



NATIONAL COALITION FOR REDRESS/REPARATIONS
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TO: The Commission on wartime relocation and internment of civilians ---

Chairwoman Bernstein, Commissioners and staff members of the Commission, on behalf of the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations, I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you here in Washington D.C. The National Coalition for Redress/Reparations considers these hearings as a very important means of educating the public about the concentration camps experience and the impact it made on the Japanese American community. We in the NCRR as well as others have been busy organizing in our communities nationwide; we have played a major role bringing the R/R issue to JA communities by speaking to community groups, churches, social service agencies, student unions, gardeners federations, workers clubs, civil liberties union and others. Our supporters and endorsers include groups as the ACLU, UTLA, chapters of the JACL, Asian State Employees Assoc. and numerous community groups and organizations.

The NCRR was formed in July of last year with the purpose of seeking restitution for losses and injuries suffered by Japanese Americans and others unjustly uprooted and incarcerated by the U.S. Government, and to seek preventive steps so that similar violations of constitutional rights will never happen again. The NCRR will use whatever means necessary that will result in the fastest, most direct and most substantial form of restitution.

As we all know, one of the objectives of the Commission is "to determine whether a wrong was committed". We applaud the attempt on the part of the Commission to conduct research, but at the same time, we feel that Japanese Americans should not be put in the position of proving that a wrong was committed. All the facts are available in [the] books and government documents. ~~Instead, the NCRR believes the Commission's priority should be on connecting this grave injustice.~~ We maintain that restitution is not only deserved, but long overdue, and that the Japanese community has every right to demand redress and reparations.

But before going into the points which the NCRR believes are essential in addressing and redressing the "wartime relocation and internment of Civilians", we would like to briefly touch on the history of Japanese Americans. This is important to establish a clear and correct perspective on the concentration camps experience.

The history of Japanese in America is marked throughout by racism--racism that increased in scope as the Japanese people found ways to survive despite these attacks. When Japanese were excluded from major trade unions, they formed their own trade unions and fought for equality of wages and conditions. When Japanese could not buy farmlands, they cleared the unwanted swamplands. They produced some of the richest farmlands and this was on only 4% of all farmlands, from which 50 to 90% of certain crops were produced. As the role of Japanese in agriculture grew, violence against Japanese and their property coincided. Violence was followed by organized opposition that methodically attacked the rights of Japanese. Like the Chinese immigrants, Japanese were "aliens ineligible to citizenship". This uncertain status was the basis of the legal discrimination suffered by Japanese people. Japanese were barred from certain professions, from intermarriage, public schools, they were denied political and judicial rights. Other rights, such as the fishing rights on the California coast, were constantly under attack.

Japanese in agriculture had to fight progressively restricting land laws aimed at reducing them to hired hands. In 1924, the anti-Japanese forces succeeded in organizing the successful passage of the Asian Exclusion Act.

Anti-Japanese legislation continued to be introduced but the years following the exclusion act were years of ^{Relative} calm for the Japanese people.

When Japan declared war on the U.S., over 2,000 Japanese community leaders were immediately arrested. For the first several weeks following the declaration of war, the Japanese were not subject to attack. But the anti-Japanese groups began to raise racist suspicions about the Japanese people. To their voices were added those of the military. The war provided the atmosphere to achieve their goal: the removal of the Japanese from the West Coast. Vicious stories were created and presented as fact by major newspapers. Government officials stated publicly, with authority, completed unfounded suspicions. The Japanese people were judged guilty solely on the basis of race: no Japanese or Japanese American was accused or convicted of any act of sabotage and espionage.

We heard many reasons for the incarceration. One of them was that a mass incarceration was required for national security and the lack of time available to separate the loyal from the disloyal. We were not told that the president had ordered a special investigation into the loyalty of the Japanese, ~~and had received that report a full month before the attack on Pearl Harbor.~~ ^{The attack on Pearl Harbor} A full month before ^{concluded} Curtis B. Munson had submitted an exhaustive study ~~of the Japanese people. This study~~ was conducted, with the cooperation of the FBI and the Naval and Army Intelligence, which had been studying the Japanese a full 10-15 years before the war. The Munson report ^{concluded} stated clearly that: "There is no Japanese problem on the Coast." This report was kept secret and on Feb 19, 1942, Roosevelt signed EO 9066 authorizing the imprisonment of 120,313 guiltless people.

