

they called us enemy book

Introduction to They Called Us Enemy

They Called Us Enemy is a poignant graphic memoir by George Takei, an acclaimed actor, author, and activist best known for his role as Hikaru Sulu in the iconic television series *Star Trek*. This powerful narrative recounts Takei's childhood experiences during World War II when he and his family were forcibly relocated to an internment camp for Japanese Americans. Through stunning illustrations and heartfelt storytelling, Takei sheds light on a dark chapter in American history, exploring themes of identity, resilience, and the importance of standing up against injustice.

Overview of the Book

Published in 2019, **They Called Us Enemy** has received critical acclaim for its honest portrayal of the Japanese American internment experience. The book combines Takei's personal memories with historical context, allowing readers to understand the societal and political circumstances that led to the internment of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during the war.

Structure of the Book

The memoir is structured in a way that blends storytelling with visual art, making it accessible to a wide range of readers. It is divided into several chapters that chronologically outline Takei's life from his early childhood, through the internment camps, and into his later years. Each chapter is infused with rich illustrations by Harmony Becker, which enhance the emotional weight of the narrative.

Themes Explored in the Memoir

They Called Us Enemy delves into several critical themes that resonate deeply with contemporary audiences:

- **Identity and Belonging:** Takei grapples with his identity as a Japanese American in a time of war and suspicion. His story prompts readers to consider what it means to belong in a society that can turn against its own citizens based on ethnicity.
- **Injustice and Resilience:** The memoir highlights the injustices faced by Japanese Americans during the internment, while also showcasing their resilience in the face of adversity. Takei's family, like many others, found ways to maintain their dignity and humanity despite their circumstances.
- **The Importance of Activism:** Takei emphasizes the role of activism in combating injustice. As

an adult, he became an influential voice in advocating for LGBTQ+ rights and social justice, reminding readers of the ongoing struggle against discrimination.

- **Memory and Reflection:** The act of remembering is central to Takei's narrative. The memoir serves as a reminder of the importance of reflecting on history to prevent the repetition of past mistakes.

The Historical Context of Japanese American Internment

To fully appreciate the impact of **They Called Us Enemy**, it is essential to understand the historical context of Japanese American internment. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, fear and suspicion towards Japanese Americans escalated dramatically.

Key Events Leading to Internment

1. Executive Order 9066: In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed this order, which authorized the forced removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. This decision was driven by wartime hysteria and racial prejudice rather than any evidence of disloyalty.
2. Relocation Centers: Japanese Americans were forcibly relocated to internment camps, euphemistically referred to as "relocation centers." Families lost their homes, businesses, and communities, often with little notice.
3. Life in the Camps: Conditions in the camps were harsh, with inadequate housing, food shortages, and a lack of privacy. Despite these challenges, many internees attempted to create a sense of community and normalcy.

Impact on Japanese American Communities

The internment had long-lasting effects on Japanese American communities, including:

- Loss of Property and Livelihoods: Many Japanese Americans lost their businesses and homes during the internment, leading to significant financial and emotional hardship.
- Generational Trauma: The experience of internment created a legacy of trauma that affected subsequent generations, influencing their sense of identity and belonging.
- Struggle for Recognition: For decades, the injustices faced by Japanese Americans during WWII were largely overlooked in American history. It wasn't until the 1980s that the U.S. government formally acknowledged the wrongs of internment, leading to reparations and a public apology.

George Takei's Personal Journey

In **They Called Us Enemy**, Takei provides an intimate look at his own childhood, reflecting on how the internment shaped his identity.

Childhood Memories

Takei was just five years old when his family was taken from their home in Los Angeles to the Manzanar internment camp in California. He recalls the confusion and fear he felt as a child, surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. Despite the harsh realities of camp life, Takei's narrative is infused with moments of joy and humor, illustrating the resilience of the human spirit.

Influence of Family

Takei's family played a crucial role in his understanding of identity and resilience. His parents, particularly his father, instilled in him a sense of pride in his heritage and the importance of standing up for what is right. This early influence laid the groundwork for Takei's later activism and advocacy.

The Artistic Collaboration

The illustrations in **They Called Us Enemy** by Harmony Becker are integral to the memoir's impact.

Visual Storytelling

Becker's artwork complements Takei's narrative by bringing to life the emotions and experiences of internment. The use of color, expression, and composition enhances the storytelling, making the reader feel the weight of the events depicted.

The Role of Graphic Memoirs

Graphic memoirs like **They Called Us Enemy** are increasingly recognized for their ability to convey complex narratives in an accessible format. They engage readers visually and emotionally, providing a unique entry point into historical events and personal stories.

Critical Reception and Impact

Since its publication, **They Called Us Enemy** has received widespread acclaim from critics and readers alike. It has won several awards, including the Eisner Award for Best U.S. Edition of

Educational Use

The memoir has found a place in educational settings, being used as a teaching tool in schools to discuss themes of racism, civil rights, and the importance of empathy. Educators have praised its ability to engage students with difficult historical topics in a relatable manner.

Takei's Ongoing Activism

Takei continues to be an outspoken advocate for social justice, using his platform to raise awareness about issues affecting marginalized communities. His work extends beyond the realm of literature and into public speaking, where he shares his story to inspire others to fight against injustice.

Conclusion

They Called Us Enemy is not just a memoir; it is a powerful call to remember and reflect upon the past. George Takei's story serves as a reminder of the dangers of prejudice and the importance of standing up for human rights. Through his narrative, readers are encouraged to confront their own beliefs and actions in the face of injustice. As Takei eloquently illustrates, the fight for equity and dignity is ongoing, and it is a collective responsibility to ensure that history does not repeat itself.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'They Called Us Enemy'?

The main theme of 'They Called Us Enemy' is the exploration of identity, racism, and the impact of Japanese American internment during World War II, as viewed through the lens of George Takei's personal experiences.

Who is the author of 'They Called Us Enemy'?

The author of 'They Called Us Enemy' is George Takei, an actor, author, and activist, best known for his role as Hikaru Sulu in 'Star Trek'.

What format is 'They Called Us Enemy' presented in?

'They Called Us Enemy' is presented in graphic novel format, combining illustrations with narrative storytelling to convey the emotional and historical context of the internment experience.

How does 'They Called Us Enemy' address the concept of loyalty?

The book addresses the concept of loyalty by examining the conflicting feelings of Japanese Americans who were forced into internment camps, often questioning their loyalty to a country that imprisoned them based on their ethnicity.

What impact has 'They Called Us Enemy' had on discussions about civil rights?

'They Called Us Enemy' has significantly impacted discussions about civil rights by raising awareness of historical injustices faced by Japanese Americans, encouraging conversations about racism, xenophobia, and the importance of protecting civil liberties for all.

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