

WMDS

Setting & Concept

The Club.

WMDS begins during the first days of Manzanar Relocation Center, our nation's largest Japanese Internment Camp. This series straddles the overlapping worlds of Bishop and nearby Manzanar, California, where thousands of Japanese were made to live. Prior to Pearl Harbor, the onset of Jazz music and a handful of neighborhood televisions were all the rage in Bishop. All at once, town inhabitants had to not only deal with the loss of their men to war, but also intermix with "local Japs" to bring home a decent wage. Those women that got to stay close to home, operating town businesses, did not envy their counterparts made to rub shoulders with the enemy.

Fortunately Rose Sterling's husband was on detail at nearby Manzanar, but she was still not at peace. Her social club, "Wives, Mothers, Daughters & Sisters" (WMDS,) founded as a support network for single parents and the like during this war, is taking on a life of its own. Yes they find solace in routine social outings like bowling, potluck dinners and bridge. However, periodic venting about "Japs" spins into a web of prejudice that cradles members, so much so that they grow to crave it.

The Untold.

WMDS is a television series primed for popular culture while its setting, at the heels of Pearl Harbor, is a familiar American backdrop. However, its "herstory" comprised of Japanese internees, mixed-race outcasts, and matrons whose hatred, when focused, could cause mass destruction, leaves room for unending possibility. Manzanar, dense with tales of survival, rebellion and separation, levies the incredible range of storylines in the small town of Bishop.

The Goal.

World War II is typically dramatized in battlefields. American women's thriving in the absence of their men glamorized for the screen. WMDS sheds light, not only on the heroines of this war, but also the ugly side of "heroism." It exposes these women's frailty *and* lauds their strength. Furthermore, this series takes an unabashed look at systematic racism, not the homegrown ghosts of chattel slavery and Jim Crow, but the earth-shattering improbability of forced relocation within one's homeland.

As a "liberated melting pot," our nation tries its hardest to ignore its scarred past. But can one genuinely heal a splintered tree without tapping its roots? This dramatic series explores this question by taking an organic, unique look into the Sierra Nevada's Owens Valley...with mountains of hope on the horizon.

The Camp.

While violent prejudices ravaged the world during the course of this war, it was the Japanese attack of a U.S. military base that not only spurred us to ally with European forces, but also made the horror of Japanese internment a reality. Whereas Japanese residents were commonplace along the west coast, with ancestors immigrating in the 1800's, Pearl Harbor "harbored" a new generation of American, whose pride and prejudice was deemed as

patriotism. After countless “garage sales,” many Japanese Americans were forced to relocate to Manzanar, USA.

The Mrs.

There’s little to nothing to do in this dustbowl nestled in Sierra Nevada Mountains’ Owens Valley, except hold down your household at all costs. If it means venturing to the nearby internment camp for work, as it oftentimes did, folks did so. Filling the empty shoes left by their husbands, fathers and brothers drafted to fight, women sustained this country as a veritable pantheon of female butchers, factory workers and postal carriers—able to wield a knife and perfect a coil with equal accuracy and ease. A remarkable set of women in Bishop, California did just that.

The Town.

Authentic, continuing characters enliven the “ordinary” town of Bishop. With women-managed mainstays such as *Wadleigh Butchers* and *Florence*, the local Italian eatery, Bishop is boring on its surface. America’s entrance into the War is the spark that unravels secrets, lies and double-lives led by these seemingly ordinary women. They all fit the profile: white, working class, 2.5 children, until we find out that one, Bee Wadleigh has been “passing” for White, while quietly mourning her darker son’s draft into war. As our characters’ tightly woven li(v)es are revealed, they cling to common ground: a shared loathing of Asian, namely Japanese culture.

WMDs is an anthropological probe into the compelling stories of these women, a cross-section whose struggles are largely absent from textbooks. In addition to Bee’s “dark secret,” there is Fran, an Italian-American struggling with her own notions of identity, and Cara, a displaced Piate Indian who takes issue with Japanese internment while her own family’s been displaced by the Manzanar Relocation Center and made to move to Bishop.

The Exceptional.

Rose, our protagonist, tries desperately to heal her home in the face of her two sons at war, her husband’s racist rants and her daughter’s smoldering angst. With nowhere to turn she finds herself on the outskirts of both Manzanar and Bishop. It is on one of these lonely nights when she first spies detainee Kanji Murakami. Amidst a sea of non-descript rocks and twigs, the quiet and peace within this woman seems to surround her, even enveloping Rose. She tries to ignore her magnetism, but soon finds herself returning there night after night to catch a glimpse of this woman, peacefully “gardening” in this desert. Eventually they become friends and Rose painstakingly learns the art of Ikebana. Their secret camaraderie, its trials and tribulations as Rose becomes acquainted with this ancient Japanese art, sets the stage for WMDs four-season run.