



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 23, 1981

STATEMENT ON THE NEW YORK HEARINGS FROM CONCERNED JAPANESE AMERICANS

Stemming from the Concentration Camp experience, the forced dispersal and lack of community on the East Coast has isolated Japanese Americans from each other. Through forming the East Coast Japanese Americans for Redress (ECJAR) to help plan today's hearing, Japanese Americans and Japanese American organization from the greater New York area united together and pinpointed the major areas of concern we, as East Coast Nikkei, felt this hearing should address. This included seeking out friends and supporters outside the Japanese American Community. We also aided the efforts of the Commission and staff in encouraging and seeking out witnesses who fell within their priority areas. We want to underscore the collective community effort this involved and the special significance of this effort for the New York community.

In this context we were bitterly disappointed and angered by the Commission staff's rejection of most of the program/agenda ideas submitted by ECJAR. The lack of dialogue prior to setting the agenda can only be perceived by us as not taking our ideas seriously. Additionally, many Issei witnesses courageously agreed to testify after much prodding and support from concerned community people. Their willingness to testify has been met with demands to speak in English. Artists who have sought to

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have their camp-related work shown at today's hearing have been denied freedom of expression by Commission staff's censorship. The one original Black on the agenda was to speak against our cause, furthering division between Japanese Americans and Blacks. Many potential Nisei witnesses who have worked long and hard on their testimonies were rejected on superficial, vague or no reason at all.

It is important to understand this disregard and insensitivity from a Japanese American perspective. The Commission claims to want to know about the character of our communities and the impact of the camps on us. We are the ones who have the experience and knowledge. We are the ones who have the right to to define our own experience. In this case, the Commission staff has told us who can speak, in what language they can speak and what they can speak about. Their actions, disregard and insensitivity can only continue the historical racism against Japanese seeking to speak the truth of their own experience.

It is a loss to this Commission, as well as the greater New York community that so much valuable testimony will not be heard here today. We urge the Commission to overcome the limitations and restrictions placed on the community in this New York hearing so that its final report will be as full and representative of Japanese American experience as possible.

While we regret the actions of the staff, today's hearing is only the beginning of the battle for justice and redress and reparations. Our cause has come a long way in two months time. Our community is more united in its understanding. We have made new friends and allies, both within and outside the community. We will continue the broad organizing efforts-- involve more people; do broader outreach; and investigate current legislative and legal initiatives. We will be back--maybe not before this Commission, but we will continue to press our claims on this government. We will become stronger, more unified and clearer. Our cause is just and we will not be deterred.

*Yuri Sakuyama*

*Sasha Holm - Spokespeople*