120,313 people, each of them building their lives; clearing land to farm, going to school, and building their communities, were uprooted and sent to live in a community made up of blocks and blocks of tar-papered barracks.

~~For as long as four years, we were kept in these concentration camps. And even here, the question of loyalty was again asked, as though it was the only decisive question left to us in terms of our future. Many could not make any plans for the lives left behind. We left our jobs, communities, and businesses which we could not preserve. Many businesses, farmlands, jobs, homes, were lost to us during those 4 years. Our communities and their histories were changed forever.~~

The camps, then, caused immeasurable damage to our people and our communities. This damage has never been adequately addressed to. It is for this reason that there has always been a very strong sentiment within the community for redress/reparations. Through the process of community-wide discussion, the following five guiding points have emerged as principles and demands of the NCRR:

First and foremost, we believe that a just Commission recommendation means monetary compensation to individuals or heirs of individuals who suffered evacuation or incarceration due to the actions of the U.S. Government during WWII. Numerous surveys conducted by member organizations of the ~~National Coalition~~ ^{NCRR}, as well as those conducted by the JACL, the National Council for Japanese American Redress, and the Seattle Community Coalition for R/R, have all shown that monetary compensation to individuals is overwhelmingly favored as the most just form of restitution. No sum of money can approach complete compensation for the tremendous social, economic and psychological trauma or the violation of constitutional rights. But meaningful restitution on the part of the U.S. Government is imperative and must include monetary compensation to individuals.

The NCRR urges the Commission to recommend to Congress, passage of a direct appropriations bill calling for a minimum of \$25,000 for each individual who was uprooted or incarcerated as a result of U.S. government action during WWII.

The figure of \$25,000 is to compensate for: property losses, which are conservatively estimated at \$400 million plus interest and inflation, lost wages and employment and educational opportunities, as well as damages for false imprisonment and compensation for psychological and emotional suffering.

~~In fact,~~

~~a recent study on the Long Beach, California Japanese community indicates that documented (and therefore, partial) losses in property, retail and wholesale sales, homes, land and wages figuring in the rate of economic growth for the war years, amount to actual losses 2 and 3 times greater than the 1942 estimated value. For Japanese Americans as a whole, then, the estimated 3.4 billion dollars in losses (based on the \$400 million plus inflation and interest) is no doubt twice that amount.~~

There is ample basis to justify the demand for individual payments. The evacuation process required that Japanese sell or liquidate possessions within a matter of a few weeks in most cases. ~~For some,~~ ^{For example,} those living on Terminal Island, near Los Angeles, were given as little as 48-hr. notice. Everything was sold at a loss. Refrigerators and washing machines went for \$5 a piece. One family was forced to sell 14 acres of farmlands for a total of \$6,000, which, 10 years later, came to be worth \$10,000-\$15,000 per acre. An Arizona grocery store owner sold his store valued at \$15,000 for \$800, two days before he had to leave. Such losses were commonplace. The government, through the Federal Reserve Bank and the Farm Security Administration, was supposed to protect the Japanese from these rip-offs. But little or nothing was done. Voluntary storage of personal property by the Federal Reserve Bank would be done only at the sole risk of the owner, and they required the owner to sign a statement relieving the bank of any liability. Consequently, few people

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made use of this "service" offered and it was estimated that 80% of the privately stored goods were "rifled, stolen or sold" during the owners' absence.

The losses and suffering was not only monetary. Many suffered nervous breakdowns, severe depression and illness. The stigma of being "criminal" and "guilty" was reinforced throughout the incarceration. The fact that many issei and nisei cannot speak of the camps experience today can be attributed to the deep psychological and emotional impact of the unjust incarceration.

The NCRR also seeks monetary compensation for Japanese who were not incarcerated, but had to relocate from the West Coast area to the inland regions. These people were also branded as "the enemy" and lived anxious lives in order to survive the ordeal of their hostile surroundings. They suffered the stigma of the anti-Japanese propaganda as did those who were in the camps. Finally, we demand reparations for people of Japanese ancestry taken from Central and South American countries, Hawaii, the Alaskan Aleuts and all others forced to relocate.

