

Mine Okubo. *Citizen 13660*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1983) xii, 219 pp., \$8.95.

Citizen 13660, first published in 1946, is part of the scant first-person record of Japanese American experience in the first half of the twentieth century. Like S. Frank Miyamoto's *Social Solidarity Among the Japanese in Seattle* (1939, repr. 1984) and Toshio Mori's *Yokohama, California* (1949, repr. 1986), Okubo's book has been given new life by the University of Washington Press.

Okubo's personal account of her forced evacuation and internment—first at Tanforan Assembly Center and later at the Central Utah Relocation Project at Topaz—is a unique combination of personal and public history, a blend of “documentary drawings” and understated prose. Her pen-and-ink narrative and its accompanying text cover the period from September 1939, when Okubo was an art student returning to the United States from Europe, to January 1944, when she was allowed to leave Topaz for a promised job in New York. During this time Okubo and her brother were reduced to the “family unit” number 13660, and they and 110,000 others became refugees in their own country.

Because cameras were considered contraband and thus forbidden to internees, Okubo's drawings constitute the only available long-term pictorial record of camp life by an internee. It is a story of how “bewildered and humiliated people” struggled for privacy, individuality, and self-respect in the face of inadequate housing, thoughtless and insulting policies, a labyrinth of regulations, and a daily life of idleness, boredom, rumor, and uncertainty. It is a record pervaded by what Okubo calls “the humor and pathos of the scenes.”

In fact, irony is Okubo's controlling mode, the method through which showing also becomes a means of telling; she is quick to picture the tragicomic reality of responsibilities without rights, “relocation” without personal motive or choice, and “Americanization” classes for people prevented by law from becoming citizens. She notes that the train that takes her to Utah resembles the blackout trains she traveled on in a Europe under siege. She wonders at the bizarre logic through which “the (precious) scrap lumber piles were guarded night and day, but in the zero weather the guards burned up most of it in order to keep themselves warm.” And in a particularly impish and revealing drawing, she captures the irony of the vigilant artist herself, spying on the buffoonish “Caucasian” spies assigned to police the camp.

There are 198 individual drawings in *Citizen 13660*, and with the playful self-possession available to the artist (but not the photographer), Mine Okubo has placed herself in virtually every one. In two of them she comments on situations by sticking out her tongue; in one of them she is crying.

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