



Communique' (ko mū ni kā') - an official bulletin from scene of action.

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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EASTERN EDITION

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 10, 1988

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

VOL. CCXII NO. 28

## Belated Redress

### Japanese-Americans Interned During War Win Formal Apology

#### U.S. Action Helps Mark End To Long Cultural Struggle Within the Community

#### Reagan to Sign the Bill Today

By PAULINE YOSHIHASHI

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Fifteen years ago, Glen Ikko Kitayama got his first lesson about the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans. As his family drove down California's Highway 395 east of Fresno, his father pointed to a bleak patch of desert called Manzanar.

"That's where I went to camp," the youth's father said.

"Why didn't you ever send me to camp?" the sixth grader asked. His father answered, "Maybe some day when you're older, you'll understand."

Now 26, Glen Kitayama understands all too well, and recalls how he had to press his reticent family to find out. His father's "camp" was a product of war hysteria, which led Franklin D. Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 9066 in 1942. That order forced the Kitayama family and 120,000 other West Coast Japanese—most of them American citizens—to abandon their homes, businesses and constitutional rights and spend the war years behind barbed wire.

"I had learned about George Washington and American ideals, and I couldn't believe the government would do that," says Mr. Kitayama.

#### Cultural Odyssey

Today, President Reagan is expected to sign another piece of legislation having to do with Japanese-Americans, this one offering restitution and an apology to those interned in these uniquely American concentration camps. It will mark a political resolution of a passage in U.S. history that has lingered as an embarrassing social injustice and, in many cases, a grave personal tragedy.

It will also mark the end of an important cultural journey for the many Japanese-Americans who fought for years—sometimes within their own ranks—for this public apology. Forty-six years have passed since the camps were established. Much of that time was needed for the Japanese community in the U.S. to gain the resolve to demand reparations. Racism hindered their effort—and still does. But so, too, did their own traditions, which emphasized obedience and counseled against a life spent dwelling on the past.

"Much of the lack of protest was cultural," says Gordon Hirabayashi, a retired sociology professor living in Edmonton, Canada, and one of the few Japanese-Americans to resist internment in the 1940s. But, he adds, "society has changed, in that people are more willing to speak out. It's a big step for the Japanese to become a different kind of citizen, not a reticent or passive citizen but an active, participating one."

#### Critics in the Church Group

Still, many in the Japanese community fear that the legislation—which calls for paying \$20,000 to each of the 60,000 or so surviving internees—may reignite latent anti-Japanese passions. Some critics of the bill, bowing to stereotypes, have already argued that Japanese-Americans are among the most assimilated—and successful—ethnic groups in the U.S. and hardly need additional compensation from the government.

Others have confused Japanese-Americans with Japanese nationals, contending that Japan's economy has flourished at the expense of U.S. jobs, so why should American taxpayers pay any redress to internees now? Sen. Jesse Helms, the conservative North Carolina Republican, for one, said he was against paying reparations until Japan provided payments to the families of American soldiers killed at Pearl Harbor.

James and Toshiko Ito, of Laguna Hills, Calif., have tasted this type of sentiment personally. "I made a presentation to my church group about camp," Mrs. Ito says. "After that, I got hate mail."

#### Interned in a Horse Stall

The Itos, who are retired schoolteachers and who support the legislation, still vividly recall the trials of camp life. Internment centers generally were located on barren public lands. There, internees endured winter blizzards and dusty summers in cramped pine-and-tarpaper barracks. For months before being relocated to the Heart Mountain camp in Wyoming, Mrs. Ito's family was forced to live in an unused horse stall at the Santa Anita race track east of Los Angeles.

A cheerful woman with dark, expressive eyes, Mrs. Ito takes from her closet a box filled with mementos as she talks about those times. "We had to shower in the horses' showers, and the floors were filthy," she says, displaying miniature wooden sandals like those she had used to keep her feet clean.

She fingers a faded pair of red boots she used during the winters. "I can't get rid of them," she says, as her eyes fill with tears. "It's as if they're my security blanket. After all these years . . . Isn't that strange?"

Mrs. Ito's father lost his prospering insurance business in the evacuation. This sort of loss, and the humiliation of camp life, eventually spurred the grass-roots campaign for redress, but not before much personal anguish among the Nisei—the second generation Japanese-Americans.

Please Turn to Page 9, Column 1



# Belated Redress: Japanese-Americans Win Apology, And Compensation, for Long Wartime Internment

*Continued From First Page*

whose youth was scarred by the camps.

Dorothy Ito Shundo, a 64-year-old Nisei and sister of Mr. Ito, until recently couldn't even bring herself to discuss the camps with her children. In 1942, Mrs. Shundo and her brothers owned the small Golden Ruby Farm in West Covina, Calif. But that May, with their crops only weeks away from harvest, the government gave them just days to store or sell all possessions that couldn't be carried to camp.

As the family was being bused to a barbed-wired assembly center in Pomona, Mrs. Shundo recalls anxiously clutching her two suitcases and thinking: "This is America, and someone will know this is wrong. Someone will come forward and say something, and stop all this."

By the time they were freed, the farm was awash in debt and they were later forced to sell. That land is now covered by nearly 100 expensive homes that others own. Mrs. Shundo, in turn, quietly went about rebuilding her life and, today, is a secretary with an aerospace firm.

But over the years, she heard younger Japanese-Americans—the third generation Sansei—debating the wrongs of the wartime evacuation. Finally, she responded to an ad in a local paper asking for volunteers to work on the redress campaign. "If I didn't tell my story, everything would be forgotten," she says. "And there are 120,000 stories, not just mine."

