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February 12, 1970

Glenn Omatsu
Yale University Asian Students Association
Hadley Hall
420 Temple Street
New Haven, Conn. 06511

Lynne Iijima
Asian Americans for Action
601 West 110th Street, #4P
New York, N. Y. 10025

Dear Glenn and Lynne:

Your plans to confront the JACL at the national convention this summer in Chicago sounds beautiful. But it will be much more beautiful if you could actually control the convention and take over the organization. What I am proposing is that we begin a systematic plan to infiltrate and gain control of the JACL.

At the last JACL national convention in San Jose, California, the Asian American Political Alliance did exactly what you are proposing to do in Chicago. However, it was merely a hit and run tactic and after only a brief period of excitement, the JACL went back to their old ways of apathy and unconcern. There is no point in repeating the shock action carried out in 1968. The JACL is now perfectly well aware of the emerging activist Asian Americans. What we need in 1970 is more staying power and long lasting, substantial reforms in JACL.

Those of us in the movement must decide whether to take over an existing national organization, or to form a completely new national organization. Forming a new national organization will be purer and have less compromises, but the problems of doing this are formidable, especially when it comes to finances. On the other hand, whether we like it or not, the JACL is the only viable Asian American organization that can accomplish things politically. The Chinese American Citizens Alliance is smaller, and is not structured as a line political outfit. The JACL has a nation-wide structure, which was originally devised to accomplish political ends, and which has a powerful and influential Washington lobby. And, the house newspaper, Pacific Citizen, has a readership of some 60,000 Japanese Americans. Where else can you reach such a wide audience for your message? Thus, I believe if we can gain control of an existing organization with its large reserves of funds and resources, we will have a powerful tool at our disposal.

The Title II repeal movement is a good case study on how the JACL can be mobilized to accomplish a major political objective with a minimum of resources and personnel. Just last year, all the big white liberal groups, plus all the so-called "experts" on the congressional scene, claimed the repeal of Title II was impossible and refused to commit any effort for a "lost" cause. Now, one short year later, the JACL has moved in on the project, and the JACL has done more in one year than all the big white liberal organizations have done in 20 years. All of a sudden the end is in sight, and the repeal campaign is being endorsed by such conservatives as Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George Murphy. I. F. Stone calls it a "political miracle", and it came about because the Japanese Americans skillfully used its own past to gain a present-day political objective.

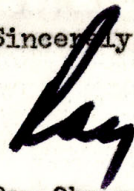
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Unless the young activists take over JACL, the organization will die a natural death in about 10 years. The JACL was founded by the young (18-25) Nisei "activists" of an era of the past. However, after all of the immediate political objectives were attained in 1952, the JACL relaxed and has been going down-hill ever since. With most JACL members over the age of 50, the organization will not last much longer. Therefore, I ask you to seriously consider taking over JACL, or, if that is too distasteful, or too much trouble, leave JACL alone to die in peace, and spend your time and energy creating a new national Asian American organization.

If you decide to infiltrate and take over, one possible tactic is to get your groups in New Haven and New York chartered as official chapters of the JACL. The only requirement for getting a charter is to have 25 paid members, at \$6.50 per member. There is no racial or ethnic qualification, so any Asian, white or black American can join. Each chapter has complete autonomy and has the freedom to pursue its own programs. In the meanwhile, you will have voting rights in the District Council and National Convention. Right off the bat, you will control 1/3 of the Eastern District Council. (There are only 4 other chapters on the East Coast) If we could do this all over the country, we will eventually have enough votes to control the national organization. In fact, we have formed the first such new chapter in Pasadena, California. A "Greater Pasadena Area" chapter was recently chartered to compete with an older, conservatively oriented "Pasadena" chapter. Here in the Berkeley-San Francisco area we are planning to create at least one, and possibly more, new chapters by the end of the year. The JACL structure is such that each chapter gets one vote, regardless of membership, at the district and national levels. Thus, many small chapters can join together to out-vote the older and larger chapters.

As your plans become firmer, you might contact the people I am listing in the attachment. Those individuals on list #1 can be completely trusted and I have already sent them copies of your February 4th letter. Those individuals on list #2 are somewhat liberal members of the JACL establishment, and whose support you need to accomplish anything at the national convention. However, I caution you against revealing specific tactics prematurely to those on list #2, because their primary loyalty is to preservation of the JACL.

Sincerely,



Ray Okamura

Copies to List #1:

Hiroshi Kanno
Bob Suzuki
Don Hayashi
Edison Uno
Mary Anna Takagi
David Miura