

CJA Statement - presented by Sasha Hobri

Part of the history of Japanese Americans, in common with other Third World people, is the struggle to preserve and maintain our communities as centers of the cultural, social and political life of our people. In a ~~hostile environment~~ ^{racist society}, the community has been a place where Japanese could speak their language, develop and practice their culture, and raise their children to have a sense of ~~national~~ ^{ethnic} identity and pride. For these reason, many Japanese Americans living on the East Coast still consider California home.

Internment, forced dispersal, uprootment, loss of identity, invisibility, isolation -- all these feelings have been indelibly stamped upon the soul and psyche of Japanese Americans on the East Coast. The dispersal of Japanese Americans to the East Coast was forced by history and the camps in particular.

Consciously or unconsciously, Japanese Americans relocated east because it possibly afforded an opportunity to pick up pieces of shattered dreams, ambitions and hopes smashed by the concentration camp experience. Many evacuees relocated to New York hoping to escape the racist vigilantism and press directed against them; the discrimination and 2nd class citizenship that had marked the experience of Japanese Americans in California.

"I wanted to get as far away from California as I could." For others, the East Coast offered an escape from the unbearable camp conditions, as ~~early~~ evacuees desiring resettlement were prohibited from returning to California. For many, there was nothing left of their pre-camp lives to return to.

The "stigma" of being Japanese, the "danger" of associating with other Japanese, in essence, the denial of roots, history and identity was a conscious policy of the U.S. government. Leave interview questions dated 8/25/43 are blatant proof of this policy:

"What is your plan for mixing into the community to which you will resettle...

Will you assist in the general resettlement program by staying away from large groups of Japanese?"

We understood the message:

"Assimilate, assimilate - a sense of guilt in associating together."

What was the impact of this policy on the relocated evacuees?

"Isolation. I couldn't find things to relate to. (It) was a deep emotional hurt."

This policy of assimilationism, of 200% Americanism has had concrete impact. One example is the loss of identity for Sansei - of growing up unaware of our proud and bitter history; inability to speak Japanese or understand and promote Japanese culture; shame, guilt and avoidance of other Japanese Americans - these are obstacles Sansei have faced.

The Japanese American success story, so widely promoted and believed, even by us at times, is truly a myth when we cannot be proud of who we are; when our children are still denied basic educational tools to understand Japanese American experience; when our culture is suppressed; and when an actual physical Japanese American community seems like a dream.

Justice for the emotional and psychological suffering, the actual losses must be made now. Reparations - individual monetary payment can only begin to ameliorate the traumatic impact of the camps on our lives. A community fund can begin to repair the damages done and give us a start to rebuild the Japanese American community. We have waited too long. We will be quiet no longer. We call upon the Commission to make these recommendations to Congress. We call upon the Commission to come to New York to make thorough and complete investigation of the camps and their impact.