

## REPARATION

The reparation project to secure restitution for the mistreatment of Japanese Americans during World War II is more than "a Japanese American" project. The Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal who wrote the now classical American Dilemma many years ago said that the so called "Negro problem" is mainly white man's problem, implying that the total national commitment is necessary to resolve this problem of racism.

Similarly, when the Japanese were uprooted and herded into concentration camps - this became mainly a national problem. A significant portion of the national effort went into persecuting the Japanese. It was a national program, official and legal - not a doing of a handful of bigoted Americans. Federal resources in money, brains, U.S. Congress, the U.S. Supreme Court, the White House - all got into the act. Some 113,000 Japanese in the United States received all this attention! This small segment of the American population occupied a massive amount of time and space of the mass media, nationally and internationally.

Some 35 years after the event, under JACL leadership, Japanese Americans are initiating action to get the American public to make amends for the grave injustice done. A mere fledgling organization in 1941-42, the JACL leadership, composed of extremely young and inexperienced men mostly in their 20s, were forced to accede to the racist moves of their own government, under almost unbearable public and military pressure. Begun in 1942, the incarceration of Japanese en masse did not end until well after the end of World War II.

The same JACL organization, with much of the original leadership intact, together with a newer crop of leadership, is now taking steps to bring together the American people for restitution for this massive denial of human rights in a democratic nation. This is being sought through the very means by which Japanese Americans were uprooted from their homes and incarcerated, namely through legislation by the U.S. government with Presidential approval.

## Reasons

Many reasons are advanced for the Reparation project and some of them are indicated here.

1. Seeking of Amends. By custom and tradition any individual or group injured or defamed might be expected to seek remedy through due process in a democratic society. Failure to do so might be interpreted as an admission of guilt by the victim of injustice. Although the damage incurred by the denial of freedom cannot be undone, nor can it be completely reduced to monetary terms, it is a recognized practice to seek restitution symbolically by financial transaction.

2. Community and Self Identity Building. When a group of people suffer sudden displacement and losses of property, family and community unity, their self worth and sense of identity are deeply affected. Now it is hoped that through this effort to corporately rectify in part the past injustices, Japanese Americans would find strength and confidence in each other for the common suffering that they endured at the hands of their own government and its people. The Reparation program, we hope, will coalesce the Japanese Americans as a significant ethnic group in the United States.

3. Racism. Racism continues to exist in North American cultures, much of it latent and covert. In times of crises, it becomes overt, as it did for the Japanese. Certain surveys indicate that many Americans still believe concentration camp treatment to have been justified. The Reparation education program is to alert the nation to the danger of racism and its possible culmination in the imprisonment of any portion of its population that it arbitrarily decides <sup>as</sup> an unwanted group at any particular time. It is an effort to learn from our past national mistakes, so that a <sup>possible</sup> repetition of the Japanese American concentration camp experience can be minimized.

4. One of the by-products of this Reparation project is to provide public occasions for Japanese Americans themselves to articulate and express their own group experiences and feelings on the matter of evacuation and incarceration, a significant part of their nationality and racial background. For example, Japanese Americans of different generations can share their thoughts openly with each other, and they in turn together with the American public at large. From this kind of exchange can emerge a greater appreciation of the United States as a society truly multicultural in its roots. The drive and education for Reparation is as important as the end result of the project being sought. It is hoped that it would generate arts, dramas, writings and mass media exposures for the benefit of North and South Americans.

## A REPARATION PROPOSAL

The main purpose of the Reparation program is to find redress for the deprivation of liberty on persons of Japanese descent residing in the United States at the outbreak of the Second World War - both American born U.S. citizens and Japanese alien residents alike. The form of restitution is to be monetary.

1. Payment will be to individuals who were evacuated "voluntarily" or involuntarily or incarcerated in concentration camps of the War Relocation Authority and the Department of Justice. Whereas most surviving evacuees are now living in the United States, others have been forcefully "repatriated" to Japan and remain there. They and all other evacuees who were residing in the United States and Hawaii during World War II are entitled to receive payment.
2. Those in the Latin American countries (such as Peru and Brazil) who were incarcerated in the concentration camps qualify as evacuees entitled to payment.
3. Where the evacuees are now deceased, the payment will be made to a trust fund to be established.
4. The amount set is approximately \$15,000 per person for payment.
5. A trust fund is to be established for those who prefer payment to a common fund to be disbursed for  
(a) educational and cultural development of Japanese Americans and  
(b) legal defense to protect Japanese Americans from any kind of discriminatory and unequal treatment under the law.
6. It is thought important that the administration and the implementation of the Reparation payment claims be carefully planned and written into the original proposal.

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