Donna Nagata, an assistant professor of psychology at Smith College, is studying the internment's effects on the children of the Nisei. Parents' silence is one of the most common findings of her research, says Ms. Nagata, whose parents were interned during the war.

Most of these children "know very little about their own families' experiences, even if they have some historical knowledge of the internment," she adds. One of the people she interviewed likened the situation to "having an alcoholic or retarded relative. Everyone knows it's there, but no one ever talked about it."

To a large extent, the Nisei, imbued with the Japanese principles of *gaman*, or patience and endurance, stayed silent to promote their own assimilation into American culture and to protect their children. "We thought it would make them better citizens, and not embitter them," one Nisei mother says sadly. "Maybe we made a big mistake." She asks that her name not be used because "I've never even told this to my own kids."

Ultimately, though, Japanese culture would clash with American. The wartime evacuation was too much a part of history for it to be ignored. Mention, albeit cursory, was made in school texts and in some public ceremonies. Curious children, living in a civil-rights-conscious America, took their questions home—only to find the family's answers evasive and unsatisfying.

Many of these children were as upset with their elders as they were with the so-

ciety that had interned them. Some couldn't understand their parents' loyalty to a country that seemingly had betrayed them, while others wondered why the camps were largely omitted from the national memory. "My first reaction [to learning of the camps] was, 'Why wasn't I ever taught this?'" says Glen Kitayama. "The second reaction was, 'What else is there that I don't know?'"

Most Sansei, like other Americans, didn't realize the extent of the discrimination Japanese immigrants faced in the U.S. for much of this century. It wasn't until 1952, for example, that Japanese immigrants were permitted to become citizens. The Japanese, like the Chinese, were subject to statutes that barred them from buying land and living in certain areas. But they skirted alien land laws by buying property in the names of their American-born children, who were citizens. Slowly, therefore, Japanese were finding a place in America.

Dec. 7, 1941, changed all that. Quickly, fear spread that Japanese-Americans had a role in the Pearl Harbor attack. "The Japanese race is an enemy race," declared the late Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt, who orchestrated the internment program. "It therefore follows that along the vital Pacific Coast over 112,000 potential enemies of Japanese extraction are at large today." This myth endured for years, despite litigation, scholarly study and government review that showed there wasn't any military need for the evacuation.

Notably, the evacuation was exclusively of West Coast Japanese-Americans, leading many to later conclude that this wasn't so much national defense as a racially motivated land grab. Immigrants from other countries with which the U.S. was at war weren't interned as a group in the U.S. Nor were Japanese-Americans in strategic Hawaii, where the danger of sabotage was perhaps greatest. Ethnic Japanese there made up one-third of the population and were too important to the local economy to lock up as a group, local officials said.

But on the West Coast, the immigrant group was much smaller, and therefore more vulnerable. Even such liberals as Earl Warren, then the attorney general of California and later chief justice of the U.S., argued strenuously for internment. Later in his memoirs, he said he had made a mistake. "It demonstrates the cruelty of war when fear, get-tough military psychology, propaganda and racial antagonism combine with one's responsibility for public security to produce such acts," he wrote.

In 1983, a congressional commission would agree, attributing the internment to "race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership."

Few Japanese-Americans actually resisted the evacuation, or the drafting of more than 30,000 Nisei men from the camps. (Most Nisei served in highly decorated European combat units or in military-intelligence service.) Kikuo Taira, a

physician who worked in camp hospitals, finds the lack of resistance quite natural. "We had been branded disloyal or spies," he says. "We were trying to be 110% American."

When the camps were closed in 1945, the early focus of Japanese-American internees was on simple financial recovery, as well as overturning discriminatory laws of the time. Few talked of redress for the years spent in the camps.

"We had no money and no political clout," says Mikio Uchiyama, who left a camp for military service and now is a municipal judge in Fresno County, Calif. "A lot of people came back to nothing—no land, no house." His family's old farm, lost during the internment, today is among the state's most valuable agricultural land.

In the last 10 years, however, sentiment among the Nisei changed. Emboldened by the Japanese community's growing strength in the postwar years, and encouraged by children who have entered the business and professional mainstream of America, the Nisei began forgiving less and demanding more. "There's been a whole psychological turnaround," says Donald K. Tamaki, one of a team of lawyers who has worked to overturn wartime convictions of the few Japanese-Americans who did resist internment.

Activists pushed not just for acknowledgement of the wrongness of the internment policy but for some financial remuneration as well. "The money isn't the main issue, but it's important," says Fred Hirasuna, a Nisei from Fresno. "Otherwise, it's [merely] saying, 'We're sorry for putting you in prison for 3½ years.'"

Beyond the political resolution, many in the Japanese-American community have also managed to come to terms personally with the internment years, whether as a Nisei who spent time in the camps or a Sansei who inherited the experience. For many years now, a group of Japanese-Americans have gathered their children and friends for a trip out to Manzanar to honor those who lived in the camps.

This year, more than 300 made the springtime pilgrimage. It was a blustery morning and little remained at the desolate site that once imprisoned 10,000. Two decaying gatehouses stood watch over the gathering. In the distance, a cemetery lay ringed with barbed wire and filled with simple rock-lined graves from the camp era. Cold gusts tore at fragile paper cranes—symbols of long life and good luck—that someone had strung along the barbed wire as a remembrance.

The redress bill gave new optimism to this year's visitors. With bowed heads, they repeated the names of the camps that inexorably altered their lives: Manzanar, Topaz, Poston, Jerome, Gila, Heart Mountain, Tule Lake, Rohwer, Minidoka, Granada. "The sands that were drenched with tears of despair are now drenched with our tears of love, victory, hope and unity," they read together. "Let us give thanks. Let us pray."