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To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Jean-Paul deGuzman, a lecturer in the Departments of History and Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, and I write to praise Mr. Sam K. Mihara and the instructive, moving, and timely presentation that he delivered to my Introduction to Asian American History lecture course on February 2, 2015. Mr. Mihara skillfully engaged the audience – comprised of nearly 200 students and other campus members – through the content of his presentation as well as his lively and authoritative style. In this letter I will sketch some of the highlights of his talk, interweaving into my assessment comments from my students.

Mr. Mihara's talk, *Memories of Heart Mountain: A U.S. Prison for Japanese Americans During World War II*, assembled together a diverse set of primary sources that ranged from oral histories to government documents to arcane small-town newspaper clippings that he unearthed himself. Students responded particularly well to Mr. Mihara's use of, as one student remarked, a "powerful" trove of photographs that "provided good context and interest." Through these sources he covered a vast panorama of Japanese American history, tracing experiences of migration, community-building, forced removal, mass incarceration, postwar resettlement, and the struggle for redress and reparations for the unconstitutional treatment of the *Nikkei* during World War II. While *Memories of Heart Mountain* contained valuable information about the legal and political architecture of incarceration that elucidated the roles of both federal and state officials, he also provided rich first-person narratives of individuals who were uprooted from their homes and banished to desolate concentration camps. These stories, along with his recollections helped students "think of the camps from [a] personal aspect."

My course was particularly privileged to learn about Mr. Mihara's newest research on detention centers in Texas designed to house undocumented Latina/o immigrants. He spoke in detail about the euphemisms used to describe these facilities, drawing several comparisons to the experiences that Japanese Americans faced. As immigration continues to catalyze spirited political debate – that often veers into the realm of outright xenophobia and racism – presentations such as Mr. Mihara's are absolutely critical. Indeed, one student immediately found it "interesting to connect [the] WWII camps and the current situation."

My students and I were particularly privileged because Mr. Mihara invited two additional guests to join him and provide snippets of their important histories. Dr. Takashi Hoshizaki courageously resisted the draft when he was incarcerated at Heart Mountain, and spoke about how he made the principled decision to stand up against the unjust imprisonment of Japanese Americans.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Toshi Ito shared with us the painful story of her father who, unable to provide for his family during the difficult period of post-World War II suicide, took his life so his kin could survive on monies from his life insurance. While this story made at least one student “shed tears,” Mrs. Ito forcefully spoke about the seemingly intractable racism that Japanese Americans faced even after the war.

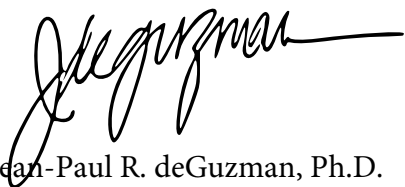
My students positively received to Mr. Mihara’s talk as well as the stories that Dr. Hoshizaki and Mrs. Ito shared. I observed them carefully taking notes, and several students posed thoughtful questions after his presentation. Mr. Mihara piqued their curiosity about details ranging from relationships between the Heart Mountain prisoners and police to efforts they could take, to quote another student, to ensure that “mass incarceration should never happen again.”

All too often, students think that history is no more than the rote memorization of dates. However, Mr. Mihara’s talk and “all the personal touches” as one student called them, left an indelible mark on their consciousnesses, and helped bring “text and history to life!” Overall, many students agreed with one peer who stated it was an “extreme honor to hear from people who experienced the imprisonment.”

Although all students learned from *Memories of Heart Mountain*, it had particular resonance for *Nikkei* students, as one reflected that they came away with “a greater understanding and appreciation for [this] history as a Japanese American myself.” Meanwhile, a Nisei-identified student (whose family, due to the nature of post-World War II Japanese immigration may have no direct connection to the camps) noted that they now “have pride for people who sacrificed a lot so we can live as we do today.” One student was so moved that she remarked “I am a Japanese, educated in Japan and never studied these camps in history classes – please come to Japan and talk to Japanese students as well.”

I whole-heartedly concur with one student who simply told Mr. Mihara to “keep on doing what you’re doing!” His talk is informative, accessible, thought provoking, and deserves to be heard. To conclude, one student earnestly shared that “I will never forget this presentation.” Neither will I, and neither will future audiences.

Sincerely yours,



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