

Support
REDRESS /
REPARATIONS



ASIAN PACIFIC
STUDENT UNION

What is R/R ?

In the spring of 1942, over 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry in the United States were abruptly and forcibly detained from their homes in the Western U.S. and herded into detention camps; surrounded by barbed wire, watchtowers and armed guards. The Japanese were imprisoned in the camps for more than 3½ years. Lives were disrupted, families separated, property and educational opportunities lost; and communities destroyed. There were 10 concentration camps in all, located in the most desolate and barren parts of the U.S.

However, no charges were ever brought against the Japanese for any crime or wrongdoings; they were found guilty by reason of race. Although the government claimed the evacuation was a "military necessity", persons of Italian and German background were largely undetained. The incarceration indeed stands as one of the most blatantly racist acts against an entire people in U.S. history and in many ways symbolizes the long history of repression and resistance that has been the experience of Japanese Americans and other minorities.

It should be understood also that the camps were no isolated incident or "mistake". Before the camps, Japanese had to face a whole slew of anti-Asian legislation, from the Alien Land Law to laws against inter-racial marriage to anti-immigration laws. Since the camps, the Japanese community has had to deal with all the physical and psychological damage done to community and family life, and the subsequent destruction and dispersal of the community through redevelopment. Inequalities in income, education and job opportunities are a reality, despite the myth of the Japanese "model minority", with census statistics showing that 30% of all Japanese are in the lowest income category.

For a very long time, the experience of the camps was not talked about. Internees, upon release were told not to talk about the camps with anyone. Many people did not want to talk about it because the memories were too painful and humiliating. The history books would give little or no attention to this part of World War II and U.S. history. In many ways, people blamed their Japanese identity as the reason for being persecuted and sought to deny this identity.

However, with the rise of the 60's civil rights movement and a movement within the Asian nationalities to affirm their national culture and identity, the camps were brought into the open as an issue of great significance. On the campuses, Asian students struggled to establish Asian American studies classes that would bring out the true history of Asians in America. As a way to dismantle the barriers between generations, community-wide pilgrimages were made to the sites of the concentration camps. Books were written, films were made and plays produced about the camps experience. After many years of education and discussion, there is a strong sentiment to stand up and seek a righting of the wrongs done.

Redress/Reparations:

A Call For Justice

The demand for reparations is a call from the Japanese American people for the government to redress the wrongs committed. Monetary compensation must be given to the internees or their heirs for losses suffered and rights violated during the evacuation and incarceration. Not only is reparations demanded for property losses (which were substantial), but also for psychological damage, loss of life and livelihoods, etc.

For over 30 years there have been efforts to seek compensation for all the losses suffered and rights violated by the government. Over \$400 million (1942 dollars) were lost in property alone. This does not even begin to include loss of income and employment opportunities, false imprisonment, psychological damage and loss of life. The first effort was the Evacuation Claims Act of 1948 passed by Congress, which paid 10¢ on the dollar with an upper limit of \$2,500. Those who placed claims were required to sign a waiver renouncing any future claims. Only some 23,000 claims were filed and many were simply discarded because nearly all evidence was destroyed during the incarceration.

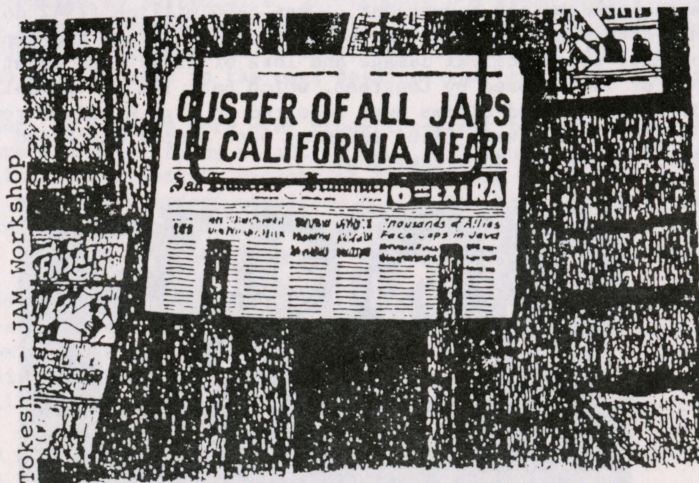


Recognizing the obvious limitations of this bill, efforts continued. By 1978, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) had begun a campaign to seek reparations in the amount of \$25,000 to each internee. However, the JACL withdrew its original demand to instead seek the establishment of a Presidential Study Commission that would study the redress/reparations (r/r) issue. A JACL-sponsored bill to set up this commission was passed by Congress last year, authorizing the establishment of a 9-member commission to hold hearings in 15 cities across the country. Based on these hearings, the Commission will determine whether an injustice was committed or not and whether or not there should be compensation. The Commission is now being set up and will probably commence hearings sometime in the Spring.

For the Japanese community, it is clear that the camps were an injustice affecting the lives and future of a whole people. While the Commission seeks to "prove" an injustice was committed, the people must strongly advocate that r/r be made. While the Commission is in session, Congress will not act on any other r/r legislation, focusing major attention on the Commission hearings. The Commission hearings will thus be a major way for the community to voice its demand for r/r.

