

NCRR BANNER



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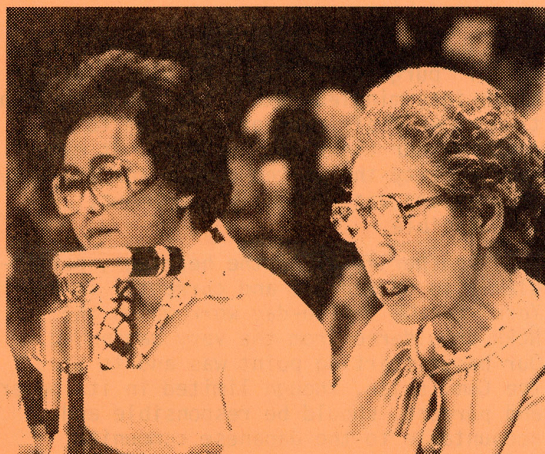
Looking Back on the Commission Hearings

The CWRIC hearings have come and gone in LA, SF, Seattle, Alaska and Chicago. The Commission, as everyone knows, was set up to investigate and determine "whether or not a wrong was committed" by the U. S. government in incarcerating over 120,000 Japanese and over 1,000 Aleuts during World War II. It will also consider forms of redress. Thus, this historical event drew JAs of all generations as witnesses and participants throughout the cities where hearings were held (1,500 in LA, 2,000 in SF/Bay Area, 1,800 in Seattle/Portland, 1,000+ in Chicago, and hundreds in Alaska.

As a former internee, I heard and relived the anger and pain with each testimony. Every sansei and yonsei alike, vicariously suffered each and every hardship and loss of their grandparents, parents and relatives. Niseis were to shatter the "quiet, American" myth as they boldly spoke out against racism and moved to act on principles when angered. And a surge of pride permeated the hearing halls from LA to Seattle. Yuji Ichioka, of LA, so aptly stated, "We've shown too much respect (to the white man), too much deference, for too long.... no more gaman". The burden of guilt has finally shifted onto the government, where it rightly belongs. There was the realization that finally, our children, the sansei and yonsei, could hear the full story for themselves, begin to gain an insight into their history and to regain pride in a heritage denied them.

Unfortunately, the LA proceedings were characterized by some critics as "a circus of freaks" with a surfeit of "sob stories" and "critically lacking in expert testimonies". Moreover, it was cited that the audience's emotions, though justified, did not warrant cheers and applause for such behavior was deemed "improper" in court hearings.

Would these people have preferred a controlled and passive audience? That we should have bowed our heads when Commissioner Lundgren said that Congress is in no mood for reparations; or remained silent when Hayakawa called the camps a 3-year vacation for the issei? Should we have turned the other cheek when Lillian Baker physically assaulted a nisei testifier? Yes, the audience cheered in support and approval and angrily booed when appropriate because our very pride and dignity were on the line! We Japanese righteously directed our longstanding grievances



IT IS ONLY RIGHT
For the internees
of America's concentration camps

"It is right that we are here
it is right that I remember
and tell it"

Hiroshi Kashiwagi,
A Meeting at Tule Lake

It is only right
that you tell your stories here
in a small, friendly patio in San Jose
with planes booming overhead
that makes us think
of the medfly 'copters
and the wars of one
and four decades ago.

It is only right
that you speak frankly
and directly -
plain, and vivid
for all to see.

It is only right
that the truth come out now -
the weight of your words
like a burden lifted
like something off your chests -
finally relieved.

It is only right
that we hear them now:
your stories of courage,
of pain and oppression

Of a young woman bent
and changed by humiliation
by facilities that stink,
are open,
and lack hygiene or dignity,

Of a sister dying
for need of insulin,
and hospitals
that shame the word,

cont. from p. 1

directly to the Commission, which was set up by the very government that created the camps. The hearings were a searing indictment of the U. S. government and various racist interests by the Japanese people themselves. And when the dam broke, there was no stopping it - for the outpouring encompassed a span of 40 years of suppressed anger and bitterness.

Importantly, the hearings were not an act of "purging" for its own sake. Bitter tears intermingled with pride and determination as we reaffirmed our resolve to continue our fight for justice. At every hearing city the united demand for monetary reparations was virtually unanimous, and irresistible.

