Julie Otsuka. *When the Emperor Was Divine*. New York City: Anchor Books, 2003. Pp. 160. Paper. $14.95.

Julie Otsuka, a Japanese American novelist who specializes in historical fiction, examines Japanese Americans' struggles and treatment during WWII, including their internment. Otsuka shows the socio-cultural impact of interned Japanese Americans and how their forced relocation caused self-repression of their identities. She also demonstrates how post-war Japanese American families were affected. The book follows the story of a fictional incarcerated Japanese American family.[1]

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which allowed the Secretary of War to designate areas in the U.S. as military zones. Such military zones incarcerated between 110,000 to 120,000 Japanese Americans. A total of ten camps were built. The story of *When the Emperor was Divine* takes place in Camp Topaz, located in Delta, Utah, where the Sevier Desert causes extreme varying temperatures. The book is structured chronologically, and it switches perspectives from one family member to another. The family consists of a mother, a father (who is interned separately), and their children (an eight-year-old boy and an eleven-year-old girl) living in the San Francisco Bay area before 1941. The purpose of these characters is to present internment through the eyes of American-born Japanese people, also known as "Nissei." Otsuka shows how discrimination and internment force cultural assimilation while highlighting the poor conditions in which families lived during their incarceration (inadequate housing, lack of privacy, poor sanitation). The story later describes how during and after internment, isolated families struggle to readjust. Although a work of historical fiction, this book was heavily influenced by the wartime experiences of Otsuka's mother's family. Like the characters in her book, her family members were forced to relocate from the Bay Area and incarcerated at Camp Topaz.

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[1] In this review, the words "internment" and "incarceration" are used interchangeably. "Internment" is used in its historical context, and "incarceration" is a modern reference to the same atrocity.

Discrimination and racism caused many Japanese Americans to deny their cultural identity. For example, Otsuka's fictional family replaced their food with American food. They also denied their Japanese ancestry and did not speak or read Japanese. The author does an excellent job of contrasting pre-and post-war family life by showing they no longer had a strong relationship with their father, exemplifying the consequences of prolonged family separation and censored communication.

The strongest points of the book come from the perspectives of the children. They witness the struggles of their mother and father, and when incarcerated, describe the state of their mother's listlessness and passivity. They describe lying when asked about their ethnicity and their names. They see their father in a reserved and paranoid state, no longer participating in any family activities with them. They express how after the war they became disciplined to be less talkative and more reserved. The book emphasizes how many Japanese American families lived a much more restricted lifestyle after the war and suffered due to limited self-expression and opportunities.

When the Emperor was Divine highlights the critical impact of internment on Japanese Americans and their families. It describes the loss of familial cohesion and subsequent internment in poor living conditions. It also depicts the discrimination and the prejudice Japanese Americans faced after the war forced them to blend in with American culture while repressing their own. The book is a must-read for those who want to get a deeper understanding of the treatment of Japanese Americans and immigrant assimilation into American culture. It is very relevant today because immigrant families continue to face challenges when assimilating into the U.S.

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