



NCRRR Statement on Passage of HR 442 by the House of Representatives
September 17, 1987

In 1942, 120,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly herded into concentration camps by our own government -- the United States government -- without hearings or charges, in gross violation of our Constitutional rights. In effect, we were found guilty solely by reason of our race. This episode, a reaction to racism and wartime hysteria, remains one of the darkest stains on our democratic history.

Today, forty-five years later, the U.S. House of Representatives took a major step toward making amends for that terrible injustice by approving HR 442, the Japanese American redress bill, known as the Civil Liberties Act of 1987.

With today's vote, prospects for redressing the violation of our freedom and seizure of our property are brighter than ever. We still have a tough road ahead. If, as expected, the Senate passes the companion bill S 1009, the President must either sign it or a two-third majority in both Houses must override his veto, for the measure to be law. In this, the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, we call upon President Reagan to keep in mind the profound violations of constitutional rights inflicted on Japanese Americans in 1942. We also trust that he will take note of the strong bipartisan support for this measure in both the House and Senate.

We wish to thank all of the bill's 167 co-sponsors and all those who voted for the bill. We especially want to express our sincere gratitude to House Speaker Jim Wright, House Majority Leader Thomas Foley, the prime sponsor of HR 442, Majority Whip Tony Coelho, and Representatives Peter Rodino, Barney Frank, Norman Mineta,

Robert Matsui and Mervyn Dymally for guiding the bill through the legislative process and lining up the votes for the House victory.

But most of all, we credit the grassroots support which provided a rock solid foundation for the bill's sponsors in Congress. Without the courageous and insistent demand for justice by the former internees themselves, supported by their friends, children and grandchildren, this legislation would never have gotten off the ground in the first place. Moreover, without the support of justice-minded people of all nationalities, and civil rights, religious, veterans, labor and other organizations around the country this legislation would never have had a chance.

In the memory of the 442nd RCT/100th Battalion soldiers and the 60,000 former internees who have already died, we call on everyone who values racial justice and our constitutional freedoms to urge President Reagan to sign the bill when it reaches him early next year.

We, in the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations, believe that when this bill becomes law, the symbolic compensation of \$20,000 to each person who was imprisoned behind barbed wire by virtue of their ancestry will strengthen the rights of all Americans by deterring the government from ever again committing such an injustice.

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