

Poems Written by People in Japanese Internment Camps in the United States

My Plea⁹

Oh God, I pray that I may bear a cross
To set my people free,
That I may help to take good-will across
An understanding sea.

Oh, God, I pray that someday every race
May stand on equal plane
And prejudice will find no dwelling place
In a peace that all may gain.

Mary Matsuzawa

Be Like the Cactus⁶

Let not harsh tongues, that wag
in vain,
Discourage you. In spite of
pain,
Be like the cactus, which through
rain,
And storm, and thunder, can
remain.

Kimii Nagata



Anonymous Poem Circulated at the Poston Camp

THAT DAMNED FENCE

They've sunk the posts deep into the ground.
They've strung out wires all the way around.
With machine gun nests just over there,
And sentries and soldiers everywhere.

We're trapped like rats in a wired cage,
To fret and fume with impotent rage;
Yonder whispers the lure of the night,
But that DAMNED FENCE assails our sight.

We seek the softness of the midnight air,
But that DAMNED FENCE in the floodlight glare
Awakens unrest in our nocturnal quest,
And mockingly laughs with vicious jest.

With nowhere to go and nothing to do,
We feed terrible, lonesome, and blue:
That DAMNED FENCE is driving us crazy,
Destroying our youth and making us lazy.

Imprisoned in here for a long, long time,
We know we're punished--though we've committed no
crime,
Our thoughts are gloomy and enthusiasm damp,
To be locked up in a concentration camp.

Loyalty we know, and patriotism we feel,
To sacrifice our utmost was our ideal,
To fight for our country, and die, perhaps;
But we're here because we happen to be Japs.

We all love life, and our country best,
Our misfortune to be here in the west,
To keep us penned behind that DAMNED FENCE,
Is someone's notion of NATIONAL DEFENCE!