

December 7, 1997

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Dear Dale,

Thanks for the call. And thanks for agreeing to do send a VHS clip for our Michi day loop.

To expand a little on the idea of commissioning a Nikkei artist to design and cast a bell to celebrate Japanese American redress and rebirth, using bits of rail or spike or barbed wire and earth from each of the camps, in the casting formula:

To get the grass roots involved and symbolically involve all of the former internees and even interners, little local penny drives. Set up cans all over J-town. Pennies. The collected pennies will be used in the casting formula.

Once the notion that the bell is to be cast from metal and earth from the camps, and pennies, I think people will start sending odd things to be cast in the bell, that will make stories unto themselves. A safety pin from camp. A belt buckle from camp.

Let's say, for the sake of discussion, a five year campaign

Year One:

A contest for the design of the bell. I have no ideas on the bell's design except that it should not look like the Liberty Bell or a western church bell with a flared rim. And that too is just a personal prejudice or perhaps matter of taste on my part. A ten sided bell? And ovoid bell? A bell that is merely a long bar or tube suspended from an arch or ceiling of a pavilion? A bell with the names of every internee? A bell depicting the story of Japanese America from immigration to redress?

From the beginning of the project, a documentary filmmaker should be snapping up sound and image.

Days of Remembrance ceremonies in various cities feature the display and ringing of a piece of rail from the railroad leading to and from the camp, people from this city were sent to. Ring once for every person evacuated from this location.

Don't waste the ringing that might go on all night, or all day. Involve a local Nisei or Sansei or Yonsei or Gosei or all generation band to play or jam to the beat of the bit of rail. This bit of rail to become a part of the bell.

The Days of Remembrance should be Japanese American folk and fine arts festivals. For those who need to speak and listen to speeches, there should be a program of workshops. What I used my terrifying nihilistic mad dog personality to effect at the Days of Remembrance in Seattle and Portland was, a spirit and atmosphere that allowed everyone who wanted to do something to do something.

I made sure everything had a place and a time. What I wanted to lock up tight was the first hour of the program, and the first fifteen minutes that gave all the politicians and theme setters their say--and I took responsibility for the politicians thumping hard for redress, and did not require the Issei and Nisei theme setters to mention the word redress or money if they didn't want to. And you must have noticed most didn't want to.

Ron Mamiya was great, though. "We were raped!" Whew! Mayor Royer was so impressed with Ron he appointed him a Municipal Court Judge. But the Nisei, even the Nisei most fervent about redress the Seattle group chose to speak, didn't want to mention redress or money. So Min Masuda sat down with me and we were comfortable with him wearing clothes like he wore the day he rode from Sicks Stadium to Puyallup Assembly Center and talked about what he wore that day. And so it went. Even if they didn't want to mention the redress they so urgently craved, we talked and found something that dramatically brought home the fact that even the Assembly Centers, on the outskirts of town, were concentration camps, something that dramatized the issues of redress, in my mind. I knew, if the Nikkei didn't, that no politician would appear to speak who was not hot to thump hard for redress before his Nikkei constituents. And so it was.

Years Two-Four:

The bell will take years to produce. So along the way, some will organize around the designer bell maker who won the contest and who will, as part of the commission, visit each of the camp sites, interview former internees and families attached to specific camps, put together a team of metallurgists, design researchers,. Over the next two or three years his setting up shop in town can become events in themselves, with a program of his speaking and showing slides of his work and research, and workshops on specific issues, exhibits and arts festivals attached.

Japanese America has a genius of the occasional poem, the poem that celebrates a specific occasion in the poet's life. Lawson Inada should be asked to mark all the occasions Japanese America can offer his memorialization.

Others organize for the bell, without the artist. A class in Asian American studies builds a barracks and lives in it for a week, collecting stuff for the bell; another group goes to a camp site and over a week end, builds a guard tower-a performance art piece, a

ceremony in the shadow of the guard tower, culminating in burning it down while Hiroshima performs "Who's In J-Town?"

A series of Art of Redress festivals in cities with large Nikkei pops, L.A., San Francisco, Seattle, San Jose.

For the fifth or sixth and final year, the artist and his team cast the bell. This too is an occasion. News. So and so, whose family was interned in a concentration camp today poured a compound of metals and earths including 120,313 pennies and metallic souvenirs of their two and half year internment.....into a mold to cast the Japanese American Bell. And the opportunity to bite for truth and justice is open to all.

You'd need a director for the whole project. One man or woman. Not a committee. Committees end up producing nothing but self-immolating competition resulting in mush and boredom. Everyone can have their say, but I think you need one person to keep the focus on a place, an event, a symbol, a personality --one thing that serves as a platform for X to do their slide show, and Y to speak on their issue, and Z to show their colors. One person to design and direct the show, direct the media campaign.

Me, I would be interested in directing a staging of the diary of an Issei at Tule Lake I've come across and had translated into English, as part of the Arts of Redress festival. I don't want to be the director of the project I describe. After finishing up the big book on the Nisei resistance and the documentary with Frank, and this Michi day, I'll be ready to lay back and practice the guitar awhile.

Thanks again for agreeing to send us a clip for our loop.

All best,

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