

On February 19, 1942, a few months after the United States entered into World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, and, by that order, some 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, 70,000 of whom were United States citizens, were summarily deprived of liberty and property and ordered out of their homes, off the Pacific Coast, and into concentration camps.

Without any evidence of misconduct or disloyalty, and without even a pretense of a trial, the Pacific Coast area "Nikkei" (Japanese Americans) were uprooted en masse and imprisoned. Their crime: Japanese ancestry. U.S. citizenship, age, loyalty and innocence of wrongdoing did not matter.

This episode, the "Evacuation", was one of the worst blows to constitutional liberties that the American people have ever sustained. Many Americans find it difficult to

understand how such injustices could have occurred in a democratic nation. However, such mass expulsion and incarceration of American citizens did happen here, in Seattle, and throughout the Western United States.

My parents were both born and raised in Seattle and are U.S. citizens by that birth right. They were among the thousands of local victims of the evacuation and concentration camps. In 1942, my father was 19 years of age, a freshman at the University of Washington and was forced to terminate his education in order to comply with the evacuation order. My mother was 17 years old and was separated from her mother and father for the entire duration of the war. The evacuation of my parents and some 120,000 other Japanese Americans meant forced abandonment of their homes, education, jobs, businesses and property for an average of 3 years behind barbed wire, overlooked by guard towers.

In the meantime, my uncle along with hundreds of Nikkei volunteers and draftees was a fighting member of the all Nisei 442 Regimental Combat Team - in Italy, the Battle of the Bulge and elsewhere. He fought for the American freedom which his parents, my parents and no Japanese American enjoyed.

In bringing this American tragedy to the public's attention, a few are still unable to understand that the U.S. Government attempted to hold persons of Japanese ancestry in America responsible for the acts of the government of Japan. The vast majority of the persons imprisoned had never been to Japan and were, in fact, U.S. citizens. Additionally, many are not aware that no person of Japanese ancestry was ever charged with, nor convicted of espionage or sabotage. The fact that the Japanese American population was no threat to "national security" was well documented by the F.B.I., U.S. Naval Intelligence, and a special investigatory report ordered by the President prior to December 7, 1942;

and, furthermore, our government in 1943 admitted to the Supreme Court of the United States that we were not security risks. It was impossible for Japanese America to have its cry heard when such injustices were preceded by 50 years of racial hatred toward an ethnic minority.

Thirty seven years later, the American public is beginning to recognize the atrocities which were perpetrated against the Americans of Japanese ancestry. On the Pacific Coast, the scene of the massive evacuation of 1942, the mayors of the major Nikkei population centers are demonstrating their recognition. The following are excerpts from a letter by Seattle's Mayor Charles Royer to Tom Bradley, Mayor of Los Angeles. Similar letters were sent to the Mayors of Portland and San Francisco:

"Both of our cities broke faith with the Japanese Americans during World War II. We ignored the fact that the Japanese who had attacked Pearl Harbor

were the enemies of Japanese Americans, just as they were the enemies of all Americans. We called Nikkei "Japs" and encouraged their evacuation to concentration camps and went so far as to say they would not be welcomed back to our cities after the war....

"The people of our nation never before and never after have turned so violently against a mass of their own citizens and violated the humanitarian spirit of equality that was always been the moral basis of American law, American pride, and American decency."

We may never be able to fully appreciate the extent to which persons of Japanese ancestry in America have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of this tragic moral lapse. However, recognition of the evacuation must be one step in our continuing efforts if we are to preserve and assure American freedom and democracy.

President Gerald R. Ford rescinded Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1976, exactly 34 years after its promulgation. He said:

"An honest reckoning must include a recognition of our national mistakes as well as our national achievements. Learning from our mistakes is not pleasant, but as a great philosopher once admonished, we must do so if we want to avoid repeating them."

As a professed leader in civil and human rights throughout the world, the United States must take meaningful action to correct its own "mistakes." This can only be done when the government of the United States either through Congress or through its courts publicly declares that the wartime uprooting and imprisonment of Japanese Americans was totally without justification and awards the victims of this outrage proper and reasonable redress.

Redress for the injustices will never heal the wounds
nor erase the scars which the Japanese Americans still bear.
But, will serve as a warning to all Americans that American
ideals of equality, pride and freedom are vulnerable to the
tyranny our nation was founded to conquer; and, that we
must never forget this black page of American history.

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