



FOPSL Book Club: March 19, 2021

Book: Buddha in the Attic

Author: Julie Otsuka

Discussion leader: Ruth Lindemann

Buddha in the Attic **Discussion Led by Ruth Lindemann**



In March, Ruth Lindemann presented Julie Otsuka's novel, *Buddha in the Attic* (2011). A graduate of Yale (B.A., 1984) and Columbia (M.F.A., 1999) her debut novel *When the Emperor was Divine* was published in 2002 and dealt with the Japanese American internment during World War II. *Buddha in the Attic* uses a similar backdrop while focusing on the lives of Japanese picture brides who are sent to the United States to be married to Japanese immigrants only to encounter lives of labor and discrimination.

Otsuka's father was born in Japan and her mother was the first generation of her family born outside of Japan. The author's mother, uncle and two grandparents were sent to internment camps during World War II giving Otsuka a unique perspective on this dark period in American history.

During our meeting there was a discussion about the use of the term "concentration camps" to describe the Japanese internment camps. One member noted that during World War II people of German, Italian and Japanese descent were held on Ellis Island in New York. I found a *New York Times* article about a 1998 exhibition at Ellis Island called "America's Concentration Camps: Remembering the Japanese-American Experience" (<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/08/nyregion/what-is-a-concentration-camp-ellis-island-exhibit-prompts-a-debate.html>). Another article examines the role of Ellis Island as an internment camp (<https://untappedcities.com/2021/01/28/ellis-islands-detention-center-japanese/>). The Secretary of State of Oregon published a webpage titled "Bombs Fall on Oregon: Japanese Attacks on the State" which includes a story about a Japanese bomber mentioned by one of our members (<https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/ww2/Pages/threats-bombs.aspx>).

Other books suggested by members included *Shanghai Girls* a 2009 novel by Lisa See about picture or mail-order brides; *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1994) a novel by David Guterson about a Japanese-American accused of murder in 1954 in Puget Sound; and *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* a 2009 novel by Jamie Ford centered around the forced evacuation of Japanese Americans into internment camps.

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Friends of the Palm Springs Library Book Club meets online

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