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TS History

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Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston portrays in an excerpt of her book, *Farewell to Manzanar*, her experiences under Japanese American forced internment. As an increasing hostility towards people of Japanese descent gripped the US, Houston's family was transported to a remote and unforgiving location. Despite the harsh conditions, Houston's family endured and sought to improve the circumstances within their confines through humor, respect, and cooperation.

In Chapters "Women in the Shipyard" and "Okies" of *Wartime Shipyard*, Katherine Archibald details her observations about two minority groups at wartime shipyards: women and "Okies". In the shipyard, female workers' numbers rose during the war; despite some successes (largely the result of increased demand), a complex stew of masculine antagonism, anxiety, and reluctance kept the women's status short of complete equality with men. Meanwhile, "Okies" - non-Californian but American immigrants - that migrated were ridiculed as illiterate and poor, although the epithet became more vague and less discriminatory as "Okies" integrated and became less readily identifiable; later, hostility towards Okies ceased to be much of a concern.

In her descriptions of "Okies" and women, Katherine Archibald highlights differences in how these two groups became integrated into the shipyard. Despite some level of unity across sex in the shipyard and disruption of traditional gender relations occurring, Archibald asserts that women nevertheless were short of complete equality with men. On the other hand, the "Okies" arriving to California fleeing poverty and economic depression - while being a minority, like women - eventually integrated into the workplace. To explain this, Archibald offers that "since

the Okies were indistinguish[able]... by no indelible or hereditary traits, ... antagonism to the Okie... would cease to be of public concern.”¹ While I agree that the visibility of traits plays an important role in explaining this disparity of outcomes, I further argue that this argument is part of a larger factor: the level of development of the trope surrounding a certain group. Female workers entering the shipyard carried with them an entire weight of matured beliefs about the relationship between men and women. As women entered the shipyards, men immediately “amiably removed their galleries of nudes and pornography from the walls... manners were improved, faces were shaved more often, and language was toned down.”² Attached to well-developed preexisting notions of female weakness or petiteness, women found it difficult to enter a workforce in which such attributes were detrimental to workplace success or even respect. Despite a misalignment of conventional gender relationships in the shipyard, ultimately – as Archibald writes – such misalignment stood in the face of much larger forces of masculism and paternalism. On the other hand, the arrival of “Okies” was relatively early and unique; as such, the set of attributes to be attached to that group was still to be developed. As such, attitudes and associated opinions of “Okies” were less organized and consistent as those towards women, from the desperation of their presumed poverty to their intelligence to their accent to, oddly enough, their physical appearance – “they have a difference kind of face... more dumb-looking, somehow”, one worker commented, on the path towards some aspect of racialization³. Amid this new group identity, the native Californians antagonistic to outsiders struggled to find a trope real and coherent enough to be powerful, largely because – as Archibald points – “Okies” did not possess many easily observable, indelible, and apt traits. Similarly, in many respects the more fixed markers of sex made attitudes towards women more engrained and established. Thus, the

¹ Katherine Archibald, *Wartime Shipyard: A Study in Social Disunity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1947), 57.

² Archibald, *Wartime Shipyard*, 16

³ Archibald, *Wartime Shipyard* 46

indelibility of traits that Archibald highlights fed into the development of more established and strong attitudes that would keep women back, while the inconsistent and vague antagonism of the more newly emerging “Oakie” epithet led to their general integration into the workforce.