



# National Council for Japanese American Redress

925 West Diversey Parkway, Chicago, Illinois 60614

Testimony of William Hohri before the Governmental Affairs Committee of the United States Senate, convening on March 18, 1980.

## A Study Commission Is Not Redress

I deeply appreciate this opportunity to speak before this committee of the United States Senate. I appear as national chairperson of the National Council for Japanese American Redress and as a spokesperson for the Methodist Federation for Social Action of the United Methodist Church.

I've lived in Chicago since 1945. In the years preceding, in 1942, 1943, and 1944, my address was 10-4-2, Manzanar, California. Manzanar does not exist anymore. It was the first mass internment camp. The 10-4-2 stands for block 10, barrack 4, cubicle 2. I graduated high school there. The school was so bad that I vowed never to go to school again. Fortunately, I had an older brother, whose wiser judgment prevailed on me to enroll at the University of Chicago. It was there that I first began to understand the broader implications of my internment. I heard Morton Grodzins give a series of lectures on the Japanese American internment as part of our study of Supreme Court decisions. It was a revelation to realize that the Constitution may have been seriously breached. I read his book, Americans Betrayed, which became the first of many books I was to read on the subject. Dozens of books have been written. Decades of research expended. A history and an understanding have emerged and become part of our American consciousness. Most recently, in Woodward and Armstrong's popular book, The Brethren, reference is once again made to our internment with the clear understanding that it was wrong. Why then, I must ask, do we now need a Study Commission? Why is this Congress, why is the Senate considering such a bill? Where did it come from? How did it arise?



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Let me review for you, briefly, the history of the movement for Japanese American redress. In 1970, I attended and participated in the biennial National Convention of the Japanese American Citizens League, the JACL. It was at that convention that the first proposal for redress was introduced. In subsequent bienniums the redress proposal resurfaced, until, in 1978, the JACL Convention resolved to submit redress legislation to the United States Congress.<sup>1</sup>

I applauded that decision and, with friends in Chicago, began to work towards creating support for its passage within the United Methodist Church. Then, in March of 1979, about a year ago, the leadership of the JACL changed that resolve from legislation for redress to legislation for the Study Commission.<sup>2</sup>

You have the result of that before you in S.1647. As a member of the JACL, I protested. It seemed to me to be a clear case of contravention. The leadership had contravened the legislation of its constituent assembly.<sup>3</sup> But my protest and that of others fell on deaf ears. The switch was based on what this leadership perceived to be political reality. They feared that this deliberative body, this Senate of the United States and the House of Representatives would summarily dismiss a petition for redress. As it turned out, what they deemed to be political reality was the reality of Washington, of lobbyists and legislative aides. It became clear to us that if redress legislation were to be introduced, it would have to be introduced independently of the JACL. Hence, the National Council for Japanese American Redress.

In November, Representative Mike Lowry introduced such legislation as H.R.5977.

Now I am quite willing to grant that that kind of political reality may be normative when the people, the citizenry are apathetic and fail to exercise their democratic franchise. But this issue is not the stuff of apathy. The memory of the camps persist. The breach in the Constitution remains. The injustice still calls for redress.



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And when there is not apathy, there is another kind of political reality in our great nation. It is the reality of the people. We were not deterred by the usurpation of our representation by the JACL leadership. We were not dismayed by the solid bloc of Japanese American members of Congress supporting this political ploy. They are not our representatives in Illinois, New York, Ohio, Michigan, Washington, Oregon, and even for most of the state of California. We went to the people and they are beginning to respond.

Last month, in Seattle, Washington, some 400 persons attended a forum on redress and strongly supported H.R.5977, the Lowry Redress Bill. In Los Angeles a similar event was held with similar results. In Chicago, we are scheduling hearings for our local representatives in Congress so that they may directly hear from the people on this topic. If I may observe, it doesn't take an act of Congress to hold hearings.

And we are beginning to move that larger body of citizens. Next month, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church convenes for its quadrennial legislative session in Indianapolis. The Methodist Federation for Social Action is submitting a petition to that 9-million member body for its support for Japanese American redress.<sup>4</sup> Already, three annual conferences have strongly supported such resolutions. We are taking the issue to the people and they have begun to respond.

The people are not asking for a Study Commission. We know it was wrong. We do not need Congress or anyone else, at this late date, to undertake a study to determine whether a wrong was committed. We understand the wrong. What we need now is the opportunity to redress the wrong.



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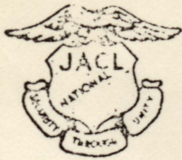
We Americans of Japanese ancestry need to know that we are entitled to equal treatment under the law; that the Writ of Habeas Corpus shall not be suspended because of our race; that the right to compensation for a miscarriage of justice involving years of internment shall apply to us as well as to all other human beings. Justice has already been delayed too long for our parents, the first generation of Japanese Americans, for most are now gone. Justice delayed for them is now justice denied. I pray that you do not repeat the same error for those of us who still carry the memory of those camps. S.1647 is beneath our dignity. Dismiss this sorry excuse for justice. Let us, instead, put redress on the legislative agenda.

