

Papa as a Historical Figure

There are many characters in the book that exemplify history through the experiences of their lives, Jeanne being the foremost of those characters, but the secondmost is Papa. Papa gives the reader an insight into the origins of Japanese Americans, and into the process of immigration, including the struggles, hopes, and dreams of the Japanese immigrants. Papa's journey is well underway before Jeanne comes onto stage for her part of the story, which gives more depth to Jeanne's journey. Papa's journey can be broken into three major parts, his time in Japan till his immigration, his immigration and life in America before Manzanar, and his internment in Manzanar and subsequent life after. Papa shows through his character and his story what the Japanese had to endure, in Manzanar and out, and how assimilation or achieving any semblance of an ordinary American life was nearly impossible, despite hard work and following the law. Papa's experiences when viewed in tandem with Jeanne's experiences give a more complete picture of life for Japanese Americans in America before, during, and after World War II.

Papa had to work incredibly hard in order to carve out a living for himself and his family while retaining few of the rights that whites, or even blacks possessed. He immigrated expecting to be able to find work easily and to make a living for himself in the land of opportunity, but quickly found that the land of opportunity was a hard one for most men. His first job in America was "in Idaho where he worked as a valet, a cook, a chauffeur, a mechanic, a general handiman" (Houston 51). This family for which he worked was one of the best opportunities he could have possibly asked for, as he was working relatively easy work for rich people who were well-connected; enough to get him into the University of Idaho as an undergraduate student pursuing a law degree. Arguably if Papa would have stayed the course he could have been a rich lawyer in America, but Papa didn't stay with the family, instead he married Mama instead and worked

various jobs as he traveled from Washington down to California, Papa tried farming but couldn't truly be successful in such an endeavour as he was prohibited by the government from legally owning land, or even becoming a citizen (Houston 52-55, 8). Papa also worked as a fisherman and owned two boats, one of which he still owed a little bit of money on when the internment began, and because of the internment he was unable to continue owning the boats or a commercial fishing license (Houston 4-6, 154, 165). These many injustices and legal hoops forced Papa to work harder than most to survive in America, and gives some insight into what immigrant workers endured to earn some money.

The Japanese Americans had many things to endure beside just fiscal hardships. Japanese- Americans had to endure bigotry and racism, even if that racism wasn't always apparent or blatant. An example of this underlying racism is when Jeanne went to school in Boyle Heights and the teacher's cold, uncaring demeanor toward Jeanne as a student shows how the Japanese Americans were looked down upon and how racism was not always an easily viewed thing (Houston 16). One incredibly blatant example of racism experienced by Papa was the alien land laws prevented him from owning any land in America, this is clear racism by the American government, contravening the tenants the country was founded upon (Houston 55). A second example shown by Papa is the fact that he is assumed to be a spy for Japan when he was just a fisherman fishing off the coast of California (Houston 6-9). The interview of Papa in Fort Lincoln displays another example of how racism is played out, when reading the interview there are several things that are apparent to the reader. One such thing is that the Papa is assumed a traitor because of the fact that he is Japanese with two fifty-five gallon drums on his boat while the rumors spread of Japanese submarines off the California, because of the rumor Papa is surmised to be a traitor (Houston 60-64). Another thing that is apparent is that the interrogator

clearly thinks that he is better than Papa, the interrogator insists upon insinuating Papa is a traitor, while refusing to answer some of Papa's simple questions, showing the interrogator refuses to view Papa as man who could be innocent of the charges facing him, seeing Papa only as a guilty man (Houston 60-64). This inequality in the interrogator's mind allows him to view Papa as a package not a person, and is one of the many examples of prejudice Papa's life shows the reader.

The racism and bigotry made assimilation of Japanese into American culture very difficult before the war, and after the internment in the camp at Manzanar it was close to impossible. Papa lived among white people before the war in the community of Ocean Park (Houston 11). While not prevented from living here they were never really welcomed there. The issue of assimilation is faced in more detail by Jeanne than anyone else, but Papa faced it everywhere he went. He had difficulty being accepted by Mama's family when he wished to court her, in addition to the division between himself and Caucasians (Houston 51-54). One final example of the impossibility of assimilation for Papa was at Jeanne's scholarship award ceremony where her father bowed in the traditional Japanese manner; and rather than being accepted, was outcast even further (Houston 168). Papa was unable to change his culture and upbringing and was outcast for that, where he should have been accepted, showing the intolerance of the time.

In conclusion Papa is an important character because he gives a broader sense of what immigrants have to endure, and through that role a broader sense of the history of immigrants. Papa works hard to attain some measure of wealth in America, but fails because of character flaws and all the things piled against him. He fought against many hardships, such as, not being a citizen, not being allowed to own land, and fought through Manzanar; which took the last hope

he had from him (Houston 195). The internment in Manzanar took everything from Papa, which combined with his age, caused him to give up hope and begin to subsist rather than pursue the American dream. His tragedy shows glimpses beyond Jeanne's experience and helps to complete the picture for the reader, which is why he is the most significant historical character other than Jeanne.

Works Cited

Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki. *Farewell to Manzanar*. New York: Random House Publishing, 1973.