

## **“Photographing Manzanar: The Japanese American ‘Internment Camp’ as Conflicted Field of Representation”**

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### Abstract

Two months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government ordered the ‘internment’ of over 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast. Throughout the forced relocation and subsequent detention of these individuals, photography would serve as what Jasmine Alinder refers to as a “representational battle ground.” Before boarding blacked-out buses, Japanese Americans destroyed family photographs for fear that they might somehow link them to the Imperial government. Upon entering the camps, they were immediately subjected to mug shots as part of a larger operation of criminalization and control. And yet, after an early ban on cameras was lifted, the deployments of photography by the state were countered by a disparate group of image makers that included industrious prisoners who fashioned cameras from found materials, Japanese American servicemen who visited the camps on leave, and even professional photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Ansel Adams. The result is a diverse body of work which both legitimizes the policies of ‘internment’ and acts as a means of resistance to its power operations. This presentation will consider the ways the ‘internment’ and forced relocation policies of WWII materialized in camps such as Manzanar as well as the unique role that photography played in articulating this relationship.

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