The first generation, Issei, should rightfully be given first priority for payments. At the time of the camps, there were approximately 47,000 Issei who average age was between 55 and 65. Now, most are late in years and many have already died. There must be a speedy payment process set up.

Secondly, we believe that a just Commission recommendation means restitution to the Japanese American communities in the form of a Japanese Community Fund, appropriated by Congress.

The purpose of this fund shall be to counteract the ~~abstraction~~ destruction of Japanese American communities due to the incarceration. It could fund the development of housing for the issei, needed services, and cultural and educational projects. Following the camps, Japanese were strongly urged to resettle in the Midwest and East to avoid returning to the hostile west coast. Less than 1/2 the number of Japanese Americans returned to their former communities. Dispersal of our communities was a direct result of the camps, and later, aggravated by urban renewal.

The community as a whole was pressured by the War Relocation Authority of the U.S. government to reject anything "Japanese" and to "prove loyalty" by accepting incarceration and volunteering for the U.S. Army. The government tried to deny the right of our communities even to exist. For example, even the questionnaires Japanese had to fill out for leave clearance as they left the camps asked, "Will you assist in the general resettlement program by staying away from large groups of Japanese?" and "Will you try to develop such American habits which will cause you to be accepted readily into American social groups?"

The Japanese American Community Trust Fund should be funded by appropriations from Congress as well as unclaimed or donated individual payments. These funds should be administered by an independent body consisting of a wide range of individuals and organizations who represent the broad spectrum of the Japanese American community. Joint administrative decisions should be made in each respective community, based on local needs. Because of the nature and purpose of the fund, administrative costs should be borne by the U.S. government.

Thirdly, we believe that a just recommendation from the Commission means doing whatever is necessary to overturn the racist legal basis that has justified the incarceration all these years. Test cases: Hirabayashi vs U.S. (320 U.S. 81), Korematsu vs U.S. (323 U.S. 214) and Yasui vs. U.S. (320 U.S. 115)

These cases still stand on the books, providing the legal basis and justification for the concentration camps possibly occurring again. ~~And lest we~~ ^{SOME MAY} ~~think that~~ ^{BUT} the likelihood of the camps happening again is too remote, ~~we may~~ remember that during the sixties, in the midst of the civil rights movement, there were contingency plans on the part of the government to re-open the camps for black demonstrators. More recently, we were appalled to hear Senator Hayakawa call for the Iranians to be put into camps.

~~We also support legal possibilities of winning reparations through examining the~~
WE ARE ALSO INVESTIGATING OTHER
~~legal precedents for reparations.~~ For example, there are the Native Americans claims settlement and class action suits such as the one initiated by the National Council for Japanese American Redress.

Specifically, then, we urge the Commission to declare illegal, invalid and unjust, the Supreme court cases and recommend that congress overturn the statute of limitations which hinders the ability of Japanese Americans pursuing legal avenues for redress/reparations.

Fourthly, we in the NCCR believe in supporting others who have or are suffering from similar unjust action taken by the U.S. government. We support the Aleutian/Pribilof Islanders in Alaska who were incarcerated and had their communities destroyed during WWII by the U.S. government. We are committed to supporting efforts by Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, Blacks, Chicanos and all others struggling for reparations and justice.

Fifthly, the NCCR believes in seeking broad education of the American public so that people may learn from the situation and not knowingly allow it to happen again. Specifically, we hold the U.S. government responsible for presenting a truthful and accurate picture of the WWII concentration camps experience and the history that led to it.

In conclusion, we wish to address the commissioners of the contradiction involved in the Presidential Commission. We can't forget that it was a Presidential Executive Order, along with the help of some political and economic interest groups, that put Japanese Americans into camps in the first place. We will do more than just present the facts for you to decide.

We would expect the Commission, once it has conducted its hearings and completed its investigation and come up with its recommendations, to come back to the Japanese American community and get some feedback on its decision prior to bringing it before Congress.

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We uphold our right to recommend the degree and form of restitution. As the victims, we indict the U.S. Government for violations of human and constitutional rights, for dispersing our Japanese American communities, for destroying countless lives and homes, and for contributing to economic exploitation, greed and racism. The time is now for the Commission and Congress to take action. We Japanese Americans demand justice. The time for determining "whether a wrong was committed" occurred 39 years ago. The time for ~~redress~~^{Justice} and reparations is NOW!