

Reparations Battle Drags On for Some Japanese

■ **World War II:** Many cases that are still active involve people who say they were hurt by actions other than internment.

By SHARON YAMATO DANLEY
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

A 15-year battle led to an apology and \$20,000 for every living person of Japanese ancestry interned during World War II. But even though her parents and more than 79,000 former evacuees have received their checks, the fight is not over for Kay Ochi.

Ochi, who was born after the war and doesn't qualify for reparations, isn't fighting for herself. She is waging a campaign for 2,000 Japanese Americans she insists have been unjustly denied redress.

Ochi is legislative director of the National Coalition of Redress and Reparations, a grass-roots organization of volunteers who lobby the federal Office of Redress Administration. Their goal is to persuade officials to amend and interpret more broadly the 1988 law that provides redress for "any living individual of Japanese ancestry who . . . was confined, held in custody, relocated or otherwise deprived of liberty or property" from Dec. 7, 1941, to June 30, 1946.

She points to Crenshaw-area native Reiko Nimura, who was 14 when she, her mother and three brothers were taken from an internment camp at Amache, Colo., and reunited with her father, who like some other Japanese American leaders, had been arrested. They were taken aboard a prisoner-of-war ship to Japan and used in a prisoner exchange to "bring back



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Kay Ochi, front, and her grass-roots organization is lobbying the U.S. government for WWII reparations for Japanese Americans such as, from left, Reiko Nimura, Marveene Naramura and Lois Tateishi

American citizens of white ancestry."

Nimura later learned that her father was given the choice of returning to Japan or living apart from his family until the war was over. He felt he would die in camp without them, she says.

As a minor who had no choice, Nimura, 66, says she spent more than three years in enemy country, afraid to step beyond her neighborhood for fear that others would discover she was American.

Without her parents, she returned to the U.S. after the war only to find her friends and chances

of a high school diploma had slipped away. Nimura's case is one of more than 150 involving minors who were relocated to Japan and were denied redress.

Many of the cases of those ineligible for redress involve children born outside the internment camps, Ochi says.

Crenshaw resident Shiro Tenma, 75, says he and his wife were sent to an assembly center, then volunteered as laborers for a sugar beet farm in Utah. In Ogden, they shared a pig shed with another couple before finally moving to a friend's house at the time their

daughter, Marveene, was born. Marveene Naramura was denied redress even though her parents received their \$20,000.

Lois Tateishi's family was not interned or evacuated because they lived in Wyoming, outside the restricted area on the West Coast. But Tateishi contends that the federal government caused her father to lose his job with Union Pacific railroad.

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Battle Drags On for Some Japanese Americans



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indicates that in 1942, Union Pacific advised the FBI about the imminent discharge of all Japanese Americans. Tateishi, 54, remembers as a little girl having to wear a sign that said "I am Chinese" to avoid anti-Japanese bigotry.

These cases are among 115 on file at the office of the National Coalition of Redress and Reparations.

In addition, a lawsuit has been filed by attorney Gerald Sato on behalf of a West Los Angeles teacher who was born in 1943 after her parents moved to Utah to escape forced evacuation. Although her parents and two older siblings received reparations, she did not. She says the government "is trying to make this Band-Aid as small as possible."

Sato says his argument filed in the Court of Federal Claims is that whatever the injury, if "motivated by race or national origin, it is real human suffering." What happened to these children was a direct result of their Japanese ancestry, he says.

The case is stayed pending a decision in the U.S. Court of Appeals on a similar action won by Sato in a lower court. A favorable decision in that related case could help determine the fate of as many as 900 others.

Ochi, a college adviser at Fairfax High, bristles at what she calls the "unfortunate thinking in this country that discounts the suffering of children."

She says that until the early 1980s she was a shy, suburban housewife. But after attending the 1981 hearings in which many Japanese Americans wept as they recounted the wartime indignities they suffered, she decided that she had to become an activist.