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And then they came for us

Documentary about Japanese internment during World War II shows audience how to stop it from happening again

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Last Saturday, on a beautiful summer afternoon, nearly 1,000 people came together to the Crest Theatre to see the showing of Abby Ginzberg's new documentary film *And Then They Came for Us*. The film tells the story of 120,000 Japanese Americans who were thrown into prison internment camps during World War II. Their crime? They were the same nationality as the people of the country we were warring against.

The movie featured photos taken by famed photographer Dorothea Lange, who was commissioned by the federal government to make a photographic record of the "evacuation" and "relocation" of the Japanese. Lange's heart-



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wrenching photos tell the story of innocent people struggling to adjust to being kicked out of their homes and shipped away to an armed camp. During the war, the photos were impounded by the military and stored away in the National Archives. They only came out of storage in 2006. Advertisement

Actor George Takei (of *Star Trek* fame), who was imprisoned with his family as a young boy, is featured prominently in the film. He connects this history to current events. "It was a failure of American democracy," he says. "And yet, because most Americans are not aware of that dark chapter of American history, it's about to be repeated."

The film includes footage of Japanese Americans who were imprisoned, making the obvious connection between the ways Japanese were portrayed during World War II and how Muslims are currently being portrayed. Here in Sacramento, the Japanese community has made a committed effort to join with the Muslim community to ensure we don't go down the same racist path today.

After the movie screening there was a panel discussion including former California Supreme Justice Cruz Reynoso, who fought discrimination his whole life; transgender activist and lawyer Mia Frances Yamamoto, who was born in a camp; Basim Elkarr, director of a local chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations; and filmmaker Abby Ginzberg. The panelists made the case for activism now. It was best said by Reynoso, who pointed out that every American generation has to make their contribution to American ideals and to our constitutional freedoms. He told the audience that this is our time.

Moderator and former local TV journalist Sharon Ito asked all audience members who were interned during World War II to stand. A few dozen did, including two who were sitting directly in front of me. Margaret Saito, 84, and her younger sister Frances Lee, 82, were shipped under armed guard from their home in Southern California to Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming at ages 9 and 7. At the time, Wyoming Governor Nels Smith protested that he did not want his state to be "California's dumping ground."

I asked the two charming sisters about the movie and their experience in Wyoming. They liked the movie. They pointed out that they were kids at the time, and third-generation Americans. I doubt they were ever much of a national security risk.

No one should be interned in a concentration camp because of their race, creed or color. This should never have happened to these 120,000 Japanese Americans. And it must not happen to any of the 3.3 million Muslim Americans living in the United States today. This is our time to stand for American values. One thousand people learned why, in Sacramento last Saturday.

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