
February 19, 1942—February 19, 1984

THE 42nd ANNIVERSARY OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 9066: DETENTION AND RELOCATION OF 120,000 WEST COAST JAPANESE

Suppose that a war or national emergency arose in the United States. Now suppose that because of your race, national origin, religion, or even beliefs, the U.S. government decided that you—an American citizen—are an internal enemy. Shortly thereafter, the Government decides that you are subject to removal. You are notified that you have a week to sell all your belongings and report for evacuation. You must leave your home, your job, your business and your community. You have no legal recourse because the Government has not made any formal charges. There is no court hearing. You have no option but to comply.*

On February 19, 1942—ten weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, empowering the Secretary of War and certain military commanders to exclude any and all persons—both citizens and aliens—from designated areas in order to secure national defense objectives against sabotage, espionage and fifth column activity. Shortly thereafter, on the alleged basis of military necessity, all American citizens of Japanese descent and all Japanese resident aliens were excluded from the West Coast. A small number—approximately 10,000—left the West Coast independently. Another 110,000 were placed in “relocation centers”—bleak barrack camps in desolate areas of the western states, guarded by military police. Listen to survivors as they recall their experiences:

“One morning three FBI agents came to our house and they proceeded to tear the house upside down in the search for incriminating evidence....”

“In 48 hours we were told to pack up and leave from the place we had called home for at least fifty years or more....”

“(Our hotel) was a two-story 37-room operation. Its pre-War value was...\$6,000.... As the evacuation notice gave our family little time..., when a Caucasian man offered us \$300 we decided to sell....”

“Many families like ours were separated into different barracks.... We were denied any privacy, and only a partial wall separated us from other families....”

“The searchlights that swung monotonously around an arc periodically lit up the rooms and seemed to rout out any final illusions of privacy.”

“My father... at age 61, was an independent farmer who worked hard all his life.... He could not make a comeback after the internment and (died) working as a laborer....”*

This policy of exclusion, removal and detention was carried out without individual review and despite the fact that no documented acts of espionage, sabotage or fifth column activity were shown to have been committed by any identifiable American citizen of Japanese ancestry or resident Japanese alien on the West Coast. By the time it ended in December 1944, untold emotional damage and millions of dollars in financial losses, illness, death and life-long trauma for many was the result. No mass exclusion or detention in any part of the country was ordered against American citizens of German or Italian descent. The ethnic Japanese suffered a unique injustice. Until recently, the U.S. Government had not acknowledged or in any way considered compensation to Japanese Americans for these illegal and destructive acts.

In 1980, responding to a growing concern, Congress established the bipartisan Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. Early in 1983, the commission published a lengthy report, *Personal Justice Denied*, in which it documented “unique injustice” to Japanese during the years of World War II, and declared that the causes were “race prejudice, war hysteria, and failure of political leadership, not military necessity.” The commission followed up that report with a series of recommendations released in June 1983: a formal apology by the President and the Congress; the issuing of pardons to persons convicted of violations of curfew and exclusion laws; various forms of restitution to individuals; the establishing of a foundation for educational and humanitarian purposes; and a cash payment to each survivor of detention and relocation.

HAS THE CHURCH SPOKEN?

In 1942 the United Lutheran Church observed that the events growing out of Executive Order 9066 were "something unheard of in American life; namely, the evacuation of the entire Japanese people and their confinement to certain camps." By 1944, the Church had bought a house in Minneapolis to be used as a hostel for persons who were being relocated in the Twin Cities area.

In July 1983, in response to a memorial from the 1982 biennial convention of the Lutheran Church in America, the Executive Council of the Church requested the synods to call upon their congregations and ministers to remember in appropriate ways this shameful episode, to pray for the victims of the injustice done, to voice their concern to their elected congressional representatives and to ask God to grant to the American people the wisdom and the will not to repeat it.

Also in July 1983, in response to a request from the Executive Council, the Bishop of the Church wrote to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, the majority and minority leaders of the Senate and the House, calling upon Congress (a) to enact legislation issuing a public apology to those persons and their descendants victimized by this wartime policy and providing for appropriate public remembrances of the episode, and (b) to establish a foundation for educational and humanitarian purposes to ensure that the detention and relocations will be remembered, and so that the causes of them will be illuminated and understood, and (c) to respond to the claims of the victims of this wartime policy in such ways as respect their gravity, including payment of reparations to those Japanese Americans relocated or interned.

ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1984

Let the commemoration of injustices to one group of persons in our midst be a significant part of our worship on that day. But let commemoration be more than mere remembering. Let us reflect on the present and the future, as well. Let us search our attitudes. For attitudes are at the root of actions.

Let us follow the example of the bishop of our church in writing to the highest officials of our nation and to our own members of Congress, urging them to affirm and carry out the position of our church, and to assure that the suffering inflicted on one segment of American society not so long ago, will not be repeated.

PRAYER

God of our lives and God of our land, grant to us that measure of grace to seek forgiveness for the sins of our land, that we as your people may be free in spirit to love you and our neighbors even more fully than in the past. Lead us truly to be your people in spirit and in truth. In the name of your Son, Jesus our Lord, we pray. Amen.

**The Moral and Monetary Basis for Redress/Reparations*, Legislative Committee, National Coalition for Redress/Reparations, Los Angeles Chapter, September 1982.

**Minutes, ULCA 13th Biennial Convention, October 1942, p. 168.

Prayer, Pastor Paul Nakamura

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Sermon - dialogue

Special forum - separate day apart from
Sunday services

Office hour - discussion / action

406
222
184

LCA 3.2 million

6500 clergy

approx. 10K congregations

Social ministry committee → Council → Congregation →

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