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A Cold Wind From Idaho



Synopsis

Poetry. Asian & Asian American Studies. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, resulting in a cataclysmic series of events affecting all persons of Japanese ancestry then residing on the West Coast of the United States. So calamitous were these actions that a noted scholar asserted that this action constitutes "the defining event in the history of Japanese Americans." What does this have to do with a book of poetry titled A COLD WIND FROM IDAHO? Those Americans familiar with the Pacific Northwest Japanese American World War II experience will understand the imagery wrought by the title as being both evocative and apt. The metaphor of freezing winter winds chilling the body and then entering the soul of those affected conveys fittingly how the Japanese Issei and Japanese American Nisei encountered, braved, and then survived the cold iciness of Idaho's winters while they were huddled in a primitive American barbed wire concentration camp.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Lawrence Matsuda is a poet of the first rank. Not only does he have the well-practiced ability to communicate emotion in succinct, carefully phrased poems, he also understands his responsibility to the betterment of mankind that ordeals such as he was born into will not happen again. This is a book of poems about a humiliating aspect of our past as a country - the incarceration/internment of Japanese in relocation centers across the country during World War II. Completely against the concepts of freedom under which this country was created, the military found it imperative that

anyone of Japanese extraction be sequestered lest they be spies or agents of destruction. These camps were isolated from society, maintained in the most bleak of conditions, treated a group of citizens as prisoners without the courtesy of trial. The fact that this happened has been a submerged quasi-secret, fearing comparison of the similar sequestering of Jews in Europe at the same time. But some courageous people have spoken out about this tainted period of our history and Lawrence Matsuda is one. Matsuda was born in Minidoka, Idaho while his mother was incarcerated. He lived through the experience and subsequently has written poetry about memories and shared stories from that time. The poems contained in this book are not only elegantly written, but they also carry a punch that is hard to escape from the reader's eyes. He writes of the degradation and humiliation of the people once released, of the hangings and other forms of suicide many resorted to in the shadow of the memory of the interment. ' ...Depression took Mom away/ like invisible armed guards. She was/ a stranger - a stick-like figure with arms/ and legs poking out of a white smock,/ pacing the sidewalk next/ to the Western State Hospital turn-around.

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