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Review of: Breaking the Silence: Redress and Japanese American Ethnicity, by Yasuko I. Takezawa

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Review

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urban Chicano experiences, make it an important contribution to the diverse ethnic history of California.

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Breaking the Silence: Redress and Japanese American Ethnicity. By Yasuko I. Takezawa. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995. xix + 233 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$37.50, cloth; \$14.95, paper.)

From 1983 until 1990, Yasuko I. Takezawa pursued graduate study at the University of Washington and engaged in field work in Seattle's Japanese American community. *Breaking the Silence*, a version of which was published in Japan in 1994, is the result of these years of research. Like Patricia Zavella's *Women's Work and Chicano Families* and Sylvia Yanagisako's *Transforming the Past*, this is a book by an anthropologist that should capture the interest of social historians.

Takezawa relies primarily on interviews with 55 Japanese Americans to explore the ways in which Japanese American ethnic identity has changed in the last 25 years. She rejects the arguments of assimilationists, cultural pluralists, and proponents of "symbolic ethnicity." Instead, Takezawa "emphasize[s] historical experience to demonstrate that in the Japanese American case ethnicity has been transformed and reconstructed through reinterpretation of past experience in the American social context" (p. xvi).

Before the 1970s, few second-generation Japanese Americans, or Nisei, talked with anyone about their internment in concentration camps during World War II. Many Nisei were ashamed of their years of imprisonment and their Japanese heritage. In the 1970s, however, a few Japanese Americans began to demand redress from the federal govern-

ment. By 1980, many Nisei and children of Nisei (third generation, or Sansei) had begun to participate in the redress movement. This activism achieved its goal in 1988, when Congress passed legislation that formally apologized to all Japanese Americans who had been imprisoned and authorized the payment of \$20,000 to each survivor of the camps. Participation in the redress movement, Takezawa argues, helped the Nisei to overcome some of their shame and to embrace their Japanese heritage. Sansei activists gained respect for their parents and a clearer understanding of discrimination in the United States. During and after their participation in the redress movement, Sansei increasingly identified themselves as "Asian Americans" and embraced political action against racism.

The book has a few weaknesses. Takezawa declines to comment on a number of fascinating patterns that surfaced in her interviews. She juxtaposes quotations that offer radically different interpretations of Japanese American experiences, but she rarely explores these conflicts in a serious and meaningful way. Takezawa also fails to highlight important differences between Japanese American men and Japanese American women.

As she interviewed survivors of America's concentration camps, Takezawa decided that "I must leave their voices in this world: that feeling was my fundamental motivation to write this book" (p. xviii). The voices of Japanese Americans make this book worth reading. Although some of the sentiments expressed in the many extended quotations will be familiar to students of Japanese American history, others—especially those from Takezawa's interviews of Sansei—are both fresh and moving.

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