

TESTIMONY OF THE
JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

SUBMITTED TO
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JUDICIARY SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
ADMINISTRATIVE LAW AND
GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

April 28, 1986

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,
my name is Frank S. Sato. As National President of the
Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), I appreciate
the opportunity to ^{APPEAR} ~~spea~~k before you in support of
H.R. 442, the Civil Liberties Act of 1985.

The Japanese American Citizens League is the
oldest and largest organization of Americans of
Japanese ancestry. Second-generation Japanese Americans
(Nisei) founded the JACL in 1929 as a response to the
racism and legalized discrimination against persons
of Japanese ancestry. ^{WE} ~~The Nisei~~ were committed
to the American ideals of justice and democracy. ~~They~~ ^{WE}
believed that through a national organization, ~~they~~ ^{WE}
could better exercise ^{OUR} ~~their~~ rights as American citizens.
For more than half a century, the JACL has worked to
secure justice and equal opportunity for Americans of
Japanese ancestry, ^{& ALL AMERICANS}

In 1970, the JACL began discussing the issue of redress on behalf of all Japanese Americans who were forcibly evicted from their homes and incarcerated in American concentration camps. For the past sixteen years, redress has been a priority issue for our organization.

WITHOUT ANY CHARGE, WITHOUT THE EXERCISE OF DUE PROCESS RIGHTS.

The JACL efforts were undertaken with the hope that it would lead to ~~some measure~~ of assurance that a similar constitutional injustice would not be repeated. As a means of achieving this, the JACL supports monetary compensation as a symbolic restitution for our years spent behind barbed wire.

FOR THESE WRONGS

OBJECTIVE

A REASONABLE

THAT HISTORY WOULD BE ACCURATELY

RECORDED

In 1979, the JACL became the chief proponent of legislation to establish a federal commission to conduct the first official investigative review of the facts and circumstances surrounding the exclusion and detention of Japanese Americans.

Although some forty years had passed, the incarceration and accompanying stigma of dishonor, disloyalty and shame had made it almost impossible for Japanese Americans to speak publicly. However, with a courage based upon faith in our Nation's ability to correct and remedy this past injustice, victims of the wartime internment came forward to testify before the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians.

EXTREMELY DIFFICULT

DREAMS OF THIS TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE

The Commission's report entitled, PERSONAL JUSTICE DENIED, issued in 1983, represents the first step towards vindicating the honor of Japanese Americans. Following exhaustive historical and legal research, the Commission's findings unequivocally substantiated our belief that the exclusion and detention was unwarranted and unjustified.

The JACL has gone on public record commending the Commission for its thorough investigation and has endorsed the Commission's five-point recommendation which includes an official apology as recognition of the injustice and an appropriations of \$1.5 billion to provide individual compensation and to establish an educational/humanitarian trust fund. The proposed \$20,000 compensation to individuals affected by Executive Order 9066 is an important symbolic recognition of the personal suffering loyal Americans were forced to experience.

For over a decade, the JACL and the Japanese American community nationwide agonized and struggled to resolve the definition of "appropriate remedies" for our wrongful imprisonment. The process of discussion and debate has resulted in deep and broad support for H.R. 442.

H.R. 442 is an eminently important and good bill. It allows Congress to reassert and reinforce the

fundamental and basic democratic principle of personal justice.

No other group of American citizens were forcibly removed from their homes under military guard. No other group of American citizens were imprisoned en masse because of ancestry. The incalculable property losses - closed businesses, abandoned farms, boarded homes, furnishings sold for pennies on the dollar - seem unimportant to the personal affront to human values and democratic ideals.

Yet, in spite of the personal loss of freedom, and fully aware that a basic American principle was being violated, Japanese Americans volunteered for military service. From the internment camps and from Hawaii, Nisei formed the celebrated 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the 100th Battalion and served with Military Intelligence in the Pacific. As a demonstration to their loyalty to their country, over 33,000 Japanese Americans served in the U.S. Military during World War II, the highest percentage of any group of Americans.

It is with this same sense of loyalty and commitment, that we pursue passage of H.R. 442.

While we, as Americans of Japanese ancestry, have a very personal interest in H.R. 442, we believe it would serve to protect the democratic principles of this

Nation for all Americans, at all times.
Prof. Eugene Rostow once wrote, "Until the
wrong is acknowledged and made right we shall have
failed to meet the responsibility of a democratic
society - the obligation of equal justice."

The question before you today, is not whether
the United States can afford to pay for the wrong
committed over forty years ago; but rather, can
the United States afford to allow the tragic
injustice experienced by Japanese Americans during
World War II to be repeated in the future?

For the Japanese American Citizens League
and for all persons of Japanese ancestry, redress
is a matter of deeply felt honor.

Can we champion human rights
around the world, yet ignore this
fundamental issue at home?