



"DAY OF REMEMBRANCE"

OPENING STATEMENT

BERT NAKANO

NATIONAL COALITION FOR REDRESS/REPARATIONS

FEBRUARY 19, 1983

Each year, we gather on this 19th day of February which signifies the signing of EO9066 41 years ago - a day of infamy - a day which we Japanese Americans will never forget, nor will we let our children and grandchildren forget - nor will we ever again submit to such injustice and humiliation without a fight, or let it happen to any other group of people. It was this day which began the process of incarcerating over 120,000 Americans and legal aliens of Japanese ancestry into concentration camps - yes, concentration camps in the most desolate parts of our country with barb wire, sentry tower and guarded gates. Without justification, we were denied our basic constitutional rights and due process of law, resulting in huge losses and suffering.

On this day of remembrance, we also want to commemorate the Issei - our parents and grandparents, who as immigrants, faced the brunt of racist discrimination throughout their lives. When they were hauled into the camps in 1942, this was but another blow upon the thousands of insults suffered. While they toiled the land which they were barred from owning, while they were denied citizenship which they have every right to - injustices too numerous to list - they persevered with pride and courage. Indeed, our proud history is their legacy to us because they endured. Today, as we fight for reparations, it is already 40 years too late for the many Issei who have passed away and this is a bitter pill to swallow.

In looking back at the commission hearings, we can say that this was truly a historic turning point in our community. 40 years of silence - and this was not because we chose to be quiet and passive - erupted into angry and bitter indictment and a demand for justice and reparations now. We drowned the likes of Hayakawa and others in as we stood proud and united - Issei, nisei, sansei and yonsei.

But today, Feb. 19, 1983, is not only a time to reflect, more importantly, it is a time to look ahead. The Commission (CWRIC) report and recommendation is due to be public between now and June. The Legislative bills by different groups are either ready to be introduced to Congress or soon to be completed. NCJAR plans to file its class action suit in the Court after the Commission makes public its findings. On the State, City and County level, bills have already passed to compensate the workers who lost their jobs as a result of the evacuation. Editorials in the various newspapers and TV media are now supporting monetary reparations. Recently, the facts disclosed on the Korematsu, Hirabayashi & Yasui case present some grave implications on the role of the high Courts and the U.S. Government. From all this movement, we can sense a turning point in our campaign. At the same time, we all know that in this period of unemployment, recession and cutbacks, winning monetary reparations will be extremely difficult. There are arguments that our demands will cause backlash, among other things. We say to that - is there ever a "right" time for redress? What we have learned throughout the struggle is that people's efforts - relying on ourselves - is an all-important factor which makes up the drive and force of a powerful movement - and only such a movement can force the U.S. Govt. to act on justice. As a grassroots organization, NCR/RR has and will continue to aggressively organize and mobilize to build this movement - outreaching to churches, civil rights groups, labor, gardeners, veterans groups, on the campuses.....

Last year, we began working on our bill which was the result of input by many individuals and groups in our community with NCR/RR's principles incorporated. From the onset, Congressman Mervyn Dymally of the 31st Distr. of the State of CA spent many hours with our NCR/RR Legislative Committee lending his assistance and expertise in the process. Congressman Dymally then introduced the bill in the lameduck special session of Congress in December, 1982. We knew full well that the bill would terminate at the end of the special session, but our goals have been to: ONE - build awareness in Congress and the American public of the issue and the demands; TWO - to have the commission made aware of the same, and THREE - to provide a basis for other RR groups to compare and share their proposed approaches to reparations.

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Basically, our bill HR7384 speaks to the direct individual payment of \$25,000 to evacuees or their heirs to compensate for violation of our rights and losses incurred as a result of E09066. HR7383 is for a community fund in the amount of 3 billion dollars to restore social, economic and cultural well being to our communities which were disrupted and damaged as a result of E09066.

But foremost to NCRR is that of forging a common struggle behind one bill as a community united. It means that in the interest of the entire JA community and in order to build a strong movement required to win reparations, all of the RR groups - the JACL, the Washington Coalition, the Chicago and the New York RR groups and the NCRR must come together. To that end, NCRR has and will continue to meet, share and discuss with all groups to help lay the basis for unity. We feel that it is moving in that positive direction and we look forward to on-going formal meetings so that out of that process, one bill will emerge.

We can then pursue our struggle as one community and to make reparations no longer a distant dream but a reality. This will require the involvement of each and everyone of us in the community. We urge you to join us in NCRR or the JACL - and talk to every relative and friend to become involved. We must also reach out to seek the support of other non-JA individuals and organizations. The tasks are tremendous - but with a little help from every Nikkei, writing letters, petitioning, fundraising, seeking endorsement, knocking on the doors of our Congressman, etc., our forces will swell and we will be heard. What all this means is that we will rise up again in the spirit of the hearings and demand justice in our fight to victory. We can proudly say that in this struggle for reparations, we are also fighting for something bigger and far-reaching - and that is for equality, our pride and heritage - for all generations.

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