

In Chapter 10 of *A Different Mirror* by Ronald Takaki, many Japanese people were lured to America with stories of high wages as plantation laborers compared to earnings in Japan. Unfortunately, plantation owners created tactics to appeal to Japanese families to willfully work the plantations under harsh circumstances. Yes, the pay was better than in Japan but with the pay came the long 12 hours of work, unsanitary and crowded living spaces, and above all, much discrimination. To plantation owners, Japanese were nothing more than a requisition of supplies. Planters asked for specific nationalities when requesting workers in order to create diversity in the work force so no unified group would strike together, making Japanese strikes of unified pay meaningless.¹ “In 1904, the Hawaiian Sugar Planters’ Association passed a resolution that restricted skilled positions to ‘American citizens, or those eligible for citizenship.’”² This meant that the Japanese people would never work to be more than field hands and mill laborers. Not even Takao Ozawa could gain the respect of citizenship after living in America for 20 years and attending UC Berkley due to him obviously not being Caucasian.³ Caucasian didn’t care how long Asians lived in America or how rich they became, they simply didn’t want them as citizens.

The Japanese workforce did not let these citizen laws stop them though from fighting for equality in the work field. During the Filipino and Japanese strike that began in December 1919, the two nationalities realized the only way to gain success and the attention of the plantation owners was to create a union that included everyone, regardless of race, and thus formed the Hawaii Laborers’ Association. This unity of minorities created a movement of equal respect throughout the work field. The color of skin was no longer a sense of division and thus plant owners raised their pays and created united camps. When it came down to the workers’ children, parents raised them to learn to take advantage of the opportunities they never had. Being that they were born in America, *nisei* (2nd generation) were able to go to college and obtain Bachelor Degrees to be something more than farmers. Sometimes though, farmers themselves were able to be successful individuals in America. Such a case was with George Shima who learned to purchase undesirable land and create lush farmlands out of them. Shima eventually became wealthy enough to purchase an attractive home in a neighborhood close towards the University of Berkley despite being Japanese.

Notes

1. Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural American* (Back Bay Books, 2008), 237.
2. Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 239.
3. Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 257-258.

Bibliography

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Revised Edition. Back Bay Books, 2008.