

Day of Remembrance, Hunter College, 7th floor (714) Saturday,  
Feb. 21, 1986, 1 p.m.

Remarks by Franklin J. Woo, Director, China Program, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. on a Day of Remembrance of Executive Order 9066 which, signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, placed over 110,000 Japanese Americans and their relatives (many of whom were classified by the government as 'aliens') into incarceration in the wake of Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Dear Friends:

Today we are gathered here to remember and honor the more than 110,000 women, men and children of Japanese descent who, 44 years ago with little warning and preparation took only what they could carry of their personal belongings, were efficiently and ruthlessly herded into ten 'relocation' camps in the United States away from the Pacific coast.

We remember and honor the 17,818 who went to Poston (Arizona)

18,789 to Tule Lake (California)

10,046 to Manzanar (California)

(Figures are from Bridge,  
Winter 1981-82, p. 13.)

13,348 to Gila River (Arizona)

9,397 to Minidoka (Idaho)

10,764 to Heart Mountain (Wyoming)

7,318 to Granada (Amache) (Colorado)

8,350 to Topaz (Utah)

9,475 to Rohwer (Arkansas)

8,497 to Jerome (Arkansas)

making a total of 113,798 people, victims of war hysteria who were cut off by their own American society, caught up in misguided patriotism.



Where were you in 1942? If you're too young, where were your parents? Where was I?

What lessons, if any, have we as a people been able to learn from that inhumane act in our nation's history?

If indeed Executive Order 9066 is part of our national history, then it is not just the story (important and poignant as it is) of Japanese Americans and some of their relatives who were regarded as 'aliens'.

We as Americans need to remember this day. We need to recollect, to recall to mind with intentionality, lest we forget and cannot advance morally and in practice beyond it.

Forty-four years ago we were a nation caught up in war hysteria and vengeful patriotism. I remember every morning hearing patriotic music over the radio, always ending with the words, "My country--my country, right or wrong."

When in March 1942 we saw the evacuation order signed by Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt wired to telephone poles giving specific instructions to Japanese when and how to leave the California coastal cities; we felt that things were in control and that we were somewhat safe from external threat. General DeWitt had come to the rescue.

At George Washington High School in San Francisco--when friend Dan Ota, editor of our school paper, came into the home room to sign out before departure to one of the camps, our class was noisy by its silence. No one said a word. Baffled and wounded, Dan was avoided by all of us as if he had contacted AIDS.

In Chinatown, people were wearing badges which said "Chinese,"



"Me Chinese," or, (perhaps in better English) "I am Chinese."  
Business was booming. Wanting to expand their dress shop, my  
parents had bought out (at a tremendous bargain) the store and  
its furnishings down the street, known to us only as "the  
Japanese cleaners."

Remember. It is painful for me to remember that past as it is  
for my Japanese American friends. Where were we?  
What happened? Was it only a mindless, irrational act, quite  
explicable under the prevailing mood and circumstances of war and  
vengeance?

Perhaps, but I think not. Executive Order 9066 was a  
systematically well thought out rational act following the logic  
of "national security" which has become much more sophisticated  
in the western world and its satellites over the last four  
decades.

It is that same rationality that in assembly-line fashion  
liquidated millions of innocent people in ovens, segregated  
people into Sowetos and other controllable "hamlets," "contained  
communism," shore up dictatorships against their own people,  
"salvage" undesirable activists, "destablilize" or "liberate"  
countless governments in the name of freedom, or tolerate  
farcical elections as long as we can keep air bases and business  
in the country.

Remember <sup>then,</sup> the more than 110,000 women, men and children for they  
are part of our national story.



For only in remembrance (and repentance) can we be enabled to move  
and to  
ahead struggle in hope of a better America and a better world.

Remember we must.

Another important aspect of remembering is to re-member.

That is, remembering in the sense of regrouping, reconstituting,  
or reforming a society that has suffered dis-memberment  
because of exclusion of part of its members.

This remembering is a continuing process, especially true for the  
United States, a nation of immigrants.

How to re-member all its citizens, early and late, especially those  
who have been cast off by conquest, by racism and by bigotry is  
still a problem for us all today.

In the nation's stories we need to remember not just the  
Mayflower, or the covenant of English, Scottish, Dutch, German or Irish  
America; but also that of Black America which came against its will. We  
need to re-member Native peoples whose land was taken to make  
room for settlers, early and late. We remember not just the  
"tired and huddled masses" of southern and eastern Europe; but also Asians,  
Latin American and Caribbean latecomers as well.

Re-membering is a continuous process. America is a nation in  
formation and reformation.

There is a lot of coverage on the spaceship, Challenger, in the  
news these days. We are literally sweeping the bottom of the  
ocean in search of clues which will solve the technological  
problem of space exploration.



Much of the fundamental problem of America as a nation, as a people,  
however, is not technological. Rather, it is moral.

I wonder how the astronauts would look at their country right now from  
where they are (wherever that might be). Perhaps we can imagine what they  
might say to us from their vantage point of nine miles in the sky and  
220,000 feet in the clouds. I have written a few imaginary lines which I  
wish to dedicate to the seven astronauts and their loved ones, especially  
to Ellison Onizuka who has joined his Japanese American uncles and cousins  
who fought and died so nobly in the combat regiment known as '442' in  
World War II. I have entitled these lines "If Ashes Could Speak."

IF ASHES COULD SPEAK

Vibrant protoplasm catapulting into space,  
Now a myriad of particles, sad memory of human race.  
If ashes could speak,  
We would say to you, our fellow Americans,  
In consuming fire, that pillar of cloud  
against blue January sky . . .  
We are equal and we were proud--

Women and men . . .  
black, white and yellow . . .  
agnostic, Catholic, Protestant, Jew --  
returned to dust from whence we came.

If ashes could speak,  
We would say to you, our fellow Americans,  
T'was "national security" and its rationality  
In name of "progress" and "frontier"  
That sent us to our celestial eternity.  
If ashes could speak,



We would say to you, our fellow Americans

Remember this day Executive Order No. 9066.

For only up here is America what it could be.

Down there . . . America is "yet-to-be."

Only here is ours truly the "melting pot,"

Remember . . . re-member . . .

Lest ours also be your lot!

*Franklin J. Woo*

2-21-86