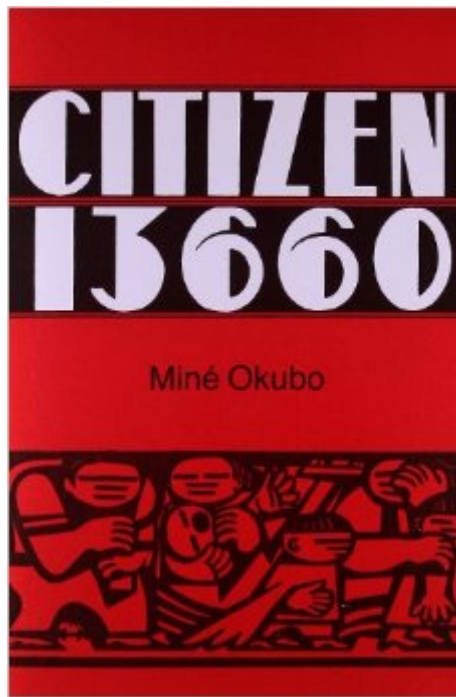


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Citizen 13660



Synopsis

Mine Okubo was one of 110,000 people of Japanese descent--nearly two-thirds of them American citizens -- who were rounded up into "protective custody" shortly after Pearl Harbor. Citizen 13660, her memoir of life in relocation centers in California and Utah, was first published in 1946, then reissued by University of Washington Press in 1983 with a new Preface by the author. With 197 pen-and-ink illustrations, and poignantly written text, the book has been a perennial bestseller, and is used in college and university courses across the country. "[Mine Okubo] took her months of life in the concentration camp and made it the material for this amusing, heart-breaking book. . . . The moral is never expressed, but the wry pictures and the scanty words make the reader laugh -- and if he is an American too -- blush." -- Pearl Buck
Read more about Mine Okubo in the 2008 UW Press book, *Mine Okubo: Following Her Own Road*, edited by Greg Robinson and Elena Tajima Creef.
<http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/search/books/ROBMIN.html>

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Okubo's book is a valuable eyewitness account of a sad period of U.S. history, the forced relocation of Japanese-Americans during WWII. I don't know anything about Okubo's life, but her book suggests she was one of those relocated. The book is illustrated on every page with great, expressive pen-and-ink drawings, and each picture is accompanied by a caption thoroughly explaining the scene depicted. The story begins with her family awaiting relocation orders, being sent to two different camps in the interior valleys of California, and concludes with her release. She

does a great job documenting daily life in the camps, like the ways the prisoners created a community by organizing school for their children, publishing a camp newspaper, staging performances, etc. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of Okubo's book is her lack of anger and bitterness. One would think forced relocation would spawn a lot of anger, but she emphasizes positive aspects of life at the camps, and even expresses some wistfulness about leaving upon her release. I'm not sure how we should read that--is it the genuine response of a young, resilient woman who was able to see the whole experience as an adventure? Her attempt to dignify the prisoners by emphasizing how well they made the most of the oppressive conditions? Or, seeing that the book was first published in 1946, a conscious effort not to voice more outrage than mainstream America was willing to tolerate from a Japanese-American woman so soon after our war with Japan? I wish I knew. In any case, *Citizen 13660* is a very important document, which deserves a place next to other illustrated accounts of prisoner camps like Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and *The Book of Alfred Kantor*.

Mine Okubo lived and painted for more than 50 years in the same Manhattan studio apartment. She died in 2001. She was known not just as Citizen 13660 from the internment camps, but as a talented and dedicated artist (see her profiled in the video *Persistent Women Artists ...*). This book, a reprint of the 1946 original, uses her deceptively simple style to tell how she was forced to leave behind the life of an American college student to become a Japanese-American detainee, and what her artist's eye observed in the camps.

I don't know how anyone could read this novel and not appreciate the text and visuals simultaneously. It would be easy to just read the text, but the visual representations created by Mine Okubo are profound and provide the viewer with a greater understanding of the events that Mine Okubo and other Japanese Americans underwent while in the camps. Unlike other graphic novels, the text and image are separate and not integrated. Some may find this difficult to read the text and then view the picture or vice versa, but the sketches were created while Mine Okubo was in the camp and then the descriptive text was added later to correspond with the visuals. These sketches were a descriptive journal for Mine Okubo, who like so many others wasn't allowed to bring in cameras or video recording devices to capture what she underwent and saw while in the camps. Personally, I found the text and visual continually playing off one another and neither one would have been nearly as successful without the other. Many of the internment camps no longer exist and what remains, "are pieces of concrete, pipes, and wire," they are but a cemetery to the past. Mine

Okubo has created a piece of living history and has produced a personal memoir for herself and the United States. This even should never be forgotten and should be a key portion of history that is taught within our private and public schools. Art is an expressive outlet that provides a means of releasing tension, anger, sadness, and anxiety. During the internment other artists and writers were creating profound works of art to communicate and further understand their own circumstances. For anyone that questions the relevance of this text a film that is worth watching is called, "9066 to 9/11." This film takes a look at the secretive footage taken by Japanese American Internees in the camps and corresponds their hardships and mistreatment with our current predicaments based on the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Great picture book -- I thought I book with so many pictures was going to lack in content. I was so wrong! The message and information in the pictures is much more important than the one in the text. Funny, humane, witty, real. Excellent!

I, personally, have never been into comic books, but since reading Maus I and Citizen 13660 I have found a new appreciation for art mixed with text. This graphic novel is excellent. I disagree with the idea that we need to know the "deep insight into the feelings of the author"; that is what makes this novel so powerful. She intentionally leaves the emotions up to her audience. This is not necessarily a story about woe is me. It is a story about survival, when life hands you lemons you make lemonade and you share it. I do agree with the dark sense of humor within this novel. And I must say I like it. Life was hard for the Japanese. These camps were not easy and sometimes rather inhumane. The weather was extreme, the food was scarce, and there was absolutely no privacy. But Mine Okubo is able to take some terrible scenarios and laugh at her characters, which enables her audience to laugh. It also made me think about what it means to have freedom and privacy. Today, people rarely even talk to their parents and siblings, let alone, their neighbors. As depicted in this novel people were practically living on top of one another. And to be to find a sense of humor through it all shows an amazing sense of character. Overall, I think this novel is a thoughtful, selfless, piece of art. It shouldn't lose credit for being a graphic novel, or lacking drama. It should be applauded for the value of the factual, overall picture painted within it. It should be applauded for allowing its readers to be affected in anyway that it may, the book world is full of tear jerkers, we don't need anymore soap opera text filling our minds with junk.

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