

barred admission or denied citizenship, was a racist conceit whose demise was contained in its own rotten core. But once the United States found itself at war with Japan, there was no viable option but to designate noncitizens of Japanese, German and Italian heritage as "enemy aliens."

The attempt to portray events as worse than they were is morally indefensible. And not only because it unfairly casts aspersions on good and decent people faced with enormous leadership responsibilities at a moment of national crisis. It sabotages our sense of national unity and purpose by spawning distrust among the nation's ethnic groups.

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It is neither offensive nor mean-spirited to assert that persons of Japanese origin did not suffer anywhere near as much as European Jews. Nor is it an affront to Japanese Americans to note that they were not singled out on the basis of ethnicity, but rather on the question of their alienage, noncitizenship, dual citizenship and, in some instances, their refusal to swear allegiance to the United States during wartime. The racism argument was rejected in the Supreme Court's Korematsu decision of 1944, which still stands. Legislation passed in 1987 to compensate such individuals for "human suffering" was, in contrast, a political decision.

A Slander Against the United States

Every American has a responsibility to protest the mistreatment of individuals or groups. And it must be emphasized that great loyalty was demonstrated by many Japanese Americans and noncitizens in spite of the disloyalty of others.

But U.S. citizens have a responsibility to challenge an injustice against the American people as a whole. That is precisely what the racially aggrieved or the politically correct are perpetrating when they promote the slander that the United States ran concentration camps during World War II, or that no evidence was available to the government to support fears of subversive activity on the West Coast.

The rewriting of history to support a political position has perpetuated ethnic conflicts worldwide. That should be reason enough for Americans to insist on the truth.

Japanese American Internment Camps
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The Japanese-American Community and the Struggle for Redress

Gary Y. Okihiro

Historian Gary Y. Okihiro describes the political activism of Japanese Americans and its effects on the Japanese-American community in the years following World War II. Many Japanese Americans at first internalized their wartime experiences and did not speak out about them. However, beginning in the 1960s, some Japanese Americans, including children and grandchildren of those interned, began to seek redress and reparations from the U.S. government. Okihiro writes that their activities, while initially controversial among some elements of the Japanese-American community, eventually served to mobilize that community and encourage victims of internment to break their silence about the camps, to confront painful memories, and to demand appropriate redress. Their efforts were rewarded when Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1988, which included a formal apology from Congress and financial redress of \$20,000 for surviving victims of internment. Gary Y. Okihiro is a professor of history and director of the Asian American studies program at Cornell University in New York.

Although a small minority, Japanese Americans sought to undo the restrictions of the past and help shape their future by engaging in the political process. A pivotal moment was the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which removed race as a criterion for naturalization

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but also introduced a quota system that discriminated against Asian immigration and broadened the grounds for the exclusion and deportation of aliens. But the act, passed during the cold war and over the veto of President Harry Truman, enabled citizenship for the *issei*, the vast majority of whom had been rendered perpetual aliens by U.S. law since 1790."

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Another law enacted during the cold war and passed over the veto of President Truman, the Internal Security Act of 1950, held significance for Japanese Americans. Title II of the act authorized the president to apprehend and detain any person of whom there was "reasonable ground to believe that such person probably will engage in, probably will conspire with others to engage in, acts of espionage or of sabotage." The precedents established by the U.S. Supreme Court in its decisions affirming the constitutionality of the World War II Japanese American detention program, proponents argued, provided ample authority for the government's sweeping powers during national emergencies. Between 1952 and 1958, Congress appropriated funds to prepare and administer six sites, including the Tule Lake concentration camp used for Japanese Americans during World War II, in the event of an emergency. Ten years later, during protests against the Vietnam War and rising Black militancy, Edwin E. Willis, chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, favored the use of Title II and declared that "black militants have essentially declared war on the United States, and therefore they lose all constitutional rights and should be imprisoned in detention camps." And in 1969, Deputy Attorney General Richard Kleindienst said of student protesters, "If people demonstrated in a manner to interfere with others, they should be rounded up and put in a detention camp."

Fighting the Internal Security Act

It was Japanese Americans who spearheaded the drive to repeal Title II. In June 1968, Raymond Okamura and Mary Anna Takagi began a grass-roots campaign within the

Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), a *nisei* patriotic and civic organization begun in 1930, to repeal Title II. According to Okamura, the group believed that Japanese Americans, "as the past victims of American concentration camps, were in the best position to lead a repeal campaign," and "it was imperative for Japanese Americans to assume the leadership in order to promote Third World unity. Japanese Americans had been the passive beneficiaries of the Black civil rights movement," he explained, "and this campaign was the perfect issue by which Japanese Americans could make a contribution to the overall struggle for justice in the United States."

The group convinced the conservative JACL leadership to endorse the campaign, and at its national convention in 1968, the JACL adopted a resolution calling for the repeal of Title II. The effort was joined by Hawaii's *nisei* members of Congress in 1969, when [Daniel K.] Inouye and [Spork M.] Matsunaga introduced repeal bills in the Senate and House respectively. As it turned out, the initiative led by Japanese Americans, "the first group in the United States to have concentration camp experience," according to the *Nation* in a June 9, 1969, editorial, disarmed Title II supporters, who had come to view their opposition as "Negro militants" and "alleged radicals" whose motives might be suspect. In 1971, Congress overwhelmingly approved repeal, and President Richard M. Nixon, on his way to a historic meeting with Japan's emperor Hirohito, stopped in Portland, Oregon, to sign the repeal measure.

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Edison Uno, one of the co-chairs of the JACL repeal campaign, reflected upon the meaning of the effort for Japanese Americans. Likening the unconstitutional forced removal and detention of Japanese Americans to rape, Uno wrote [in a 1974 *Amerasia Journal* article]: "For over a quarter century the unspeakable crime was quietly internalized by the victims as they suffered in silence from a false sense of guilt and shame and thought of themselves as American citizens unworthy of their birthright. Their unjust imprisonment, which mocked the American tradition that 'one is

considered innocent until proven guilty' created long-lasting psychological problems. The trauma was so great that many believed that they must 'prove' themselves innocent in order to eliminate the preconceived notion that Japanese Americans were categorically disloyal. For the record," he added, "it is well established that not one incident of sabotage or espionage was ever committed by a Japanese American." The repeal campaign that brought together scores of Japanese Americans in a common effort, wrote Uno, indicated a healthy response to the people's trauma, showing that "we realized that we should no longer suffer the pain and agony of false guilt" and instead discovered that "we were truly victims of a conspiracy of officials in government who abused their authority and power in order to victimize helpless citizens." In that way, the campaign to repeal Title II was a coming to terms with the silence imposed by the wartime years and a reminder of the need for constant vigilance in the defense of freedom. "The thrill of victory," foresaw Uno, "must be used to energize the next struggle."

The Redress Movement

Perhaps what Uno had in mind was his 1970 proposal to JACL for that body to seek legislative reparations for the wartime detention. In fact, others before him, such as James Omura, Joseph Y. Kurihara, and Kiyoshi Okamoto, had argued during the war for governmental redress for the wrongs committed and the losses suffered. But it was Edison Uno who prepared the way for the campaign that would culminate with the passage and signing of the Civil Rights Acts of 1988. Uno contended that monetary payments to the victims of the camps would help to ease their economic hardships and mental anguish, vindicate the loyalty of all Japanese Americans, rebuild their shattered communities, educate the American public about the loss of civil liberties, and ensure that such acts never happen again in the future." Although the JACL passed resolutions supporting redress as early as 1970, very little effort was expended on implementing the project until 1976, when it created the National Committee for Redress, which directed JACL's legislative strategy.

The JACL, however, was not the sole actor in the redress movement. The *sansei*, the third generation, were coming of

age; and weaned on the social activism of the 1960s, many were inspired by and participants in the civil rights, free speech, anti-Vietnam War and Third World solidarity, women's, and ethnic studies movements. In 1969, the Organization of Southland Asian American Organizations arranged the first pilgrimage to Manzanar concentration camp, students in northern California organized a counterpart pilgrimage to Tule Lake in the same year, and beginning in 1978 activists held Days of Remembrance in communities and on college campuses to commemorate the February 19, 1942, signing of Executive Order 9066. Several hundred people, of all generations, boarded buses to the campsites, cleaned the graves, and remembered the years of exile. "I came on this pilgrimage out of curiosity, little realizing the impact this trip was to have on me," said Marie Miyashiro. "Many feelings which were repressed, many of my 'mental blocks' were cleansed and washed away as I stood on the ground of our former campsite. Realization that I was here once, that I had lost my father in Tule Lake hit me with such a force. I could not stop my flow of tears. More tears flowed later, but these were all good 'cleansing tears.' I feel good I'm glad reconciliation has taken place with me."

