

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, STATE,  
THE JUDICIARY AND RELATED AGENCIES

By Chizu Iiyama  
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National Coalition for Redress/Reparations

Date: Wednesday, April 5, 1989

Time: 2:00 p.m.

My name is Chizu Iiyama, and I am an American of Japanese ancestry. I live in El Cerrito, California.

I am here today to urge that you support substantial appropriations for redress payments and for redress administration. We believe that President Reagan was sincere when he signed HR 442 into law - "we reaffirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law" and that our current President Bush truly believes that "it is only fair that our country provide apologies and reparations to those Japanese Americans interned during World War II." We were very disappointed that they allocated such a small sum, and ask that the budget reflects their stated sentiments with adequate funding.

It was almost 47 years ago - April 6, 1942 that I was herded into the Santa Anita Race Tracks. I was a student at the University of California - and we were given five days to make arrangements for my father's business, dispose of our household goods and possessions, say goodbye to our relatives and friends -not knowing whether we would ever meet again, where we were going, how long we were to be interned, what kind of conditions we were facing, what was going to happen to us during and after the war -- and worst of all, not knowing what specific charges were made against us, and not given a trial.

I can tell you about some of our experiences - of living in a horse stall with the overwhelming stench of manure; whole families crowded into single rooms, of facing extreme heat and devastating cold with inadequate clothing as we were sent to desert camps, of dust storms that permeated every corner of our room which made breathing difficult, of the lack of privacy - and especially the deprivation of our freedom. We were in a jail - with barbed wire fences surrounding us and American soldiers armed with rifles facing us.

What happened to the United States of America that we had studied about in our schools?

But I am here today to ask for sufficient amounts to implement the redress program primarily for my mother and the other immigrant Issei men and women. My mother is now 99 years of age, and will be 100 in September. My mother has lost some of her memory -- but she can recall the days spent in detention. She often repeats herself, but she has tremendous faith in our country - her country.

When she first came to the United States in the early part of the century, Japanese immigrants were not allowed to become citizens. It was not until 1952, under the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act that she, and other Issei were eligible to become naturalized citizens. Many of our families can tell poignant stories of how their parents studied English and Civics night after night so that they can pass their citizenship tests. How proud she was as she became a citizen and voted for the first time in 1954.

She does not comprehend the details of Public Law 100-383. But some of our other Issei friends - frail, ailing, most in their 80's and 90's ask us tremulously if we think they will receive payments before they die. They deeply believe that our country will honor the commitments they made when they enacted the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. We urge that you will not fail them.