

# Hearing About the Bombing of Pearl Harbor: Akiko Kurose

This video clip is an excerpt from Akiko Kurose’s oral history interview, conducted on June 17, 1997, by Densho, an organization dedicated to sharing the history of Japanese-American internment during World War II.

DENSHO

---

Tier 2 terms

alien, probably, responsibility, threatened

Tier 3 terms

Pearl Harbor, bomb, geography, citizenship, Japanese, (internment) camp

Web Version:

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/texts/hearing-about-the-bombing-of-pearl-harbor-akiko-kurose>



*This article contains a multimedia feature that is available at the web address above.*

**Akiko Kurose:** Well, I had just come home from church.

And then we kept hearing, “Pearl Harbor was bombed, Pearl Harbor was bombed.”

I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was. My geography was not that sophisticated.

I had no idea, and my father said, “Uh-oh, there is going to be trouble.”

And I said, “Well, how come?”

He said, “Well, Japan just bombed Pearl Harbor.”

And he says, “We’re at war with Japan.”

But, I thought, “Why should it bother me? You know, I’m an American.”

And then he said, “You know, we are aliens.”

My parents ...

“We don’t have the citizenship, so they’re gonna do something; we’ll probably get taken away.”

But at that time, my parents had no feeling that we would be removed because — so they were saying my brother would have to take on the responsibility to keep the family together, because they may be removed or put into [a] camp or whatever.

And then, when I went back to school that following morning, December 8th, one of the teachers said, “You people bombed Pearl Harbor.”

And I’m going, “My people?”

All of a sudden, my Japaneseness became very aware to me.

And then that I was no longer — I no longer felt I’m an equal American, that I felt kind of threatened and nervous about it.

## Source

To access the full interview please visit,  
[ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1000-41-13/](http://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1000-41-13/)

## TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

### 1. Question

While we cannot “hear” Akiko’s teacher say to her, “You people bombed Pearl Harbor,” we can infer the feelings behind these words.

- Who is the teacher referring to when he or she says, “you You people”?
- What can you infer about the manner in which the teacher said this to Akiko? What makes you think so?

- The use of the phrase “you people” creates a clear separation between Japanese-Americans and other Americans who are not of Japanese descent. You are either Japanese or you are not. Why might the teacher have wanted to draw this distinction?

2. Question

What does Akiko mean when she says, “All of a sudden my Japaneseness became very aware to me”?

3. Question

What other lines in the first half of the interview help support the notion that she thought of herself as an American?

4. Question

Akiko says she no longer felt she was an “equal American.” Who did she consider to be “more” American than her at this point?

## TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### 1. Question

While we cannot “hear” Akiko’s teacher say to her, “You people bombed Pearl Harbor,” we can infer the feelings behind these words.

a. Who is the teacher referring to when he or she says, “you You people”?

b. What can you infer about the manner in which the teacher said this to Akiko? What makes you think so?

c. The use of the phrase “you people” creates a clear separation between Japanese-Americans and other Americans who are not of Japanese descent. You are either Japanese or you are not. Why might the teacher have wanted to draw this distinction?

Answer

a. Japanese people

b. Based on the use of “you people,” the teacher likely said this in a cruel, accusatory way.

c. Drawing this distinction creates the illusion that there is an in group and an out group, or an us vs. them dichotomy

### 2. Question

What does Akiko mean when she says, “All of a sudden my Japaneseness became very aware to me”?

Answer

She didn’t regularly think of herself as Japanese. She thought of herself as American.

### 3. Question

What other lines in the first half of the interview help support the notion that she thought of herself as an American?

Answer

Well, how come? Why should it bother me? I am an American.

### 4. Question

Akiko says she no longer felt she was an “equal American.” Who did she consider to be “more” American than her at this point?

Answer

Any Americans who were not also of Japanese descent.