Another facet of the hearings, particularly in SF and LA, and currently in New York, is the day-to-day work which the NCCR shouldered from the very beginning. Our basic starting point was and is that the Commission, though limited in its power and purpose, should be responsible and accountable to the Japanese community. Well before the hearings, the NCCR communicated to the Commission and its staff numerous demands: for additional hearing sites, Japanese translation, and evening/community sessions, etc. The NCCR organized the community to push for these things through countless phone calls, telegrams, letters and petitions to Washington. Last minute deadlines, changes and overall lack of information and coordination by the Commission resulted in grave confusion at different points. An NCCR person had to work with the executive staff person up

to the very day of the hearings to ensure that all the testifiers were confirmed. Translation for issei was coordinated entirely by the NCCR in LA and SF and otherwise would not have happened.

During the hearings themselves, the NCCR stood firm to oppose any attempt on the Commissioners' part to cut the testifiers short of their allotted time. In LA, Commissioner Lundgren once told a Japanese speaking panel to simply summarize their testimonies in English! To this, an NCCR person strongly objected, saying, "the isseis have been told to shut up for 40 years.. they deserve and have the right to give their testimonies in full and in their own language as prepared..."

Though the Commission has come and gone, the tremendous impact of the hearings on the Japanese people - both on a personal level and for our entire community's sense of common bond and destiny, will be with us for a long time to come. We reaffirmed an important lesson - that it was only through pressure from the grassroots level that any concessions can be won. Only with the continued organizing and unity of all groups and individuals can we hope to make the Commission come out with a favorable recommendation that is acted upon. Only with the support from the entire community plus backing from the broader American public, can we win reparations, and moreover, equality and justice as Japanese Americans.

- Lillian Nakano
NCCR, Los Angeles

SANSEI'S FEELINGS ON CWRIC HEARINGS

I am a sansei - third generation Japanese American. Although I was not born in a concentration camp, I spent every moment possible at the recent wartime relocation

hearings at the State building in Los Angeles.

I was recently asked to identify the nine most significant events in my life ... beginning with "when I was born." If I was asked that question today, these hearings, without a doubt, would be one of those listed as most significant. Not the hearings them-

selves, but the people who testified. Never in my life have I felt so many emotions so intensely - strength, anger, love, sadness, hatred - but pride, fierce,

resolute pride stands out the strongest.

And how I felt when I saw the Japanese people, my people, stand strong and firm in the face of racist attacks, arrogant

commissioner, intimidating conditions, and five minute time limits (Can you imagine! Five minutes to sum-up four years of indignities!) And I cried when they cried while telling their stories, unleashing 40 years of hidden pain and anger. But ours were not tears of weakness, they were tears accumulated

from each miserable day in camp; tears for each racist attack we experienced, each moment of pain and humiliation suffered, each friend or family lost during those

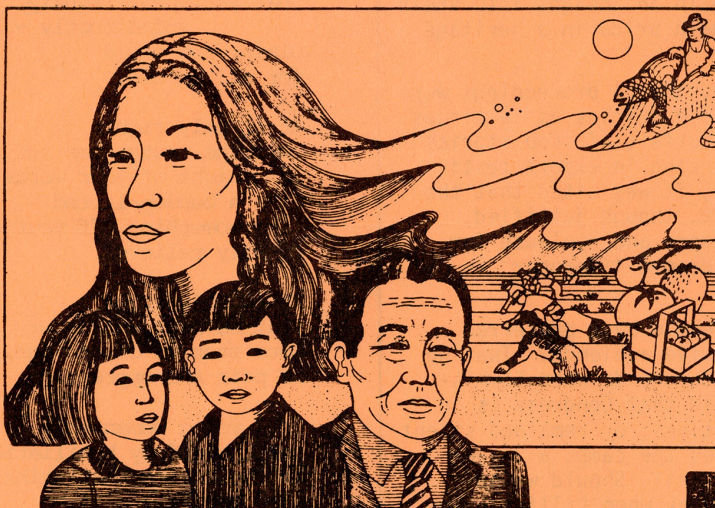


Illustration by Wes Sasaki

WINNING R/R: POST-HEARINGS "DIRECTIONS"...

Now that the Commission hearings are drawing to a close, many people may be wondering, "what now?" But at NCRR follow-up meetings and video programs, one important message came through - we must continue the work, keep up our initiative, unite even more closely as a community, and seek wider support in order to win redress/reparations.

While the Commission hearings brought forth a powerful call for r/r, the Commission's final recommendation remains a mystery. Various Commissioners at different points have made statements downplaying and even scoffing at the idea of individual payments of \$25,000. Overall, the Commission seemed to be more interested in some type of community fund.

