


MIDWEST REGIONAL OFFICE

## Japanese American Citizens League

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WILLIAM J. YOSHINO  
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

April 23, 1982

Mr. Tom Kometani  


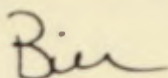
Dear Tom:

Enclosed is a short narrative that may be useful in conjunction with the photo display. I left out reference to the incarceration and leave it to you to determine the manner in which this should be mentioned inasmuch as you are closer to the sensitivities involved.

The additional photos which have been returned to my office are mainly of the camp experience and duplicates of the ones already in your possession.

With regards and success on the exhibit.

Sincerely,



Bill Yoshino

WJY/by

Enclosure

## 1840-1886

Japan's contacts with the United States form 1840 (when a castaway fisherman named Manjiro became the first to visit the U.S.) to 1886 were largely arms-length relationships. Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry in 1854 "persuaded" Japan at cannon-point to end two centuries of isolation. Once the doors were opened, Japan quickly sent students to the U.S. to learn western ways in an effort to catch up with the world. But except for isolated groups, like the unfortunate Wakamatsu Colony at Gold Hill, California -- marked today by Okei's grave -- there was no immigration.

## 1887-1924

The Chinese Exclusion Act, passed by Congress in 1882, created a labor shortage in the growing West. In 1887, Japan was persuaded to let her people migrate to the U.S. to fill the demand. The first immigrants were "birds of passage," intending to return to Japan after a few years. Many did go home with their earnings. But others found America to their liking despite the discrimination and hostility they encountered. Although denied citizenship, many stayed, established families and businesses. These men and women -- the Issei -- must be numbered among America's pioneers, for they helped turn wilderness into productive fields, felled trees for lumber, mended the rails, grew food for an expanding nation. Japanese immigration was halted in 1924, again by Congressional action. There were only some 115,000 persons of Japanese extraction in the United States, but they were the objects of an extraordinary amount of the West Coast's attention -- and bile.

## 1925-1941

This was the period of transition. The Japanese immigrants were growing older. Their American-born sons and daughters -- the Nisei -- like the offspring of other immigrant groups were being assimilated into the American way of life. But there were invisible barriers that denied them equality of economic and social opportunity despite the promises of democracy. In school, the Nisei were good Americans. After school they returned to their ethnic ghettos. Largely because of de facto segregation, they remained an unknown and unaccepted element in the American melting pot as war clouds gathered over the Pacific.

## The War Years

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, American citizens of Japanese ancestry (Nisei) in Hawaii answered the call to arms into the only branch of service open to them, the U.S. Army. These volunteers, the Hawaiian National Guard, eventually became the 100th Battalion, the first all Nisei Army unit.

On the mainland, conditions were quite different. The army was mustering out from service any Nisei who had had any kind of education in Japan or who were suspected of having close ties with Japan.

Nisei then serving in the army, many of whom were from Hawaii, found their way to Camp Savage, Minnesota, in the U.S. Army Military

Intelligence School. As the school expanded to Fort Snelling, many mainland Nisei volunteered for duty there. Upon completion of their training, they were sent to the Pacific Theater as linguists, translators, and interpreters, where they served with distinction.

As the war took its toll on manpower reserves in the United States the idea of forming a special combat team made up of volunteers of Japanese ancestry started taking shape mainly as a device to test their loyalty. In 1943, by Presidential order, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was formed comprised mostly of Hawaiian Nisei who took their training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. As the unit swelled in regimental strength augmented by Nisei volunteers from the mainland, the 442nd RCT then was assigned to the 36th Division from where they went on to compile an unprecedented military record in Italy and France.

#### 1946-to present

The pendulum of history has a way of swinging back. The Japanese, the most despised of American minorities during the war years, suddenly found the long-elusive acceptance and opportunity when peace returned. Their undeniable record of loyalty helped. So did their skills and abilities, honed by the education acquired through their diligence and the sacrifices of the parent generation. In the three decades since war's end, Japanese Americans have found their niches in the American way of life, enjoying the freedom to work and play and live and dream, and to make their contribution to the progress of their country.

But the saga is not ended. Having experienced the bitterness of discrimination, Japanese Americans are aware that no American's rights are secure so long as the rights of any minority are restricted or threatened. The Japanese Americans are determined that no segment of the population shall be denied the freedoms that are the promise and legacy of all Americans.