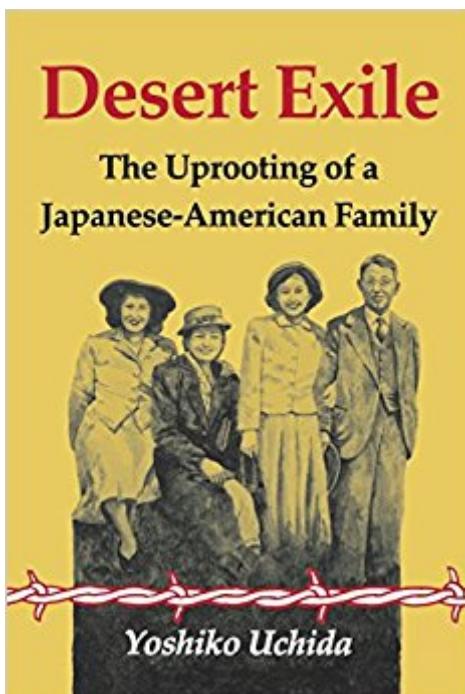


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# Desert Exile: The Uprooting Of A Japanese American Family (Classics Of Asian American Literature)



## Synopsis

In the spring of 1942, shortly after the United States entered into war with Japan, the federal government initiated a policy whereby 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry were rounded up and herded into camps. They were incarcerated without indictment, trial, or counsel - not because they had committed a crime, but simply because they resembled the enemy. There was never any evidence of disloyalty or sabotage among them, and the majority were American citizens. The government's explanation for this massive injustice was military necessity. *Desert Exile* tells the story of one family who lived through these sad years. It is a moving personal account by a woman who grew up in Berkeley and was attending the University of California when the war began. To better understand how such a gross violation of human rights could have occurred in America, and how the Japanese reacted to it, the author takes a backward look at her parents' early years in this country and her own experiences as a Nisei growing up in California. She evokes the strong anti-Asian climate of the years preceding the war, and provides an intimate glimpse of life in one Japanese American household. With the attack on Pearl Harbor, everything changed in Yoshiko Uchida's life. She tells of her father's abrupt seizure by the FBI; one of the family's frantic efforts to vacate their home on ten days notice; of being forced to live in a horse stall, deprived of every human privacy; and of being sent on to a bleak camp in the Utah desert, ringed by barbed wire and armed guards and plagued by terrifying dust storms. But this is not simply an account of the day-to-day life in the Tanforan and Topaz concentration camps where the author lived; it is also the story of the courage and strength displayed by the incarcerated Japense. In particular, it is about the Issei (first generation immigrants) who, having already endured so much in a hostile society, still retained a remarkable resiliency of spirit as they established a sense of community, saw to the education of their children, and tried to live productive lives even behind barbed wire. This is a beautifully crafted book, written with clarity, conviction, and insight. It should be read by all Americans so they will know and never forget what once happened in this country, and through that knowledge will never allow such a travesty of justice to happen again. "Yoshiko Uchida has given us a chronicle of a very special kind of courage, the courage to preserve normalcy and humanity in the face of irrationality and inhumanity. Her family's story, told in loving detail, brings alive the internment experience and is an important book for all Americans. It is not a history of the decisions that were made during this period, but rather it is the story of the human lives touched and molded by those decisions. As such it is infinitely more important, and infinitely more precious." - United States Senator Daniel K. Inouye

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family," by Yoshiko Uchida, is a compelling autobiographical narrative. Uchida tells the story of her family, which includes her Japanese-born parents and her sister. After the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan and the outbreak of World War II, the family endures the fate suffered by many other Japanese-Americans: they are forced to abandon their home and are relocated to an internment camp in Utah. This is a powerful story of injustice, racial prejudice, endurance, and family devotion. Uchida creates a vivid portrait of the internment camp: "an artificial government-spawned community on the periphery of the real world. . . a dismal, dreary camp surrounded by barbed wire in the middle of a stark, harsh landscape that offered nothing to refresh the eye or heal the spirit." Despite the unpleasant and often humiliating conditions, it is amazing how many residents worked to create a liveable community with a viable infrastructure. I was intrigued by Uchida's account of the Christian faith of her mother. Also fascinating is Uchida's deconstruction of the Big Brother-ish language used to mask the true nature of the internment program. The book includes many photos of the family and other camp residents. Uchida also discusses her own mother's vocation as a writer of tanka (31 syllable Japanese poems), and includes translations of some of these poems. This enhances the literary quality of the book. "Desert Exile" is told simply but with great eloquence. The book is, in my opinion, a wonderful contribution to the multi-ethnic literary tradition of the United States. Also recommended: "Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories," by Hisaye Yamamoto.

Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family" by Yoshiko Uchida deals with a Japanese-American family who were sent to concentration camp during World War II as Japanese-Americans at that time were considered to be potential "spies" for the Japanese government. Uchida started off with introduction to her family, of how her parents met, and how California became their home. Even though she was raised with Japanese values and ideals, she was at the same time an American who can barely speaks Japanese. Her world was turned upside down when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Japanese-Americans were sent to concentration camp for fear that they could endanger the national security. This violates their Constitutional rights but there were no public support for their fellow citizens. It was indeed racist of the government as German-Americans were not sent to any concentration camps even though the United States was fighting Germany. The Japanese-Americans had to swallow their pride and dignity and were moved to barracks that were bare and ill-equipped. They were placed behind the fence, guarded by MPs and basically were treated as prisoners. Uchida's vivid descriptions of their living conditions were both horrifying and shocking. "Desert Exile" was used by my professor for a History of American West class. This is truly an eye-opener as most Americans are unaware of their fellow citizens' ordeal and treatment. The Japanese-American loss was immeasurable. Not only did they lose financially (from selling their homes hastily), they lost touch with friends and relatives, lost their pride and lost confidence in their government. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to learn more about the ordeal of the Japanese-Americans during World War II. It is extremely well-written, eloquent and easy to understand.

Reviewer: Terah Johnson from Richmond, VA USA  
Though I was forced to read this book for a class and I was very reluctant to do so, "Desert Exile" was one of the best books I have ever read. It is an account of a Japanese American family who was uprooted from their homes during World War II and sent to sort of "concentration" camps in the desert. In every classroom in the US we learn about and criticize what happened to the Jewish people in Germany with the Holocaust. However, there are many people who do not know that the United States did almost the same thing to Japanese American people. It blew my mind to read about the Uchida family and other families who were successful Americans that got torn from their homes because our government believed they had something to do with the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor. This family was ripped apart and they had to make provisions in horrible conditions with thousands of other Japanese Americans. Our country is known as "The land of the Free" where "All men are created equal" and it is the "land of

opportunity." So why was our country doing this to these innocent people? Nonetheless, "Desert Exhile" is a well written biography that tells a part of American history that is ignored by so many people and I learned so much from this book that I never knew and it astonishes me. I would recommend this book to anyone.

A subject we don't see discussed much anymore. Well written without bitterness. It was amazing to see what this group of mistreated people could accomplish to improve a pathetic existence during their exile. Some of our welfare recipients should read it to see just what can be accomplished with determination and pride.

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