



NATIONAL COALITION FOR REDRESS/REPARATIONS
244 S. San Pedro #406, Los Angeles, CA 90012

July 8, 1981

Dear Commissioner,

We in the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR) have attempted to participate in the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians process in a spirit of cooperation by urging people to attend the hearings, testify, and voice support for just redress and reparations for the Japanese people. The Commission, on the other hand, has shown itself to be insensitive to the Japanese community on a number of key points. First, we learned the Commissioners do not intend to have hearings in the evening hours. This does not take into account that working people will not be able to testify or participate because they cannot take off work.

Secondly, the hearings are reportedly to be held at a government facility that has no provisions for outside activities. This decision was made, in spite of NCRR strongly urging the hearings be held in a community facility, such as a church or other such place. Through our outreach into the Japanese community, we have found many people, especially Issei, have been reluctant to testify before the federal government that put them into camp. Many have stated that a government building would be intimidating. The Commission has responded that a government building would be free and adaptable to hearing needs. We strongly urge the Commission consider paying minimal rent for a community site to create an atmosphere conducive to full and unhindered testimony, as well as to enable NCRR to implement a long-standing plan to have activities outside the hearings such as photo displays, cultural entertainment and speakers.

Thirdly, while the Commission has accommodated our request for translators for Japanese-speaking testifiers, there is no commitment to have the entire proceedings translated for the Japanese-speaking community members who are making plans at this moment to attend the hearings. A majority of these people were the ones most affected by the camps, being at the prime of their lives at the time of the evacuation.

In addition, we feel that the testimonies themselves should in no way be limited. The Commission has indicated that testimony must fall into cer-

tain categories so as to avoid "repetition." We feel that of the number of testimonies that we have helped people prepare, there is no such "repetition." And in fact, each story is unique, and together forms a whole picture of this experience. Also, we are against limitations or "3 to 5 minutes" for each testimony. Although we understand the need for some structure, but the 3 to 5 minute limit is ridiculous, and goes counter to enabling any meaningful testimony about this experience that tore apart peoples lives and communities.

Finally, we are greatly concerned that many hearing sites have not been designated by the Commission, such as San Diego, San Jose, Sacramento, New York, New England. NCRR asked that given the lack of hearing sites for New York, that these people's transportation costs to the Washington D.C. hearings be provided by the Commission. But we were told that even our spokepeople must pay for their own travel and lodging. And there are no sites that would provide a forum for the unique experiences of the Japanese living and working in rural California, despite the fact that Japanese farmers and farm-workers toiled to turn the Sacramento River delta area from swamps into fertile and productive farm land. And so much of it was lost through the internment. And due to all the hearings being scheduled in the middle of the week, during regular working hours, even places like San Diego would find it impossible to travel to Los Angeles to participate in the hearings.

Due to the significance of this Commission process, we feel it only fair to the Japanese people throughout the U.S., as well as to all of the tax-paying American people, that there be a public accounting of how the allocated \$1 million is being spent.

While NCRR and others have been working hard preparing for the hearings, and the Japanese community as a whole is gearing up for our long-awaited "Day in Court," we have begun to have serious questions about the intent and perspective of the Commission. Earlier, we met with Commission members who seemed very open and receptive to our suggestions (many outlined above), but have received no official decisions until now, nearly a week before the opening of the first hearing in Washington D.C. We are strongly urging the Commission to reconsider their decisions in light of the tremendous impact that this process will have on thousands of Japanese Americans and their heirs who suffered the tragedy of false imprisonment. This is our first chance in forty years that we will be able to face the government and speak out about this profound experience. We want to support the Commission process as an important step in a long struggle for redress and reparations

for this dark chapter of American history. The Issei, 20% of whom were living at the poverty level in 1970 (census) as a direct result of the internment, cannot wait for another Commission. We want to recommendations of the Commission to reflect the sentiments of the Japanese American people. We want to process to provide the basis for Japanese Americans to be able to express our demand for JUSTICE NOW! REPARATIONS NOW!!

↓ (NCRR urges concerned people who support some or all of our concerns to write a letter or send a night letter (telegram) to the Commission: COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS (CWRIC) 726 Jackson Place, N.W., Washington D.C. 20506, or to call (202) 395-7390.

Signed,

National Coalition for Redress/Reparations

phone 620-0761