



Pledge of Allegiance, Dorothea Lange

Pledge of Allegiance, Rafael Weill Elementary School, San Francisco

Dorothea Lange
American, 1942
Gelatin silver print
13 3/8 x 10 1/16 in.
2000.50.16



Questions for Teaching

Take time to look closely at the work of art. What do you see?

Where are the children looking? What do you think they are looking at? How do you know?

Mimic the pose of the girl in the middle. When someone is posed in this way, how do you think the person feels?

What are the children doing? (*They are reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.*) What shapes can you find on the children's clothes? Repeated shapes can be called patterns. Where do you see patterns in this work of art?

A few weeks after this photograph was made, the U.S. government relocated this girl, and thousands of other Japanese Americans, to internment camps in desolate areas. The attack on Pearl Harbor, which marked the beginning of direct American involvement in World War II, triggered a rise of assaults on the Japanese in America. Knowing this information, how do you feel when you look at this photograph now?

Background Information

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Clutching her lunchbag, this schoolgirl places her right hand on her heart to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Dorothea Lange made this photograph at the Rafael Weill Elementary School in San Francisco's Japantown. The above version of the Pledge of Allegiance received official approval from the U.S. Congress on June 22, 1942, a couple of months after Lange captured this image.

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By then, the U.S. government had relocated this girl, and thousands of other Japanese Americans, to desolate areas east of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

The attack on **Pearl Harbor**, which marked the beginning of direct American involvement in World War II, triggered a rise of assaults on the Japanese in America. Lange's photograph speaks to a shameful part of America's history, when all persons of Japanese descent residing on the West Coast were forced into **internment camps** because of their supposed risk to national security. President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized these detentions as protection against espionage and sabotage.

About the Artist

Dorothea Lange (American, 1895–1965)

One should really use the camera as though tomorrow you'd be stricken blind. To live a visual life is an enormous undertaking, practically unattainable. I have only touched it, just touched it.

Thus wrote photographer Dorothea Lange of her extraordinary life and career. She worked for Arnold Genthe in his **portrait** studio in New York and studied photography with Clarence White at Columbia University. In 1918 she began to travel around the world to make her living as a photographer. She found herself stranded in San Francisco, so she opened a photographic studio there. Paul Taylor, who would become her second husband, hired her to document workers in California.

In 1935 she began to work for a federal agency called the Resettlement Administration (later the **Farm Security Administration**). During this period, she made her most famous image, *Human Erosion in California (Migrant Mother)*, of Native American Florence Owens Thompson and her children in a peapickers' camp. Other less famous subjects included Japanese internment camps and scenes of workers in factories during World War II. Lange became the first woman awarded a Guggenheim fellowship, and she spent nearly ten years making photo essays for Life and other magazines. She also traveled extensively, making photo essays in Vietnam, Ireland, Pakistan, India, and elsewhere.

