

1150 Park Hills Road
Berkeley, Calif. 94708

June 1, 1982

National Coalition for Redress/Reparations
c/o Japanese Community Progressive Alliance
1858 Sutter Street
San Francisco, Calif. 94115

Dear members of NCRR:

At numerous public meetings on redress/reparations, including the CWRIC hearings, I have noticed a disturbing speech pattern: spokespersons for the NCRR--especially those who are also members of JCPA--consistently refer to Japanese Americans and other ethnic groups in the United States as "nationalities" or "national minorities." I pay careful attention to the words people use, and I find that NCRR spokespersons are the only ones to incorporate the terms "nationality" and "national minority" into their speeches. JACL and NCJAR spokespersons, and older Nikkei in general, do not use such expressions which have proved to be troublesome in the past.

"Nationality" reflects citizenship or membership in a nation (with implied loyalty) and is not synonymous with ancestral origin. Japanese Americans are Americans by nationality and nothing else. The only persons who are "Japanese" by nationality are those who are citizens of Japan. There is a very big difference between nationality and ancestry, and the two should not be confused. It was precisely this misunderstanding of nationality which resulted in the concentration camps for Japanese Americans; so I think it is totally incongruous for an organization working for redress/reparations to perpetuate this mistaken identity.

I realize that the legal definition of "nationality" tends to be blurred by improper colloquial usage in the United States. Many Americans erroneously use "nationality" in place of race, ethnicity, ancestry, or cultural heritage. This imprecision comes from the racist inability of white Americans to perceive people of color as real Americans. Asian Americans are the most likely to be rudely asked by strangers on the street, "What is your nationality?"--which actually means, "You couldn't possibly be an American, so what else are you?"

I further realize that "nationality" and "national minority" are chic terms for those who consider themselves Marxists. Some Communist countries, such as the Soviet Union and China, do have nations within a nation (the semi-autonomous "national minority" regions), so it may be correct to speak of internal nationalities in those countries. But in the United States, a similar situation does not exist: no state has been set aside for an ethnic group. About the only analogy here would be that of the Native American nations. Thus, unless one is a Native American, it is inappropriate to speak of "nationalities" or "national minorities" in the United States.

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If you ever travel outside of the United States, you will quickly realize that your only nationality is American. For every country you visit, you will have to fill out an application for an entry permit, and woebegone if you carelessly put anything other than American or USA in the space for nationality.

I hope NCRR spokespersons in the future will refrain from using the terms "nationality" and "national minority" when talking about Americans of Japanese ancestry. There are enough racists around who try to blame Japanese Americans for Pearl Harbor and Bataan, and we do not need NCRR people adding to the confusion. Our nationality is American--just like everyone else. We are fighting for redress/reparations as Americans for the benefit of Americans.

Sincerely,



Raymond Okamura

CC: NCRR/LTPRO

✓ Concerned Japanese Americans