KEEP THE PRESSURE ON THE COMMISSION

Therefore, it is vitally important that during this "Commission Period", the entire Nikkei community keep up the pressure on the Commission. Don't let them forget or try to sweep under the rug our demand for monetary compensation - individual payments and a community fund, as well as legal and educational forms of redress. We can do this in a number of ways:

1. The NCRR will be reactivating its petition drive, gathering more support for r/r both within our communities and among other nationalities.



cont. from p. 1

Of men shot,
for no apparent reason;
of the anguish
of wondering / if you're the next

Of coming to a camp
with barbed wire, and guns that kill
"For your own protection"
against your will.

Of needing to buy
what you never wanted to get.
Using the meager dollars you earn
to buy food / you can stomach
or clothes to fight / the bitter wind
and dust,

Of searches and wakeups
at 5 in the morning
and government men
that steal your fine silk scarves.

Of kindness offered
by Nikkei to Nikkei:
families sheltered, the sick tended,
utilities paid by generous hands,

Of men that have built
their businesses from sweat
year after tired year
to see "their government"
take it all away,

2. The NCRR is continuing to organize and submit testimony, especially from the issei, many of whom were not able to testify at the hearings.

3. Push for a New York hearing. The Concerned Japanese Americans, member of the NCRR, has been very busy organizing in the New York area for a hearing. While the Commission has given verbal commitments, no definite date has been set, causing unnecessary inconvenience for the community.

cont. on p. 4



Of wives and families
kept from their men,
left fearing and waiting,
and waiting, and waiting
in manure-lined horse stalls
without a word,

It is only right
that we hear your stories now
moving us / to the brink of tears
It is only right
that our respect / and understanding grow-

It is only right
that you let the truth be known!
To us, in San Jose
to the commission, in San Francisco,
to all those / that need to be educated

It is only right
that you get reparations -
cash now/ for the gross injustice;
payment now / for the great material loss

It is only right
that the communities get a fund -
small pittance, for the many needs,
the many effects of the ugly camps

It is only right
that the story be told -
in the classes, to the nation
how the Japanese were wronged.

It is only right
that the laws be overturned,
that the legal basis
be refuted today.

It is only right
to stand for what is right
to fight all oppression,
and learn from the others' fight.

It is only right,
and we will have what is right!

cont. from p. 3

4. Demand that the January deadline for the Commission's recommendation be extended. The NCRR has already submitted letters to the Commission expressing our dissatisfaction with this unrealistic deadline. If the deadline was extended, the Commission could hold more hearings in cities where large populations of Japanese Americans exist (San Jose, Sacramento, Fresno, San Diego, Denver, Salt Lake City, etc.), as well as conduct more research.

5. Urge the Commission to come back to the community in some way to report on its recommendation before submitting it to Congress. After all, the Commission should be responsible to the Nikkei community, and the people should have the final say on the recommendation.

Over the next several months, the NCRR will also be holding community discussions in order to concretize our demands to submit to the Commission. Much of this discussion has already taken place, however, there needs to more input on some points. For example, should the \$25,000 per individual amount be raised? How should the community fund be administered and what should it be used for? These are questions that must be decided by the community itself. Once consolidated, these demands will be forwarded to the Commission.

If the Commission decides not to include these demands in their recommendation, they could be used as a basis for drafting legislation for a direct appropriations bill to submit to Congress. Already, there has been much interest in the direct appropriations approach because if successful, it would be the quickest, most direct means of getting r/r.

AND BEYOND.....

Pushing for as favorable a recommendation as possible is only part of our task. The NCRR has always held that the Commission process should not be regarded as an end in itself. We have a long haul ahead of us and there is no easy or quick solution to winning r/r. At this time, there are many ideas and opinions in our community as to strategies for winning r/r. This is a positive thing, and the NCRR is supportive of all efforts to win r/r, whether through class action, direct legislation, etc.

While supporting all efforts, the NCRR will be moving to gather resources and ideas from our own members and supporters in order to hammer out which strategy to pursue as an organization. We hope to establish a Legal/Legislative Committee which can help pool the knowledge and information that is out there and develop proposals for which path to take. For example, we feel there are both pros and cons to the class action suit approach, lobbying a direct appropriations bill and the tax write-off plan. These

strategies must be weighed carefully and opened up for scrutiny and feedback by the community. We hope that the NCRR can play a positive role in bringing this discussion to the community and organizing the people behind whichever route is decided upon.

