

REVIEWS

Stephen Fox, ed. *The Unknown Internment: An Oral History of the Relocation of Italian Americans During World War II*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990. Pp. xxi, 223. Cloth, \$24.95; paper, \$10.95.

Most of us know about the cruel and heartbreaking internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. Few know that some Italian-Americans were also sorted out for a similar fate. This well-written oral history explores what happened to these Italian-Americans, and it helps fill in our understanding of the xenophobia of the early war years.

General John DeWitt, still remembered by an internee fifty years later as "that son of a bitch," is the nativist of this story. DeWitt, with help from California officials, such as Governor Culbert Olson and Attorney General Earl Warren, wanted to confine non-citizen Italians soon after the declaration of war. By March 1942 the U.S. Army had relocated Italian "alien-enemies" from restricted zones along the California coast. The effects of this relocation on families are recorded in the poignant and often bitter remarks of the victims. Fishermen could not fish; families were broken up; children moved from schools they loved; and all had to live under curfews away from the coast. Naturalized Americans were immune from this treatment, but they were affected because often a family member was still not a citizen. Even Joe Dimaggio, the hero of that summer of 1941, had a father who was not allowed to eat at his son's restaurant on Fisherman's Wharf.

Common sense stopped this from becoming a Japanese experience. A House Committee, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and other government officials opposed any such action. Besides having a strong belief that a person was innocent until proven guilty, these officials had practical reasons of state not to want an internment. Politically it was unwise; to relocate Italian-Americans would have had massive repercussions among that ethnic vote. Relocation was a denial of the melting pot, an American belief that contradicted the Nazi Aryan propaganda. As Fox points out, DeWitt and company were betraying the American ideal. It was an insult to such respected Italian-American figures as Fiorello LaGuardia and banker A. P. Gianini. In addition, DeWitt's plan crippled the much needed fishing fleet, and relocation would be too costly and disruptive to the American economy. Recall that the Japanese in Hawaii were left alone because they were too intertwined into those islands' economic system. How could we square a policy that allows suspect aliens to be drafted into the same armed forces that they were supposed to be undermining? Something was wrong with a program that relocated a grieving father whose son had perished at Pearl Harbor. By July 1942 the Roosevelt Administration realized its mistake and removed the Italian-Americans from the alien enemies list on Columbus Day of that year. Though soon forgotten by most, bitter memories remained, as discovered by Fox.

You can use this book as a supplement to a study of the Home Front or as an example of an oral history. Unlike two other oral histories in this Twayne series, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited* and *Hill Country Teacher*, which rely on long oral passages, this book uses documents, newspapers, and oral accounts. In this way Fox catches the flavor of the war hysteria on the West Coast. Much might be learned by comparing the Japanese experience to the Italian one.

You can also use this book for a class on nativism or in sociology classes. It would tie in with any xenophobic era. The Adams-era Francophobia, the Know-Nothings, and the Red Scares come to mind. Use of this book might prepare a student to gather information in the local Italian-American community. Nativism comes and goes, so read this history to prepare yourself for the coming reaction against third world immigrants. As Fox suggests, the experience of the Italian-Americans is similar to AIDS victims, whom many want to isolate. Another

comparison can be made to the military policy toward homosexuals. Though its full title suggests an esoteric study, *The Unknown Internment* has broad implications.

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Judith Porter Adams, ed. *Peacework: Oral Histories of Women Peace Activists*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991. Pp. x, 228. Cloth, \$25.95.

Somewhere between the few powerful, visible leaders and the indifferent or alienated masses are a group of people invested in their society, yet convinced it can be better. Their issues have varied, as have their tactics. Judith Porter Adams has interviewed 23 women who chose peace as their life issue, and membership in the International League for Peace and Freedom and/or the Women's Strike for Peace as their primary focus for activism. It is hard to estimate how much different contemporary society looks today because of their efforts, but it is imperative that we know their stories and their work. Many of these women, born in the early twentieth century and now nearing the ends of their lives, wondered in their interviews how much difference their lives made since their goal of a more peaceful global society seems elusive; nevertheless, they recognize the value inherent in the struggle for a society without war.

As Adams is aware, her sample of women tends to be "white-gloved," Anglo and middle-class, and not conducive to broad generalizations about women in the peace movement. She does include interviews with two Japanese-Americans, Mariagnes Aya Uenishi Medrud and Marii Kyogoku Hasegawa, and two African-Americans, Erna Prather Harris and Enola Maxwell. Each interview is enhanced with a fairly recent photograph of the woman being interviewed; some also include pictures of them as younger women.

Her introduction adequately gives the reader a sense of her interviewing process and her sources. However, the brief conclusion probably does not provide enough information for most high school and beginning college students to understand the context and strategies of the work for peace, without supplemental material. Expanding the bibliography (of 33 references) would offer students a broader base for understanding the issues and events touched by the lives of these women.

Nevertheless, oral history collections such as this have great teaching potential. First, most students find primary source history interesting; it is easy to see these women as real people; grandmothers, aunts, teachers, etc.—ordinary people who felt strongly enough about an issue to become involved. Secondly, many of their stories are inspiring and encouraging, a welcome antidote to the fatalistic pessimism of many contemporary students. Finally, the interviews are generally no more than ten pages long, making them very manageable for even reluctant readers. This format allows for a variety of teaching strategies, including group reports on a select number of women, or dividing the text among the students for individual research and reports. The book is also a useful supplement in a study of mid-twentieth century history as a means of generating alternative thinking about the inevitability and necessity of war. Such a text also could be used to generate class discussions about who and what are included as important in traditional history texts and why.

This book is an important component of the Twayne's Oral History Series that includes collections of interviews with women during World War II, holocaust witnesses, one-room school teachers, and the relocation of Italian-Americans during World War II. The text is a welcome resource for women studies, peace studies, and general twentieth-century history.

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