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Notes:

1. See appendix A. It is a detailed description of the action by the 1978 JACL National Convention.
2. See appendix B. It is from the Pacific Citizen, the JACL's newspaper, which was published on March 9, 1979.
3. See appendix C. This is a letter to the editor which was published in the May 14, 1979 edition of the Rafu Shimpo, a major Japanese American daily newspaper based in Los Angeles.
4. See appendix D. This petition is now in the legislative hopper of the General Conference.





## JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

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 REGIONAL OFFICES: Washington, D.C./Chicago/San Francisco/Los Angeles/Portland/Fresno  
 Karl K. Nobuyuki, National Executive Director

### MEMORANDUM

From: Clifford I. Uyeda Date: August 8, 1978  
 To: Committee members, Subject: Revised REDRESS  
 National Council members, Proposal  
 National Board members

The JACL National Council, on July 19th, approved the following REDRESS guidelines:

- 1) Eligibility is limited to those actually detained or interned in camps, or were compelled to move from the "exclusion" areas.
- 2) Individual payments are limited to survivors and to heirs of deceased detainees.
- 3) Persons of Japanese ancestry brought over from Central and South American and interned in the United States are included.
- 4) Processing and paying individual claims will be the responsibility of the United States Government.
- 5) Trust foundation for the benefit of Japanese Americans will be administered by a presidential Commission, majority of which are Japanese Americans, and also including members of Congress.

The National Council approved the concept that the Bill which will be presented to Congress of the United States, based on the above guidelines, provide the broadest possible coverage.

Further details may be worked out during negotiations with the Government.

Attached is the revised proposal as promised to the National Council on July 19, 1978, at the Salt Lake City convention.

\* \* \*



From the Pacific Citizen, March 9, 1979:

## JACL drafting bill for redress commission

By **HARRY HONDA**  
**San Francisco**

Two crucial votes were taken during the National JACL Redress Committee meeting here Mar. 3-4 at Headquarters. Both tallied 4-2 with no switches. The motions were:

1—To endorse the concept of a (legislative) commission as opposed to any other methodology for redress.

2—To endorse the "one-step" concept to examine the remedies for the wrongs of expulsion/incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

A draft of the JACL redress bill is being prepared by Ronald Mamiya, a committee member and Seattle attorney. "We're still on schedule," noted Ron Ikejiri, Washington JACL Representative who will be conferring with the Nikkei and other members of Congress when JACL's

legislative proposal is ready for introduction sometime in the midyear.

The committee, chaired by John Tateishi of Marin County, was toying with three concepts, which had been discussed a month ago in Washington with Senators Inouye and Matsunaga, Congressmen Mineta and Matsui. The concepts were:

(a) An IRS check-off plan, (b) a direct appropriations plan, and (c) a legislative commission to study the issue and recommend the method of solution.

Political reality of a Congress hit by the message of Calif. Prop. 13 to cut spending, of an accommodation that should be made with the junior senator from California, Dr. S.I. Hayakawa (R), and of the need to stay on JACL's redress

schedule as mandated at the Salt Lake City convention, the committee did indeed "bite the bullet" — at 3 p.m., Mar. 3, to be exact.

The vote to endorse the legislative committee concept in preference to the other two methods was by roll call with the chair choosing to vote to break a tie. The first tally:

### YES (4)

**MINORU YASUI** (Denver): A "reluctant" yes because there are unknown dangers involved with committees, but it does not ignore the (JACL) Convention mandate.

**PHIL SHIGEKUNI** (San Fernando Valley): A "yes" because the (commission) would be in line with the main thrust of the redress campaign—to educate the public, and because of political reality.

**BILL MARUTANI** (Philadelphia): "Yes" for two reasons — A direct-appropriations bill is a short-run, disastrous method; a commission method shows greater possibility.

**RAYMOND OKAMURA** (Berkeley): A "reluctant yes". Though opposed in principle to the commission concept, political reality dictates.

### NO (2)

**HENRY MIYATAKE** (Seattle): Opposed because I believe intent of a commission is not within the mandates.

**RONALD MAMIYA** (Seattle): Opposed because of inadequate discussion of other alternatives; commission concept is too broad and not in the mandate.

The second vote was taken up on Sunday morning as some wanted to "sleep" on the discussion of whether JACL should go "one-step" or "two-step" with the commission concept. The same four voting "yes" the first time favored the more assertive "one-step" concept.

The "two step" pattern would have sought to es-

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ablish the basis for redress and none of the committee was of the opinion that a bill should hit a "rock bottom line" as one member described it.



## LOS ANGELES JAPANESE DAILY NEWS

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MONDAY, MAY 14, 1979

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## ONE PERSON'S OPINION

## Chicago Nisei critical of Nat'l. 'CL Redress drive

★ The author of the following piece is Nisei William Hohri, a 52-year old Chicago computer programmer who has devoted much of his time recently to the study of the current move to gain redress from the federal government for time spent in "relocation" centers by Japanese Americans during World War II. He has been instrumental in efforts to get the United Methodist Church involved in the reparations issue.

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It's deja vu to '42.

