never received an apology. It's important to remember them, and to make sure that something like internment doesn't happen again to save others from suffering the same fate.

In his talk at the F.D.R. museum, George says he doesn't know if something like that could happen elsewhere in the world. It reminds him of something Daddy used to say, though: that American democracy is the best. As a teenager, George couldn't understand how he could say this when the U.S. government took everything away from him and Mama. Daddy replied that President Roosevelt pulled the country out of the Depression and did other great things. Nonetheless, Roosevelt was also fallible and human, and he made an awful mistake with internment. Despite this, Daddy still thinks American democracy is the best in the world because "it's a people's democracy," and people can do amazing things.

Remember that teenage George was angry and felt that Daddy and other Japanese Americans didn't fight hard enough against internment. Given his righteous indignation, it makes sense that he'd scoff at the idea that democracy is great—it robbed his parents of so much, after all. But Daddy nevertheless urges George (and readers) to remain optimistic about the country's fate, while also developing a nuanced understanding of history. It's possible, he suggests, to acknowledge the good things FDR did alongside the bad—and it's necessary to do that to prevent something like internment happening again.

When George thinks about it now, he realizes that those talks with Daddy informed his worldview and made him want to share his family's story with as many people as he could. Because of this desire, George shares his story with Scott Simon on NPR's *Weekend Edition*. Over the course of George's lifetime, he's seen people embrace Daddy's ideals wholeheartedly, as when President Barack Obama was elected president in 2008. But at times, he's also seen the same story play out again, as in the 2018 policy of separating immigrant families at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Because Daddy showed George the power of speaking honestly about the past, George feels compelled to share his story with others. He implies that if people stay silent, others will never learn important lessons. Indeed, he draws a direct line between the Trump administration's policy of separating immigrant families and Japanese internment, as the family separation policy is widely considered racist and exclusionary. George implies that in this situation, the government ignored the lessons of the past.

George jumps back to 1942 to tell Fred Korematsu's story. He was born and raised in Oakland, California, and initially refused to relocate, but he ended up in the Topaz Relocation Center in 1942. While he and the ACLU sued to try to overturn the executive order mandating internment, he lost his court case and began the appeals process in 1942. Eventually, his case made it to the Supreme Court—and he lost again. According to Justice Hugo Black, Korematsu was excluded from the military area not because of racism or anything personal—he was excluded because the country was at war with Japan. This case found Executive Order 9066 constitutional, and the Supreme Court didn't overturn it until June 26, 2018. But this is no cause for celebration. The Supreme Court struck down *Korematsu* in a side note in *Trump V. Hawaii*, the case that upheld President Trump's ban on immigration from Muslim-majority countries.

Fred Korematsu initially refused to relocate, hid out in Oakland, and was then arrested and put in an internment camp. The ACLU took his case to challenge Executive Order 9066's legality, and as George explains, Korematsu lost when it got to the Supreme Court. Justice Black's reasoning suggests that during wartime, the government can impose all kinds of restrictions on citizens—even if those restrictions are racist. This is undemocratic and challenges the idea that the U.S. is welcoming to immigrants. The travel ban on immigration from Muslim-majority countries does much the same thing, citing national security as a reason to unfairly exclude people.

As an effect of *Trump v. Hawaii*, many Muslims are denied entry to the U.S. In her dissent, Justice Sonia Sotomayor acknowledges that overruling Korematsu is an important step. But she also insists that the court's ruling in *Trump v. Hawaii* uses the exact same logic that *Korematsu* did. She insists the rulings "replace[] one 'gravely wrong' decision with another."

For Justice Sotomayor, neither Trump v. Hawaii *nor* Korematsu *are constitutional, democratic decisions. Instead, she sees them as both resting on the same racism against immigrants that has stymied American families for generations. Immigrants still experience some of the same racism that Mama and Daddy did decades ago.*

In 1986, George received his star in Hollywood. He tells readers that over the years, he's had the opportunity to tell his story all over the world. Today, he can connect with people in new ways, such as on Twitter—in addition to acting and sharing his story through exhibits at the Japanese American National Museum. Everything he's accomplished, he believes, is because of Daddy.

By attributing his success to Daddy, George circles back to the idea that he's been able to be as successful as he has because of his supportive family. Though George has others to thank for his fame as well, Daddy is the one who inspired him to use his voice to advocate for justice—through his work on Star Trek, *in musicals, and by publishing this memoir.*


EPILOGUE

At the memorial cemetery in Rohwer, Arkansas, George and Brad stand in front of the memorial commemorating Japanese Americans who died in the camp World War II. George thinks of Barack Obama saying that his liberty depends on others being free as well. Obama insists that history can't "justify injustice" or justify not making progress. Rather, history should be treated like a guide, so that people can avoid repeating past mistakes.

The monument commemorates Japanese Americans who died in Rohwer during World War II—and it's one of only a few structures that remain where the camp once stood. By ending his narrative with an image of this monument and this quotation from President Obama, Takei reiterates that it's foolish to forget the past, such as by allowing evidence of Rohwer to simply fade with time. Just as the memoir itself is a way for people to learn about Japanese internment, monuments can do much the same thing. A monument ensures that those who sacrificed their lives and their dignity during this time won't be forgotten.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Brock, Zoë. "*They Called Us Enemy*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 30 Jan 2021. Web. 30 Jan 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "*They Called Us Enemy*." LitCharts LLC, January 30, 2021. Retrieved January 30, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/they-called-us-enemy.

To cite any of the quotes from *They Called Us Enemy* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Takei, George. They Called Us Enemy. Top Shelf Productions. 2019.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Takei, George. They Called Us Enemy. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions. 2019.