



NCRR TESTIMONY JUNE, 1984

INTRODUCTION

The National Coalition for Redress/Reparations is a grassroots coalition made up of organizations and individuals who came together over five years ago to educate, organize, and develop community-wide planning to win reparations.

The NCRR is the only national organization whose primary goal is to win redress and reparations for the over 120,000 Japanese Americans who were incarcerated in internment camps during World War II. We are former evacuees, and their descendants as well as Americans of all races and backgrounds. Our membership includes organizations ranging from the ACLU to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to the three million members of the Lutheran Church of America.

We have waited many years for these hearings, ever since that fateful day in February, 1942, when President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, opening one of the darkest chapters in American history. We were stripped of all our property and personal belongings and banished to desert internment camps.

We Japanese Americans were denied due process of law. It should be noted that no German Americans or Italian Americans were subjected to mass exclusion or detention in any part of the country.

This is why the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations commends the courageous and honest recommendations of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians and why we want to make clear our support for the historic bill before us today, HR 4110 The Civil Liberties Act of 1983.

NATIONAL COALITION FOR REDRESS/REPARATIONS

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WHAT CRIME DID WE COMMIT?

Mr. Chairman, under our laws a criminal usually knows what crimes they are being charged with. We were never even granted that. Our rights and property vanished with the posting of notices instructing anyone of Japanese ancestry to report for evacuation. Some of us were given no more than 48 hours to pack 48 years of our lives, and told we could only take what we could carry.

Every single Japanese American, whether or not they were born in or experienced these dreadful internment camps, has been touched by this experience. For all of us, a lifetime of toil and contributions to this country was reduced to barbed wire, armed guard towers and tar paper shacks. For some of us, all we had left were our children.

The record shows beyond doubt, that we were steadfastly loyal to our country. There is not one documented case of espionage, sabotage or fifth column activity by any Japanese American on the West Coast (see page 3 of the CWRIC report, Personal Justice Denied, 1982).

HOW DO WE SEE WINNING REDRESS?

The National Coalition for Redress and Reparations believe that the CWRIC Recommendations are the foundation for a just redress and reparations effort on the part of the U.S. government. The main components are:

- * Congressional apology to the Japanese American people
- * Presidential pardon for convictions resulting from the enforcement of EO 9066, specifically cases where offenses were based on a refusal to accept treatment due to race or ethnicity.

And most importantly,

- * Establishment of a Community Fund
- * Individual monetary restitution for those who were incarcerated in the internment camps.

The NCRR believes that the heart of the reparations issue is the acknowledgement by the U.S. government that it committed a gross injustice against an innocent people in 1942; that it is willing to redress this wrong to the fullest extent possible; and that it will never again allow such a travesty of justice to occur.

Therefore, we feel a moral imperative to recommend the following amendments to this landmark legislative effort HR 4110:

* RESTITUTION. SEC. 205. (a)(1) regarding individual payments of \$20,000 to eligible individuals as defined by SEC. 201. (2).

NCRR recommends that the amount of individual payment be increased to \$25,000. The figure of \$25,000 is fully justified by using the estimate of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco or by using the per capita income of the State of California for 1941 and then allowing for interest and inflation over a 40 year period. Although partial restitution was attempted in 1948, its limitation to documentable real property left it far short of the actual losses suffered. No amount of money can readily compensate for all of the lost years. \$25,000 is a symbolic figure which represents a tangible apology for the lost property, income, education and opportunity taken from a victimized people.

* DEFINITIONS. SEC. 201. (2) "eligible individual" means any living individual of Japanese ancestry...

NCRR recommends that all innocent parties affected by EO 9066 receive full restitution. Payments only to living individuals or survivors fall short of the full measure of justice we seek. One hundred and twenty thousand and more lives were affected. To restrict justice to merely the living survivors is a cruel waiting game - letting old age and death become the dominant factor of reparations.

NCRR recommends that when monetary redress is granted, immediate priority

in payments be given to our elderly so that their wait would not have been in vain.

* TITLE III - THE ALEUTS. RESTITUTION. SEC. 302. (a)(1) regarding individual payment of \$5,000 to each eligible individual.

NCRR recommends individual payments to Aleuts be equal to the amount paid to Japanese Americans. We believe that the circumstances surrounding the internment and removal of the Aleuts mirror that of the Japanese Americans. We are linked together in an unfortunate experience as victims of our own government during the war. The appalling conditions and the sickness suffered by the Aleuts in abandoned canneries can only be described as a miserable disgrace to humankind. The Aleut homes destroyed by the military, as well as title to Attu, should rightfully be a consideration in reparations to the Aleuts. We, in addition, call for compensation of \$25,000 per evacuee.

Mr. Chairman, our final recommendation concerns this committee directly. We recommend that you hold 1 or 2 day field hearings in the Aleut and Japanese American communities. The psychological impact of the internment experience cannot be adequately conveyed to you by our words alone. To hear the actual victims directly will convince you of the total injustice of the mass incarceration of two ethnic groups.

Mr. Chairman, we would like to reaffirm that NCRR strongly supports the passage of HR 4110.

This would serve as a landmark in advancing the cause of justice not only for Japanese Americans - but for all those who aspire to the principles upon which this country was founded. Those principles have been sorely tested during the development of this country. Witness the banishment of Indians - the Native Americans - to reservations; the ongoing struggle of Black Americans to free themselves from the effect of racial discrimination; even today Americans of Latin descent are victimized during immigrations raids; and America's

working people are faced with skyrocketing unemployment, while the unofficial estimate of the homeless has risen to 3 million.

Based on our similar historical experiences NCRR has received endorsements and active support from people and organizations of all nationalities...just as we have pledged our mutual support and unity.

With the support of the American people and this committee here today, let us join in our efforts to pass HR 4110, the Civil Liberties Act of 1983. Let us strengthen that which is the heart of this country, our Constitution which guarantees freedom and justice for all Americans regardless of race or color. Let us strike a blow for justice!