Vindication from the Courts

Another part of that reconciliation was winning vindication from the courts, the very courts that had affirmed the injustice of the mass removal and detention. Peter Irons, a member of the legal studies faculty at the University of Massachusetts at the time, discovered in 1981 that the government's own lawyers arguing the internment cases before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1943 and 1944 complained that their superiors had lied to and suppressed evidence from the court. That finding, Irons told the original litigants, Gordon Hirabayashi, Minoru Yasui, and Fred Korematsu, might make it possible to reopen the cases and clear their criminal convictions. "They did me a great wrong," said Korematsu simply, and so began the effort to right "a great wrong." The team of attorneys pursuing the petitions for a writ of error *coram nobis* (a rehearing to correct a fundamental error at the original trial) was headed by Irons, Kathryn Bannai, Dale Minami, and Peggy Nagai.

Between 1983 when the first petition was filed and 1988 when the government decided to end the litigation, Fred

Korematsu and Gordon Hirabayashi's wartime convictions were vacated, but the judge refused to hear Minoru Yasui's petition, and the government's decision to drop the matter prevented a full hearing by the Supreme Court, which was the only body capable of reversing its decisions. Still, the effort to right a great wrong was a pivotal moment in the unfinished business of the war. "It is now conceded by almost everyone that the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II was simply a tragic mistake for which American society as a whole must accept responsibility," declared Judge Donald S. Voorhees, who heard the Hirabayashi *coram nobis* petition. "If in the future, this country should find itself in a comparable national emergency, the sacrifices made by Gordon Hirabayash, Fred Korematsu, and Minoru Yasui may, it is hoped, stay the hand of a government again tempted to imprison a defenseless minority without trial and for no offense."

Meanwhile, the legislative effort for redress continued. In 1976, President Gerald R. Ford, in a symbolic act, repealed Executive Order 9066, and in 1980, largely as a result of a compromise reached by the JACL with the Japanese American members of Congress, a Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians was created by President Jimmy Carter and Congress to ascertain whether an injustice had been committed and to recommend appropriate remedies. The commission was seen by strategists as a necessary intermediate step toward the goal of legislative redress. Groups like the National Council for Japanese American Redress (NCJAR), formed in 1979, and the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR), organized in 1980, opposed the commission plan at first, believing that the tactic was simply a way to stall legislative action. NCJAR, led by William Hohri, introduced its own redress bill through Mike Lowry, representative from Washington, but it failed in committee. In 1983, NCJAR filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of all the victims of the detention camps, and that too eventually failed.

An Outpouring of Testimony

But all of those efforts stirred, then mobilized, a sentiment and movement for redress among a supportive, reluctant, and sometimes antagonistic Japanese American community, some of whom preferred to forget the past. That redress

movement, working on different fronts, helped to ensure that the legislative process continued to make progress, and NCRR members lined up and prepared witnesses for the commission's hearings in the summer and fall of 1981, when its nine members solicited testimonies in Washington, D.C., New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands. Those hearings marked a turning point in the drive for legislative redress by revealing to the government the depth of the people's suffering in the outpouring of their testimonies and by solidifying Japanese American support for the idea of redress. The hearings were a kind of "coming out" for Japanese Americans, who had hidden their shame and guilt, unmerited, in the closets of their minds. With their voices, after nearly forty years, they broke the silences of the camps.

