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Comparative Analysis: “In the Time of the Butterflies” & “Farewell to Manzanar”

Aarti Khurana once said, “A strong women does not let the hardships of life tear her apart. But a woman of strength goes on to accomplish even when she is torn apart”. This quote speaks in so many levels if you know the authors Julia Alvarez and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. These ladies have accomplished to write books about their past regarding government issues, family hardships and the struggle to identify themselves as who they are today.

In the books “In the Time of the Butterflies”, by Julia Alvarez, and “Farewell to Manzanar”, by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, are both written by female authors that have lived through the historical events they used in their books. Alvarez wrote about the Dominican Republic under Dictator Rafael Trujillo and Wakatsuki wrote about her experience living in a Japanese internment camp during WWII. However, that does not give much historical background about the books or about the authors and the similarities and differences in the rights violated that occurred in these two books. So keep reading to learn more.

First book I read was “In the Time of the Butterflies”, by Julia Alvarez. In a website by Sienna M. Potts, Julia mentions that she was not born in the Dominican Republic if not in New York in March 27th, 1950, but because her parents preferred the dictatorship of Trujillo than stay in the U.S they moved to the D.R when she was three months old (JuliaAlvarez.com). According to the Historical and Literary Context: The Dominican Republic under Trujillo, Julia’s family was forced to leave the D.R and move back to New York in 1960 because the underground movement her father was in, which was against Trujillo and lead by the Mirabal sisters, was discovered. So Julia was around ten years old when her family moved but like any child, she was confused. As years passed she understood but realized that there was more to know about this terrible dictator and who got involved with him. That would be the Mirabal sisters, which Julia knew that many Americans did not know who these revolutionaries were and what they did. That is how we wound up with her book, “In the Time of the Butterflies”.

“In the Time of the Butterflies” was written and published in 1994 by you know who, Julia Alvarez. Like I mentioned, the reason the book was written was for readers, mainly Americans, to know about the harsh dictatorship of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and to know who the Mirabal sisters were and what they did. To start off, the book is classified as historical fiction because Alvarez makes up the voice of all the sisters, Dede, Minerva, Patria and Maria Teresa, but they evolve around actual historical events that happened. I could imagine that was a challenge for her but I do know that in the book she used the diary entries of Maria Teresa Mirabal since she was a young girl, since she mentioned it in an interview. The diary entries are found in chapters three, seven, and eleven. The thing that stood out to me was how Julia was able to get her hands on the little maps Maria Teresa drew during her stay in prison and not only was it her drawings, but she wrote about the treatment of Trujillo’s guards towards them and others, which can be found in chapter eleven. Rafael Trujillo was trained by American forces in the D.R where he became head on military and after killing candidates to the presidency, he became the president of the Dominican Republic. His main goal was to have the D.R as an all white’s population and he even attempted to do a similar genocide as Hitler did, he was responsible for the Parsley Massacre, which killed over 30,000 black Dominicans, including babies. If that does not make you feel awful then I guess this will, he raped innocent women for his pleasure. (Trujillo prezi.com)

The second book I recently read was “Farewell to Manzanar”, by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston. Jeanne Wakatsuki was born in September 26th in Inglewood, California, 1934, being the youngest of ten (discovernikkei.org). Being born during the 1930’s was not great a time because WWII was taking place. Unfortunately, being an American from Japanese ancestry was even worse in the 1940’s because they faced harsh racial discrimination due to the surprise attack bombing in Pearl Harbor by the Japanese army in 1941.

As a result of the bombing the U.S president at that time Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 in February, 1942 stating, “I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War, and the Military Commander… may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War… may impose in his discretion. (historymatters.gmu.edu)”. In the Executive Order it states, “all persons may be excluded…” but everyone knew who they were targeting, they were targeting the Japanese. With order 9066 being signed, the Americans basically turned against the Japanese and they did not care if they were born in the U.S nor did the Executive Order cared if they were loyal. According to them, they could be spies from the enemy’s side, so they took most Japanese-Americans to internment camps all over the U.S. My English LF, Dr. Carr, said that it was racial bias since it was targeting one racial group, the Japanese, because the U.S was in war with their country but how come they did not intern Germans or Italians. It is crazy how Americans thought during that time.

In “Farewell to Manzanar” was originally published in 1973 by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and husband, James D. Houston. In an interview with Jeanne she mentions that the reason she wrote this book was not to let the reader know about the internment camps if not to let the reader know how life was in the internment camps. The book is classified as Non-fiction because it is her autobiography. The setting is in Manzanar, California which is where Jeanne’s family was located.

Chapter one starts off with seven year old Jeanne waving to her father’s ship as they leave to fish but then return after hearing the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Her father burns and destroys any objects, paper and anything that might cause them to be counted as suspicious when police arrive to search, since they foreshadowed it. Also in chapter one, according to an article in the Santa Monica paper he was arrested for delivering oil to Japanese submarines offshore. That is how the book starts and since every single event that happened in the book actually happened it is without a doubt that it is a credible source. Wakatsuki even includes an interview that was between her father and perhaps a soldier in Fort Lincoln in chapter seven. Chapter two really brought out the tough time families had to leave everything they owned, even houses and businesses because they had a short period of time to gather up their things and leave to a bus that would take them to their destination. Throughout most of the chapters Jeanne explains how life was in the internment camps and in the last chapters she explains life after the camps. It was still a tough time for all Japanese-Americans not just because of the racial discrimination they faced but also because they had nowhere to return too and no money to start off comfortably.

Mostly all countries follow a Constitution that carries out the rights of all citizens and non-citizens and if they violate any, the people have the right to go against their word. That was not the case in “In the Time of the Butterflies” and “Farewell to Manzanar”. Both books share similar violated rights and those are: the eighth amendment under the U.S constitution; “the freedom of cruel and unusual punishment”, which is the internment of Japanese-Americans. Article five under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” which is the torture of Dominican citizens in prisons. The sixth amendment under the U.S constitution; “right to an indictment or to be informed of the charges”, which is violated when Japanese-Americans were forced out of their homes without knowing what they have done. Article nine under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile” which is violated when they would be arrested for their opinion and is also a violation of article nineteenth, “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression”

The leaders of these countries had different intentions when war was happening, like for instance, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 for the safety of the U.S and for the Japanese-Americans even though it meant having them in internment camps for three years. When the war was finished and President Roosevelt had ended his presidency term, President Ronald Reagan signed a formal apology to all Japanese-Americans and gave $20,000 for all surviving Japanese citizens. In “Farewell to Manzanar” by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston”, in 1952 congress passed a Public Law 414 stating that all Japanese aliens have the right to become a naturalized U.S citizen (p.xv). Trujillo did not recompense the damage he did because he was assassinated in the 1960s but it was clear to everyone that he did not care who he killed, he wanted an all-white population. I guess you can say that the only justice done toward the Dominicans was having Trujillo declared dead.

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