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"Mountains, Monuments, and other Matter: Environmental Affects at Manzanar"

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This essay investigates the natural landscapes and built structures at the Manzanar National Historic Site, the first of ten incarceration camps to open in 1941 and a temporary home for over 11,000 Japanese Americans. Using former incarceree Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's writing as a touchstone, my essay foregrounds the environmental features of the (re)location: the extreme desert weather, the mountain vistas, the incarceree-created rock gardens, the reconstructed barracks, guard tower, and barbed wire fence, and the cemetery/monument. I bring together concepts from ecocriticism and from affect theory—particularly Ben Anderson's "affective atmospheres," Sianne Ngai's "tone," and Sara Ahmed's characterization of affect as "sticky"—and develop the notion of *affective agency* to describe the impacts generated by environments and objects at this national memory site. I assess how the visual and written rhetoric at the site addresses what I call an implied tourist, and I show how powerful emotions of shame, anger, grief, and compassion— and sometimes, mixed, even contradictory, affects—are not only represented in visual and written rhetoric but are also, in a sense, communicated by the environment itself. More broadly, I suggest that ecocritical theory brings a useful lens to discussions of public memory, and that affect theory helps account for the less tangible, visceral, experiences visitors have at Manzanar and other fraught historical sites, as well as within our everyday environments. (Text from author's abstract)

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