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English 251, P.1

01 December, 2016

Comparative Analysis: Final

The topic of World War II can bring about many different feelings to people all over the world. The reason behind these feelings is some of the events that took place during the World War II era. For example, Japanese Internment Camps and Concentration Camps brought out feelings of helplessness and despair for the Japanese and Jewish people. The books “Farewell to Manzanar” by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, and “Night” by Eliezer Wiesel touch the topics of Internment camps in the United States and Concentration camps in Germany and express what the main characters in the book went through in each camp.

Jeanne Wakatsuki’s “Farewell to Manzanar” dealt with Internment Camps during the time where the United States declared war against Japan. The Japanese bombed the army base, Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii and their attack caused the American government to take serious actions to “protect their country” by interning all Japanese Americans. Jeanne and her family were forced to leave their family home and relocated into the internment camp Manzanar. Eliezer Wiesel’s “Night” dealt with the concentration camps in Germany during the dictatorship of Adolf Hitler in World War II. When German soldiers invaded his town of Sighet, they rounded up all the Jewish people and transferred them to concentration camps that had many brutal things happen. Although these books dealt with different events in the World War II era, both books have certain comparisons that both relate and differentiate with each other.

Some aspects of the character’s life before the camps and how they both got to each camp as well as the involvement of the government are both similar and different on some levels. In “Farewell to Manzanar”, Jeanne Wakatsuki’s life started off as normal in California with her parents and siblings. Everything was fine until they found out that the attack on Pearl Harbor happened and her father was accused of helping the Japanese military in providing submarine fuel, arrested. and taken for interrogation while Jeanne and the rest of her family started the process of being relocated to Manzanar. They were moved from house to house around the Los Angeles area before being transferred by bus to Manzanar. Internment of the Japanese started off as a single Executive order signed by President Roosevelt which authorized the Secretary of war to deem any location as military bases and remove anyone in those areas “as deemed necessary or desirable” (History, 2010) which is known as Executive Order 9066. This Executive Order led to the internment of anyone in the west coast of Japanese descent.

In “Night” Eliezer Wiesel’s life also started off as normal. At that time, he was a little boy in his Jewish neighborhood in Sighet, Transylvania. Later on in the book, a Jewish man from another neighborhood, Moishe the Beadle, who Eliezer knew came to warn them of the horrors he went through when his neighborhood was captured and taken to Polish territory. No one in Eliezer’s neighborhood believed him. Some years after German soldiers came into Eliezer’s neighborhood and slowly gave them restrictions until they were forced to be transferred to ghettos then to concentration camps. Having connections to the Hungarian police, Eliezer’s father was allowed to know about the transfers but not to where the Jewish people will be transferred to. German Soldiers were to take all the Jewish people in the neighborhood and transport them to synagogues where they then will be transported to camps by cramped cattle cars. The main similarity between the camps is the fact that they singled out an entire race and religion and separated and isolated them from the rest of the country.

A difference is how both of the characters and their family were relocated to the camp. Eliezer and his family was transported to different ghettos then a synagogue before being put in a cramped cattle car that carried over eight people while Jeanne and her family received help from government agencies and were moved from house to house before being transferred to Manzanar by bus.

Another concept is the conditions of both camps once both the characters got there. Eliezer had to deal with many things that changed his life forever. When he arrived at the concentration camp Auschwitz, he was forced to be separated from his mother and older and younger sisters since they had a different path for women and children. Both Eliezer and his father barely escaped death by lying about their age. During their first day in Auschwitz, they saw many traumatizing things that were happening to their own people. They were then forced to change in front of everyone and put into crowded brick or wooden barracks where they spent some time in. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, “Prisoners in the camp received meals three times a day…Auschwitz prisoners with less physically demanding labor assignments received approximately 1,300 calories per day, while those engaged in hard labor received approximately 1,700.” Jewish prisoners were forced to work “over ten hours per day working” and the rest was either roll call assemblies or as much of personal time allowed to each camp prisoner (Jewish Virtual Library). Other Jewish people who weren’t eligible to work like most women, children, elders, and disabled Jewish people were killed with different methods like gas chambers or medical experiments. Hitler’s point of concentration camps was the total extermination of Jewish people because there were seen as the inferior ones.

Jeanne’s camp experience was completely different on so many levels. Internment camps weren’t made to exterminate the Americans with Japanese descent but to keep them in one place in order to “protect the country” and for the government to keep watch over them since they were seen as a threat at that time. The camps weren’t yet competed when Jeanne and her family arrived but were still assigned a small barrack for twelve people and were only given “…steel army cots, two brown army blankets each, and some mattress covers, which my brothers stuffed with straw” (Wakatsuki, 21). Although they had poorly built barracks, they still had mess halls for meals three times a day and then later on had churches, schools, and activities where anyone could occupy themselves. The lives of the Japanese people in internment camps like Manzanar weren’t close to those in concentration camps for many different reasons.

The main difference with the lives of the main characters in the camps is obvious. Eliezer was exposed to so much death and trauma at such a young age while Jeanne just had to deal with the confusion and feeling like her people was being betrayed by their own country. Although they were both young, they both kind of understood what was going on at that time and that caused them to have scares within themselves because of the inhumane captivity they both went through.

Along with those concepts, there were some struggles both characters went through like them questioning their religion and going against their culture. During Eliezer’s time in Auschwitz, he struggled most with not questioning God and why he didn’t do anything for them. It started when he first saw the horrors of what the German soldiers were doing to the young children and infants. “Why should I sanctify His name? The Almighty, the eternal and terrible Master of the Universe, chose to be silent. What was there to thank Him for?” (Wiesel, 33). Eliezer never stopped believing in God, but did start to lose faith in Him with the more he saw in the camps as well as most of the camp prisoners. Jeanne also struggled with religion and culture during and after the internment camps. During the camp, Jeanne found the Catholic church that was newly made as a distraction from her family problems. She started to find a place inside the Catholic religion and almost converted into Catholicism but her father stopped her. She again found herself drawn to Catholicism but was again quickly shut down by her father. After she left the camps, and started school with Caucasian kids, she felt as her religion didn’t allow her to fit in like the rest. She started to ignore her Japanese culture and start to conform to Caucasian standards to feel accepted in her school. Her father opposed her ways and tried to make her go back to the Japanese culture. Close to the end, she started to understand why her father wanted her to not be like the other kids and she regretted doing what she did to conform to the standards put up in school.

The comparison between both characters is what made them question their religion and go against their culture in the first place. Being exposed to so much hardship and trauma made Eliezer begin to question where God was when there were bad things going on. “I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice” (Wiesel, 45). God’s silence was enough to make Eliezer lose his faith in God. Jeanne went against her culture and religion to try to be like the rest of the girls in her school. She felt that since she already looked different, then she shouldn’t do anything else to prevent her from being like the rest like accepting her own Japanese culture. Jeanne’s father stated “You become this kind of woman and what Japanese boy is going to marry you?” (Wakatsuki, 177) and argued that Jeanne’s ways of conforming to American culture will not make her an acceptable person to marry in the Japanese culture.

Both of the books ended differently. “Farewell to Manzanar” ended with Jeanne and the family she made years later visiting Manzanar. This was where she got the closure she wanted with every hardship she faced in the camp. “Night” ended with Eliezer being freed from the Auschwitz by the American forces and with Eliezer fighting an illness for his life. There were many things that were the main similarities and differences between both books and the characters. The process of being relocated to the camps was different, as well as the conditions and purposes for each camp. The similarities were that both characters struggled with issues related to religion and culture as well as share a level of emotional scars because of the inhumane captivity caused by World War II. **(1722 Words)**

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