

Poston Article

Before, during, and after World War II, the Japanese Americans were mistreated because of their ethnicity. *Hakujin* did not treat the Japanese as equals, and it became even worse after Executive Order 9066. Other immigrants from countries like Germany and Italy were not put in camps or mistreated like the Japanese Americans were. This mistreatment was unfair because many Japanese Americans had complete allegiance to the United States, but were assumed to be against the U.S. because of where they came from. They were just like ordinary people, but were deprived of many rights and privileges.

After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Executive Order 9066 was released, saying all Japanese Americans were to be put in internment camps until the war ended. Around 120,000 Japanese Americans were relocated to camps that were not adequate living areas, and the conditions were egregious. In *Weedflower*, Tak-Tak becomes sick because of food served at a temporary camp, and the mashed potatoes that were served resembled beef tongue in tomato sauce rather than mashed potatoes. Mr. Russell Yamada's aunt found flies in her food, and everywhere else in the camp near Portland while she was interned. This shows how the Japanese were mistreated and weren't even given food that would be served to a white person living in the U.S. at that same time. Many camps also lacked comfortable beds, privacy, and nice bathrooms. Scorpions and snakes inhabited the camp Sumiko from *Weedflower* stayed in. These camps didn't provide comfortable or even adequate living, much less the luxuries many caucasians were privileged with.

Japanese Americans also had considerably less rights than most U.S. citizens, which is extremely unfair. Many Issei like Jiichan from *Weedflower* came to the United States for a better life. They left everything behind and worked hard to build a new life, but they couldn't even become U.S. citizens. In *Weedflower*, Ichiro had to own the family's flower farm because his father and grandfather were born in Japan and couldn't own or lease land. Many Japanese Americans became farmers because their ethnicity prevented them from receiving other job opportunities. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Americans were afraid to own possessions that suggest they were loyal to Japan. They couldn't even have a notebook with Japanese writing in it, Sumiko had to burn hers in *Weedflower*. Unlike other Americans, the Japanese also couldn't vote. They should have had a say in the government like everybody else because it's a democracy, but they didn't.

Although they were mistreated, the majority of the Japanese Americans didn't fight back against the government. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Issei were taken and imprisoned, but many people including Jiichan and Uncle from *Weedflower* did nothing to fight back, they went along with it. Another example of this is when the Japanese were told to stay in their homes and not self-evacuate. Everyone followed orders and stayed home, just like how they went to camps without question when they were instructed to. The reasons for all of this was fear and haji. The Japanese Americans felt haji or shame for what Japan did to the United

States, which is why they unquestioningly obeyed the orders they were given by the U.S. government. Fear also motivated them to stay in line in many cases such as answering the questionnaire sent out in *Weedflower*. Many people said yes-yes to the questions because they were afraid of what would happen if they didn't. The Japanese Americans never fought back against the government even though they had been mistreated because it might just make things worse.

The Japanese Americans were mistreated during World War II because their ethnicity was stereotyped as being against the U.S. Ethnicity and race were boundaries then, as they are now. Sumiko and her family from *Weedflower* were mistreated because they were Japanese. They didn't fight back and they still were thought of as the enemy. Sumiko's family went through a lot of unfair treatment that they didn't deserve, it was even unconstitutional. Hopefully in the future, we will learn not to mistreat people no matter what.