The JACL has taken a turn on redress which reminds me of March, 1942. In that fateful month, the JACL, wishing to act as the representative of the total Japanese American community, negotiated with the U.S. government on the evacuation order. (The minutes of this special session are available but difficult to come by.) I received the impression that the JACL leaders were so eager to please, to be influential, to be patriotic, that they asked few hard questions. Although there was concern expressed over violations of law and order by unruly citizens, no one said a word about the violations of our Constitutional rights by the government. Here we are in 1979 and the JACL seems to be stumbling over its own footsteps of history. What started off as a well organized campaign for redress at the 1978 National Convention has suddenly switched into a Study Commission. The reason cited is political reality. In 1942 it was military necessity.

This time the problem seems to be the Nikkei legislators: Inouye, Matsunaga, Mineta and Matsui. They have turned the campaign around and they insist that their advice be kept off the record. What kind of monkey business is this? This is hardly the way to conduct the business of the entire Nikkei community in an open and democratic society.

The recent record of reporting by the JACL's newspaper, the *Pacific Citizen*, has created the impression of a manipulated press. It has failed to report the firing of one of the members of the National Committee for Redress. It has failed to report the official vote of dissent from the Study Commission approach by the Seattle Chapter's Board of Governors.

The president of the JACL has maintained an enigmatic silence through all this. The National Committee for Redress, in my judgement, clearly contravened the decision of its parent body, the 1978 National Council. The National Council voted for redress. The Committee, its creature, overrode that vote by moving for a Study Commission. Please read the proposed bill if you think it is anything more than a Study Commission. That is plainly unparliamentary. A committee may not act against the direction given to it by the main body. If the chairman of the Committee refuses to rule the contravention out of order, then the president must. Even if the president does not judge the action to be out of order, given the extreme gravity of the decision, he at least ought to explain his judgement. Silence is inappropriate.

I do not believe the actions of the JACL national leaders reflect the wishes of their rank-and-file member, especially those who have

read the proposed bill. The vote of the Tri-District Conference in April was only an expression of opinion by the persons present and not an action of their chapter. The Nikkei press was led to believe that "... 78 out of 105 JACL chapters have now endorsed the national redress unit's proposal ..." (Rafu Shimpo, 5-3-79). This is a distortion. Only half of the 70-member TDC chapters were represented. And those who were "... had no voting power." (*Pacific Citizen* 5-4-79) The chapter involved in this distortion should respond to this kind of manipulation by the national JACL. Further the Nikkei community at large must not let this kind of group determine their destiny in '79 as they did in '42.

But there is a difference between '79 and '42. We are here. We can raise our own voices. We can press for our own legislation through our own representatives and senators. The four Nikkei are not representatives of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, Chicago or New York. Nor is this issue primarily a Nikkei one. It is an issue for America. The Nikkei are the victims. It is the U.S. government that perpetrated the crime. It is the government that must be called upon to make the reparation. We are calling for an act of repentance. All Americans of conscience should join in the call.

If the JACL has stumbled irretrievably, if the JACL leadership will not turn themselves around, then it is time to think of alternatives. There are plenty of people who will not let '42 happen again. The Open Letter to Haya-kawa movement is evidence. The vote of the Seattle chapter is evidence. The vote of the Chicago chapter is evidence. Local JACL chapters can run their own campaign. We can form coalitions which Black, Jewish, civil rights, peace, church and other groups in our communities. There are already persons in Congress who will co-sponsor a true redress bill. A movement has already begun in the United Methodist Church for reparations. It's only a beginning. We must not let '42 happen again!

—WILLIAM HOHRI

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Individuals and organizations wishing to contact Hohri can do so by writing him at 4717 N. Albany, Chicago, IL 60625.



Appendix D

To the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Rev. Newell P. Knudson, Secretary, Postoffice Box 5098, Eureka, California 95501:

Whereas, during World War II, the United States of America did forcibly remove and incarcerate, without charges, trial, or any due process of law, 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, both citizens and resident aliens of America and citizens from Latin America; and

Whereas, this action was initiated by a presidential order, enabled by Congressional legislation, and supported by the Supreme Court, thereby implicating the total government; and

Whereas, despite the government's claim of military necessity, this action proved to be made solely on the basis of race and for racist motives, there having been not a single case of sabotage or espionage committed by such persons and there having been no such sweeping action taken against Americans of German or Italian ancestry; and

Whereas, the American Convention on Human Rights, to which this country is signatory, states:

"Every person has the right to be compensated in accordance with the law in the event he has been sentenced by a final judgment through a miscarriage of justice."

and

Whereas, legislation has been submitted in the 96th Congress "to provide for payments to certain individuals of Japanese ancestry who were interned, detained, or forcibly relocated by the United States during World War II" (H.R.5977);

Therefore, Be It Resolved that this General Conference acknowledge the injustice of this event, affirm the need for America to redress the victims, and actively support the passage of redress legislation, such as H.R.5977, in Congress; and

Be It Further Resolved that the General Board of Church and Society be instructed to communicate this resolve to all members of Congress and to adopt support for redress as part of its program for this quadrennium.

Methodist Federation for Social Action

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