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Show Me the Way To Go Home Book Foreword

We have learned the power of a word and the power of a single image to affect our hearts and shape our opinions. Words matter. Language matters. History matters. And the scrawled words "show me the way to go home" on the wall at Tule Lake is more than a plea or even a demand, it is a moment in history that we cannot forget from a person we cannot know. It is one voice speaking for 120,000 unjustly incarcerated Japanese Americans locked up during World War II. One hundred and twenty thousand Americans whose lives were upended and destroyed and who wanted nothing more than to go home. Americans from communities across the United States who wanted nothing more than to return to their lives before Executive Order 9066.

This collection of powerful images from the past and present takes us on a tour of the ten incarceration camps, or relocation centers as they were known, around the country from the Rohwer War Relocation Center in Arkansas to Poston War Relocation Center in Yuma, Arizona to the Topaz Relocation Center in Utah where my father, Fred T. Korematsu, was sent in 1942. Make no mistake, the euphemism "relocation center" obscures the desolation of the sites, the forced segregation and isolation of the inhabitants, and the barbed wire fences and armed guards that kept them inside these prison walls. By any definition, these were concentration camps. For some incarcerated, like former chef, James Hatsuaki Wakasa, his blood was spilled, and his life ended when he was shot for walking his dog too close to the border fence at Topaz. This could have been my father or any other inhabitants of the camps. James Hatsuaki Wakasa did not get to go home. His murder is starkly depicted in the artwork in this book. This is real history. Our history. And more importantly, this is an important part of our story we should ALL know.

We currently find ourselves at a crossroads of how we deal with hard history like the forced relocation of the Native American tribes, Chinese immigrants building our nation's railways, the economic boom borne on the backs of the slavery of African Americans, and the Japanese American incarceration that are all entwined into the fabric of our American history. How do we share our stories? And how do we prevent the xenophobia and brutality that results from these stories not being told? We are currently seeing the effects of prejudice, ignorance, and fear in real-time with the spikes in AAPI hate speech, fearmongering, and violence during the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. Representation matters and it is up to us to make sure that these stories live on, so we do not repeat the grave mistakes of our past.

And we must make decision-makers accountable so that we are not fighting these same avoidable battles generation after generation.

In the end, we must stand up for what is right every day. This is what Fred Korematsu represents. One voice of many standing up against injustice. Fred Korematsu was able to go home again, but his life was forever altered by his experience. It took decades before the scales of justice finally began to tilt, but even this still could not undo the injustices of the past. "Show Me the Way To Go To Home" creates a bridge between the past and this moment. It blends the history on the ground at the ten incarceration camps littered with invisible tears and heavy-hearted memories with the present day. It also manages to capture the important heart-breaking history of all that happened in-between. It is our history. It is another important American story that cannot be forgotten.

August 2022