

Photograph bears witness to Japanese-American injustice

Lydon, Sandy

EVERYTHING ABOUT the young boy in the photograph is American: his jeans, shirt, and sweat shirt. The comic books he is reading are in English, and that's a Nestle's candy bar he is eating.

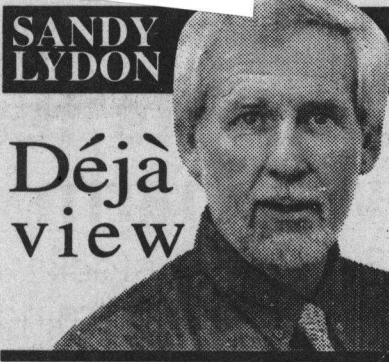
The tags hanging from his shirt could be identification for summer camp. And that could be summer camp luggage piled behind him. Unfortunately, the Japanese ancestry apparent in his face has tagged him for another kind of camp. He is waiting for the bus that will take him to the rodeo grounds on the north side of Salinas. And, from there, he will go by train to a concentration camp in Arizona.

This remarkable photograph was taken by a Farm Security Administration photographer who visited Salinas in May, 1942, to document the last stages of the removal of persons of Japanese ancestry from the Central California coast.

The Farm Security Administration was responsible for seeing that the agricultural land which had been farmed by Japanese was kept in production. Low-interest loans were made available for those who wanted to take over the farms, and as the Japanese moved onto the buses, others moved in to take over what had been the life's work of thousands of Japanese im-

SANDY LYDON

Déjà view



migrants.

I have spent a lot of time studying this photograph since it first came to my attention earlier this year. Notice, for example, the luggage behind the boy. There's a leather bag, a large white duffel bag, a cheap suitcase and piled atop it all is a striped folding chaise longue which one might find on a summertime backyard lawn. The Army gave the Japanese community no guidance about what climate to prepare for. They were just told to bring clothing and personal items and leave behind everything else. Automobiles, sewing machines, refrigerators, fishing boats — all that was left behind.

And family pets. So many of the

Japanese I have interviewed remember having to leave their pets. I wonder if this boy had to say goodbye to his dog?

We still do not know the identity of the boy. Several Japanese-Americans in Salinas suggested that it might be a Frank Fujita who now lives in Morgan Hill, but when I finally located Frank, he apologized and said it wasn't him. We are now pursuing another lead in Southern California.

Identified or not, we still have this powerful reminder of the moment when the U.S. government lost its constitutional bearings and herded over 100,000 people into concentration camps for the duration of the war. The vast majority, like this young man, were U.S. citizens. Recently, at a reunion of Japanese fishermen in Monterey, one of the second-generation fishermen told how his boat was sold out from under him in 1942, and how he was sent to the camp in the Arizona desert.

He had taught himself how to play the harmonica, and was asked if he might play a tune for the group. As he reached into his coat pocket for his harmonica, he said that he would play a song from his heart. Then, this man who had been accused of being disloyal, had lost a life's worth of fishing equip-



A young Japanese-American waits to be bused to the rodeo grounds in Salinas, May 1942. His identity remains unknown.

Farm Security Administration

ment, and had been sent to a desert prison by his own government began to play his favorite song — "God Bless America."

If you have a photograph you would like to see used in this column, or one that you would like some help identifying, send a good photocopy (color copies are best) to *Deja View*, Sandy Lydon, c/o Santa Cruz County Sentinel, 207 Church St., Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060. E-mail address: salydon@aol.com.

Sandy Lydon is a member of the history faculty at Cabrillo College.

■ Sandy Lydon will be giving a free slide-illustrated lecture titled "It Did Happen Here: The Removal of the Japanese from the Monterey Bay Region" at 7 p.m. Friday in the McPherson Center for Art and History in Santa Cruz. The evening will also feature his new book, "The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region," which will be available after the lecture.