While we hammer out our own strategy, we will continue to keep up the grassroots organizing. We believe that if there is no strong, united voice for r/r among the masses of people, no strategy - whether through Congress or the courts will be successful. It is naive to think that Congress or the legal system is "objective" and "above" mass sentiment or political pressure (whether from the common people or the power elite). We can be sure that the government will be resisting our demands every step of the way, no matter how much proof we have of constitutional rights being violated.

Thus, the importance of creating more mass pressure, involvement and education. Already, the NCRR has held numerous post-hearings programs, video showings, and meetings, with the aim of reaching more people and keeping the momentum going.

In this light, we must express our regret that since the hearings, certain groups and individuals seem to be losing sight of what we are all fighting for and spending too much energy criticizing each other, rather than the government itself, which has yet to be made accountable for its crimes.

We cannot stress enough the need for unity, for mutual cooperation and respect, and criticism that is constructive and moves us closer to our goal of redress/reparations. Only with this powerful weapon - unity - can we hope to accomplish such a formidable task and act in the best interest of the Japanese American community as a whole.



IF YOU WOULD LIKE HELP WITH YOUR TESTIMONY, OR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE NCRR, CONTACT ONE OF THE REGIONALS BELOW:

LOS ANGELES - Bert (213) 532-9527
Merrilyn 267-0299

SAN DIEGO - Jan (714) 280-5263

SACRAMENTO - Kathy (916) 323-2302

SAN FRANCISCO - Cathy or Don (415) 921-8841

SAN JOSE - Julie (408) 287-9710

NEW YORK - Sasha (212) 732-3467

UNITED AUTO WORKERS
SUPPORT NCRR!

- Local 1364 of UAW in Fremont, CA. supports the cause of fighting against discrimination and inequality of all nationalities.
- We believe that the NCRR and the Japanese community's demand for redress/ reparations is a just demand.
- Our local is proud to have endorsed and contributed financial support to the NCRR as well as testified towards this goal at the recent Commission hearings in San Francisco.
- We are not stopping here at our local level. We are soliciting support from the Regional level (6 Northwest states) and up to the International UAW.
- As our members who testified at the hearings stated, "We want other unions to support this important cause". We would like to thank the NCRR for bringing this issue before us and soliciting our support.

Signed,
Newton Kamakani,
Financial Secretary
Roy Mita, Committeeman
Naomi Kubota,
on behalf of Local 1364,
United Auto Workers

PUSH FOR A NEW YORK HEARING DATE!

The East Coast Japanese Americans for Redress, a coalition initiated by Concerned Japanese Americans (CJA) has been busily organizing the greater NY area JA community to testify before the CWRIC. The problem is that there has been no definite date set, although verbal statements have indicated a November hearing. We urge all NCRR members and supporters to contact the Commission at the address below, and urge them to set a date for this important hearing!

CWRIC
726 Jackson Place, N. W.
Suite 2020
Washington, D. C. 20506
(202) 395-7390

cont. from p. 2

terrible years, each career stopped dead, each community and family destroyed, each happiness stripped away.

And it was these tears over the past three days that flowed freely and naturally into a wave of unity so powerful, that nothing could stop us. And that unity as a Japanese people surged through the hearing room, and spilled out into the overflow rooms and the halls where even more Japanese people stood listening and fully supporting with hearts and minds and bodies ...

Once destroyed, dispersed, disbanded; spread all over the country and state; doctors, seamstresses, fishermen; Issei, Nisei, Sansei, and Yonsei ... and now we were one!! And no one can ever take that away from us again.

Together we relived the common bond of our life experience, the re-emergence of our fighting spirit, and with the power and justness of our cause, we demand direct monetary compensation for all the injustices, for all the years of pain and loss, for all the years we struggled to rebuild the community.

And I just wanted to thank you - the Japanese community, my people, for coming out, for being there, for giving me one of the most significant moments in my life, for daring to tell our story, for challenging the foundation upon which this country was supposed to have been built, for demanding justice and reparations, for making me proud, so proud to be a part of the Japanese people.

- Linda Miya Iwataki
NCRR Member, Los Angeles
August 6, 1981

THE NCRR WOULD LIKE TO GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE
THE MANY INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS WHO HAVE
DONATED THEIR MONEY TO "THE CAUSE".
TO ALL OF YOU ---
OUR HEARTFELT "THANKS" !!!

**** MEMBERSHIP/DONATION FORM ****

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE NCRR _____
YES, I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DONATION _____ AMOUNT \$ _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

(Individual membership is \$5.00, organizational membership is \$25.00)

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