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SAN DIEGO REDRESS/REPARATIONS COMMITTEE
MEMBER ORGANIZATION OF
THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR REDRESS/REPARATIONS

Post Office Box 16184
San Diego, CA 92116

5 August 1981

To: The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of
Civilians

We, on the panel, represent the San Diego Redress/
Reparations Committee. Our Committee was formed last year
based on the principles of unity of the National Coalition
for Redress/Reparations. Our Committee has a membership of
32, which includes Issei, Nisei, Kibei, Sansei and Yonsei,
as well as other nationalities. We have workers, profes-
sionals, students, housewives and teachers in our Committee.

1. Introduction of testimony:

We will not be presenting any information on the indi-
vidual or collective experience of our people during
the evacuation/concentration camp experience. This
will be and has been covered in the many individual and
organizational testimonies given to this Commission.
Instead, within the time limits of our testimony, this
panel would like to address three points: 1) Dispersal
of the San Diego Japanese community as a result of the
forced evacuation and incarceration of people of
Japanese ancestry during World War II; 2) The effect of
the evacuation/concentration camp experience on Third
and Fourth generation Japanese Americans; and 3) The
remedies our Committee feels should be recommended by
this Commission.

2. Dispersal of the San Diego Japanese community as a result of the forced evacuation and incarceration of Japanese during World War II:

The pre-war San Diego Japanese American community was a lively, vital one providing many of the services necessary to maintain any community. Japanese-owned restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, barber shops, cigar stores, churches, and recreation and entertainment centers served the Japanese population. Many of these stores and services were concentrated in a small Japantown near downtown San Diego. Surrounding this business/commercial area was a good portion of the Japanese residential population.

— This business area served not only the nearby residential community but also served as a center for local Japanese farmers and fishermen. This community, this center for Japanese people in San Diego was destroyed and dispersed directly due to the incarceration of Japanese during World War II. Some lost their businesses because they had to sell out when evacuation came. Others, like the barbers lost their licenses while they were incarcerated and had to find new jobs when they returned.

Compounding this dispersal of the San Diego Japanese community were the instructions given to the released inmates of the concentration camps—not to speak Japanese, not to associate with other Japanese, and not to return to their West Coast homes. This dispersal and destruction

of the Japanese community happened fairly rapidly following the end of World War II. The dispersal of the residential community accompanied the dispersal of the business community. All that is left now in the old Japantown is one lone grocery store, soon to be evicted.

The dispersal of our community is directly related to our ability and our right to maintain and develop ourselves culturally, socially, politically, and economically as a people. Without a concentration of people, it is very difficult if not impossible to continue our development as Japanese Americans. We feel this development is important not only because it helps our people and gives a sense of identity to our new and coming generations, but also because it enriches the historical/cultural development of all people.

We feel it is not too late to rebuild our community, to give back a sense of pride not only to the Issei and Nisei, but also to the Sansei, Yonsei and future generations. It is not too late to build a community and to have community centers where the young can learn from the old, where we can develop our language and culture and where we can learn our history first hand.

Rebuilding our communities also means building our strength as a people to carry out our ongoing struggle for full equality and justice.

3. The effect of the evacuation/concentration camp experience on Third and Fourth generation Japanese Americans:

The effect of the camps that interned our grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters and cousins has directly impacted on Third and Fourth generation Japanese Americans.

The vast majority of sansei and yonsei do not speak Japanese. Many understand very little of the language, and most of us could not fully communicate with our grandparents. We know very little of our history as Japanese in America and probably know even less of our culture.

We grew up not knowing the proud history of struggle and achievement of our Issei pioneers and not always understanding or appreciating the sacrifices and courageous efforts of our Nisei parents to survive and make a better life for us.

Very few sansei or yonsei can play Japanese instruments or sing Japanese songs or dance Japanese dances - all this is being lost.

This denial of our language, history and culture has led directly to many of the problems facing sansei and yonsei youth. In the 1960's and 70's, hundreds of Japanese American youth got involved with drugs - with overdoses cutting short many potentially productive lives. For myself, a sansei and many others like myself, the greatest problem has been psychological.

By psychological, I mean peace of mind - a sense of myself. All this is directly related to the confusion we have had over our identity. Identity comes from an understanding of a people's history, language and culture. We have lacked that in many ways - always feeling like an outsider - not American and not Japanese.

We have been denied our roots by law, by exclusion, by racism, by relocation, by internment, by oppression, by forced self-denial...we see no alternative but to fight for the betterment of our people, and against those who would deny us our rights.

4. The remedies our Committee feels should be recommended by this Commission:

This final part of our testimony relates to what we believe are the remedies for the grave injustices suffered by our people.

In that light we put forward the following, which we feel would be just recommendations for the Commission to make:

- 1) That a minimum of \$25,000 be paid to every individual forced to evacuate their homes - whether by forced internment in the concentration camps or by "voluntary" relocation. For those deceased evacuees, the money should go to their heirs. Also that an emergency fund be set up immediately to pay the Issei.
- 2) The establishment of a separate fund, to provide for social, cultural, educational, religious and other needs of our Japanese American communities.

- 3) That legislation be enacted explicitly prohibiting this type of event from ever happening again to any people in this country.
- 4) The popularization and dissemination of the true history of the American concentration camp experience, through text books and other educational materials.

We would like to thank the Commission for allowing us this time to speak.

Submitted by:

Beth J. Shironaka

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Janet Haruko Tokumaru

and Janet Haruko Tokumaru

Date: Aug 5, 1981

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