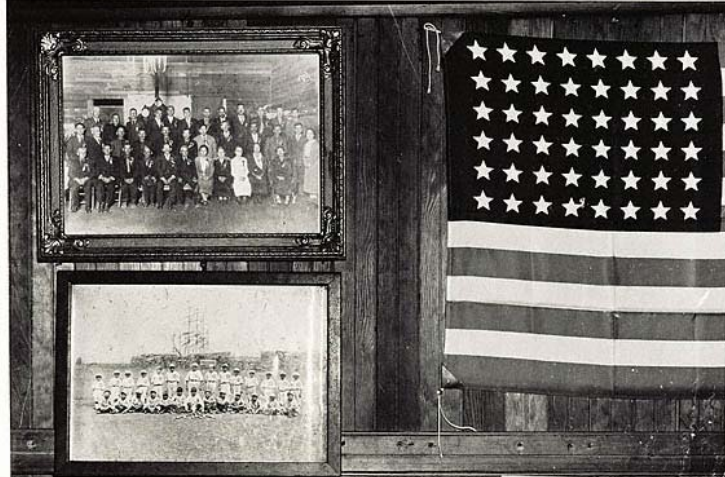




Display of Flag and Japanese Family Photographs, Dorothea Lange

Display of Flag and Japanese Family Photographs

Dorothea Lange
American, 1942
Gelatin silver print
7 15/16 x 12 in.
2000.52.1



Questions for Teaching

Take time to look closely at the work of art. What objects do you see?

The objects belonged to a family. By looking at these objects, what can you say about the family?

Look closely at the pictures within the photograph. What do you notice about them? (*The top picture could be a family photograph; the bottom picture shows a group of people wearing the same uniform.*) What more can you say about the family by looking at these pictures?

Japanese American evacuees were permitted to bring only those items they could carry. Why do you think a family who was evacuated would bring an American flag?

How do you think other families in the internment camp reacted to the American flag? (*Some could feel pride, contempt, anger, disappointment, confusion, etc.*)

Do you think the family is patriotic? If so, what do you think of a family who is still patriotic despite being treated harshly by the U.S. government?

How many stars can you find on this flag? What does this tell you about the time period when it was made? (*This photograph was taken before Alaska and Hawaii became states.*)

What do you notice about the **composition**? Which aspects of the wall are captured in the photograph? Why do you think Lange chose to crop the photograph this way? (*The rectangle surrounding the stars on the flag is similar in size to the frames on the wall, creating a balanced composition.*)

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Background Information

Dorothea Lange made this photograph while working for the **War Relocation Authority** during World War II. The image is a poignant commentary on the relocation of Japanese Americans to **internment camps** shortly after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Authorized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, internment was deemed necessary because of the claim that anyone of Japanese descent posed a threat to national security. Over one hundred thousand Japanese Americans were uprooted and moved to desolate areas east of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Lange probably made this picture at the **Tanforan Assembly Center** in San Mateo, California. At the "assembly center"—a racetrack where horse stalls had been converted into barracks families spent weeks waiting to be sent farther east. Evacuees were permitted to bring only those items they could carry. One person chose to display an American flag alongside family photographs, communicating a dual identification with her or his cultural heritage and national allegiance, a combination that need not be mutually exclusive.

About the Artist

Dorothea Lange (American, 1895–1965)

One should really use the camera as though tomorrow you'd be stricken blind. To live a visual life is an enormous undertaking, practically unattainable. I have only touched it, just touched it.

Thus wrote photographer Dorothea Lange of her extraordinary life and career. She worked for Arnold Genthe in his **portrait** studio in New York and studied photography with Clarence White at Columbia University. In 1918 she began to travel around the world to make her living as a photographer. She found herself stranded in San Francisco, so she opened a photographic studio there. Paul Taylor, who would become her second husband, hired her to document workers in California.

In 1935 she began to work for a federal agency called the Resettlement Administration (later the **Farm Security Administration**). During this period, she made her most famous image, *Human Erosion in California (Migrant Mother)*, of Native American Florence Owens Thompson and her children in a peapickers' camp. Other less famous subjects included Japanese internment camps and scenes of workers in factories during World War II. Lange became the first woman awarded a Guggenheim fellowship, and she spent nearly ten years making photo essays for Life and other magazines. She also traveled extensively, making photo essays in Vietnam, Ireland, Pakistan, India, and elsewhere.