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Kanshi Stanley Yamashita told the commissioners that his family was among those evicted from Terminal Island with forty-eight hours' notice. When the eviction order was posted, Yamashita's father had already been picked up by the FBI and sent to the camp at Bismarck, North Dakota. "Without the head of the family, how does a mother, with three children, move out of a house where they have lived for years?" he asked. "Bitter memories of trying to dispose of furniture, a fairly new car, my father's precious sextant and chronometers, and the accumulation of years of living to grubby, calculating and profit-seeking scavengers are still vivid." Yamashita then turned to the charge of the commission: "It is farcical to state that the *raison d'être* of this Commission is to determine whether a wrong had been committed—rather, its efforts should be directed to rectify the patent wrongs committed against a group, solely on ethnic grounds." After relating some of the skepticism among Japanese Americans about the commission's outcome, Yamashita asked, "What will you members of this Commission do to change the resigned, despairing and fatalistic

views of these people who still vividly recall the misery and helpless feelings engendered by the evacuation and have inherited the legacy of bigotry, hatred and racial prejudice?"

"My name is Alice Tanabe Nehira. I was born 5 June 1943 at the Tule Lake Project in Newell, California," she told the commissioners. Her father, Yoriharu Tanabe, was born in Hiroshima, and despite the mass removal order that left many of his friends "angered and betrayed" and the atomic bombing of his place of birth "where most all of his school friends were annihilated," Tanabe, his daughter testified, was "steadfast in his belief that this nation would someday see the grave injustice of this act [detention of Japanese Americans]." When she was born, Nehira continued, the camp physician performed a tubal ligation on her mother without ever telling her or receiving her consent. She discovered her sterility years later when she was examined for colon cancer. "Today, after thirty-eight years, I am still a victim of prejudice," said Nehira, who told about her discrimination suit pending against her employer. "For over thirty-five years I have been the stereotype Japanese American. I've kept quiet, hoping that in due time we will be justly compensated and recognized for our years of patient effort. By my passive attitude, I can reflect on my past years to conclude that it doesn't pay to remain silent. No one benefits when truth is silent." And turning to the commissioners and their work, Nehira declared: "The final judgment will affect all Americans, now and for all time."

"However painful it is, even after forty years of trying to forget the bitter memories of the indignities and hardships suffered by Japanese Americans as a result of the nightmare of the relocation and four years of incarceration, I dedicate this testimony to my children, Ken, Rei, and Kimi, to my brothers Toki and Dick, and to my late father-in-law Gohei Matsuda, and my former mother-in-law Kama, who lived through the frightening experience of wartime internment, in the hope that the tragedy . . . will never again be endured by any American citizen of whatever race or ancestry," began Violet de Cristoforo. A native-born citizen with a seven-year-old son, a five-year-old daughter, and three months pregnant, de Cristoforo and her family were uprooted and placed behind barbed wire. Her daughter was born "in a horse stable" at Fresno Assembly Center and, on the train to Jerome, developed double pneumonia and remained sickly

in Jerome and in Tule Lake, where they were transferred. Her brother Toki was placed in Tule Lake's stockade, a prison within a prison, where "he was repeatedly beaten by the security personnel, so badly that once he was left for dead." Her other brother, Dick, served in the U.S. Army in the Pacific as a translator and was called "derogatory names" by his comrades and "made to go into caves in search of documents or interrogate Japanese prisoners, always with some Caucasian members of his unit armed with rifles and bayonets at his back because they did not feel he could be trusted." Her father, who lived in Hiroshima, died and her mother was severely burned as a result of the atomic bomb explosion, de Cristoforo discovered after the war. "I . . . hope," she resolved, "that the authorities will give a solemn pledge that they will remain faithful to the provisions of our constitution and that the indignities and emotional stresses we suffered will not be repeated in the future."

Redress and Compensation

The commission recommended, and Congress passed, the Civil Rights Act of 1988, which contained a formal apology from Congress, presidential pardons for those who resisted the eviction and detention orders, recommendations that government agencies restore to Japanese American employees lost status or entitlements because of the wartime actions, and financial redress to Japanese American individuals and communities, \$20,000 to each survivor and the creation of a community fund to educate the American public about the experience. In a reversal of his administration's opposition to redress, President Ronald Reagan signed the bill into law on August 10, 1988, bringing to a close another aspect of the camps' unfinished business.

But the totality of that business will only be completed when we can ensure that the violation will "never again be endured by any American citizen," in de Cristoforo's words, and that assurance—that racism (or sexism or homophobia or nativism) will never again shape and justify government policy and action—can only be given when we the people resolve it.