In recent years, many more community people and students have become involved in building the r/r movement in addition to the JACL. On 12 July 1980, the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCRP) was formed to do grass-roots organizing around the issue. Among the membership of the NCRP are the Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization (L.A.), the Japanese Community Progressive Alliance (S.F.), the Nihonmachi Outreach Committee (S.J.), the Tule Lake Committee (Sacramento), various student organizations and a wide range of individuals.

Through the NCRR, these groups have played a significant role in conducting education about the camps through the Manzanar and Tule Lake Pilgrimages, and see the r/r struggle as a part of the overall struggle of Japanese people for full equality. A major event for the NCRR was the National Conference for Redress/Reparations held on 15 November 1980. It was attended by over 350 people, including representatives from the East Coast and Alaska. Currently, significant efforts are being made to forge greater unity among all groups and individuals interested in getting involved in the r/r issue.



APSU and R/R Conference

On Sunday, 2 November 1980, the APSU unanimously voted to take up r/r as its campaign for 1980-81 at its third annual conference held at San Francisco State University. This decision reaffirmed our understanding of the important role that Asian and Pacific students have played in promoting education and discussion around the camps (and similar episodes in Asian and Pacific people's history in America), and how linking that to the conditions facing us today has helped to create the beginnings of a mass movement for r/r. In addition to uniting with the NCRR's five principles of unity, the APSU set three goals for itself in taking up the campaign:

- strengthen the APSU's ability to take up major struggles in the Asian/Pacific Student Movement
- strengthen our working ties and overall relationship to the Japanese community and deepen our understanding of the community's needs and situation
- bring out the history of oppression and resistance of the Japanese in the U.S. and expose the role of the government in the history of oppression of Asian and Pacific people in this country

Perspective

Winning redress and reparations will require a protracted struggle. In helping to build the r/r movement, the APSU also united on a threefold strategy:

- Rely on the masses of the people

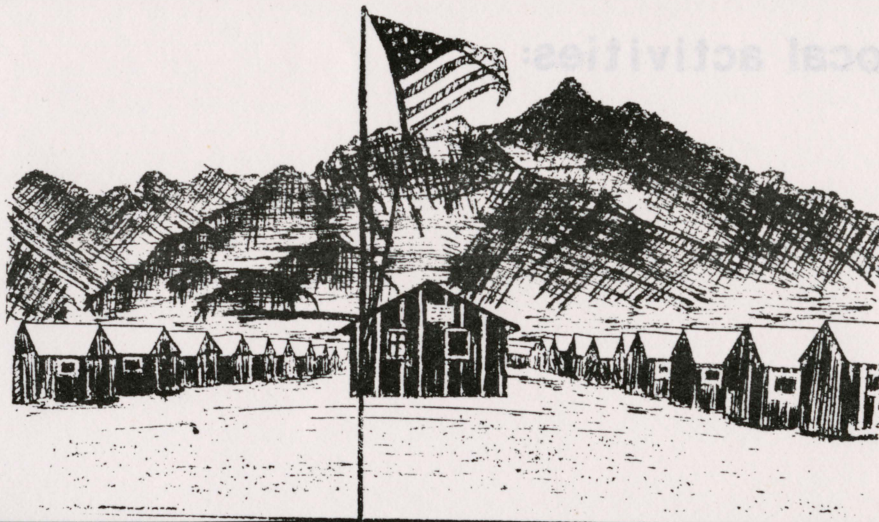
This reflects our understanding that r/r cannot be won by relying solely on politicians and government bureaucracy. The Japanese community must be organized in the broadest possible way, to assess its own needs, put forward its demands, and become a unified movement for r/r. This will require broad educational work, community forums and discussions.

- Unite with all who can be united around r/r

This means working with all community organizations and individuals who are mobilizing for r/r. As the movement grows many different views will emerge and change; we must learn to work well with people and organizations holding different views, especially around the upcoming Commission hearings in order to mobilize for them as fully as possible.

- Unite the Asian and Pacific nationalities

In order to succeed, the campaign will require mass support running far beyond the Japanese community by itself. We should view the campaign as a way to promote our common histories, needs and struggles as the key to forging that unity.



Plans

The APSU will be participating in various community as well as campus programs commemorating the signing of Executive Order 9066 around 19 February as well as carrying on educational work during Asian/Pacific Heritage Week in May. In addition, the APSU will be mobilizing as fully as possible for the Commission hearings with the hope of submitting testimony.

What is APSU ?

The formation of the West Coast Asian/Pacific Student Union (APSU) in the spring of 1978 marked an important development in the Asian/Pacific Student Movement. The initial momentum to form the APSU can be traced back to the first Tule Lake Pilgrimage, which was organized largely by an informal inter-campus network of Asian students working in conjunction with the community. Individuals (on campuses with too few Asians to form an organization) as well as individual Asian and Pacific nationality student organizations on many different college and high school campuses united on common principles of unity in order to change the scope and character of the Asian/Pacific Student Movement.

For the past three years, the APSU has united on common goals and campaigns, brought together different Asian and Pacific nationalities, and shared cultures and experiences at its annual conference. With general guidance from the conference and through joint work during the year within the various regions, the APSU has helped Asian and Pacific students build up their local campus organizations, encouraged the deepening of student and community ties, and given the Asian/Pacific Student Movement a powerful voice on the West Coast.

Local activities:

Contact: