

Concerned Japanese Americans
[REDACTED]

June 12, 1981

Joan Z. Bernstein, Chairperson
Commission on Wartime Relocation & Internment of Civilians
Room 202
New Executive Office Building
726 Jackson Place NW
Washington, D.C. 20506

Dear Ms. Bernstein:

Concerned Japanese Americans is a local, New York-based group of Nisei (second generation) and Sansei (third generation) Japanese Americans. We formed to take up different issues of concern to the Japanese American community. Our present focus is to support and participate in the national movement of Japanese Americans for reparations and redress. At the heart of the issue is a fundamental question of injustice and denial of basic rights to Japanese and Japanese Americans in the forced evacuation and incarceration during World War II.

Concerned Japanese Americans has recently become a part of the National Coalition for Reparations and Redress, and fully supports its principles and demands.

We are writing to request that the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians hold a hearing in New York. Attached are petitions signed by members of the Japanese American and other Asian American communities, and supporters outside the community. As the petition states, there is broad support and interest in the issue of reparations/redress in our community. We feel that Japanese Americans in New York and the surrounding area have an important contribution to make to the Commission process.

The largest concentration of Japanese Americans on the East Coast is in New York. The greatest numbers of Japanese Americans residing in the New York area are those who relocated out of camp directly to New York. Large numbers did so not by choice but due to the legal and military restrictions and the racial barriers facing them on the West Coast. Little of their materials losses and property was ever recovered. The sense of Japanese American community, a more intangible but nevertheless great loss, was never recovered due to the dispersal of Japanese Americans on the East Coast. Also in the New York area are Japanese Americans who were picked up and incarcerated on Ellis Island and other military bases on the East Coast as a result of Executive Order 9066. The opinions of those families who chose to voluntarily relocate prior to the forced evacuation can be heard here as well.

As a group that has committed itself to the just struggle for reparations/redress, Concerned Japanese Americans feels that the voices of those who suffered the most, and would most greatly benefit from any kind of compensatory recommendation, should in particular be heard. These are the voices of our Issei, first generation Japanese pioneers, many of whom have passed away or are now quite elderly. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to travel to Washington DC. The travel distance and resulting inconvenience place an additional obstacle to community people's access to the Commission process. In addition, a New York hearing would make more possible the participation of Japanese Americans residing in the New England area.

In sum, we feel the experience and testimony of victims of Executive Order 9066 residing in the New York area to be unique, and that both the exposure and the accessibility of the Commission would be significantly enhanced by designating New York as a hearing site.

We will be forwarding to you additional signatures as well as a list of potential participants in a New York hearing should one be held. Concerned Japanese Americans has also been seeking the active support and involvement of other groups in the Japanese American community in this effort. We request that this letter be circulated to all the members of the Commission at the June 23rd issue briefing meeting for their consideration.

We would greatly welcome a meeting between the Commission and community representatives to discuss the potentialities of a New York hearing. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Sasha Hohri for
Concerned Japanese Americans

enc

cc: American Buddhist Academy
Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund
Japanese American Association
Japanese American Citizens League, New York Chapter
Japanese American Citizens League, Boston Chapter
Japanese American Help for the Aging
Japanese American United Church
New England Nisei
New York Nichibei
Niko Niko Club