



February 1991

NCRR BANNER

National Coalition for Redress/Reparations

February 1991

244 So. San Pedro St., Rm. 411, Los Angeles, CA 90012

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NCRR and Japanese Americans Speak Out in Support of Arab Americans

— January 28, 1991 - an Arab American student is attacked by fellow students at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., who yell, "You people are the cause of all problems."

— In Tulsa, Oklahoma, a Muslim school is vandalized and a worship service interrupted when rocks are thrown through the windows.

— FBI agents begin to "interview" Arab American community leaders, asking them about Saddam Hussein and whether they know anyone who is a terrorist.

Sound familiar? To Japanese Americans, these incidents can't help but bring back dark memories of the period just prior to the evacuation. But these are experiences you may face if you happen to be Arab American today (or even someone who resembles a person from that region). Anti-Arab hostility and stereotyping that existed long before the Persian Gulf crisis has worsened dramatically due to the war with Iraq. In January, 1990, there was one reported case of anti-Arab harassment in the U.S. In January, 1991, 58 such hate crimes were reported.

This January, just before the war with Iraq started, the FBI began interviewing Arab American leaders. The interviews began with the FBI warning of a possible backlash against Arab Americans, but quickly jumped to the individual's views of the war, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and continued with questions like, "Do you know anyone planning to blow up federal installations?"

Although Los Angeles FBI head, Lawrence Lawler, said that any connection between the treatment of Arab Americans and Japanese Americans during World War II was "so ridiculous it's irresponsible," the strong parallels were not lost for NCRR members and others in the Japanese American community.

NCRR immediately issued a statement condemning the FBI targeting of Arab Americans. In the words of Bert Nakano, National NCRR spokesperson, "While the FBI certainly can and should do all it can to prevent terrorist acts, it is wrong and only reinforces racial hysteria to single out people for investigation based solely on their ancestry or national origin. By publicly targeting them for investigation, the FBI is casting unwarranted suspicion on Arab American business and community leaders who have nothing to do with terrorism."

In San Jose, San Francisco and Los Angeles, NCRR has participated in press conferences, educational programs and rallies, along with the JACL, the American Civil Liberties Union and Arab Americans, in defense of the civil rights of Arab Americans. At the upcoming Day of Remembrance programs, representatives from Arab American groups are invited to talk about what is going on and how we can support them.

In early February the FBI announced that it has

ended its interviews of Arab Americans. We think this was largely due to the immediate outcry by various groups, including Japanese Americans. Perhaps the U.S. government, learning from Japanese American redress, realizes it has to be a little more careful before it tramples wholesale on an entire community's civil rights, again.

At the same time, it appears that some FBI interviews are continuing. On February 4, Ghassan Khalek, an Arab American who works for the Federal Communications Commission, was interviewed at work after FBI agents entered, flashing their badges. This incident took place after the FBI said it had completed its interviews. In the words of Mr. Khalek, "There are some people who don't want to hang out with you, they don't want to go to lunch with you because they know the FBI is looking for you."

NCRR should continue to speak out on this important issue of civil rights and racism. Our unique experience of the concentration camps has put us in a position where we can appreciate the hardships Arab Americans are facing. For NCRR, we are continuing our struggle for justice—beyond redress—for the civil rights of all people in this country.

NCRR NEEDS YOU!

Everyday people are what makes NCRR a special organization. We could not have accomplished what we did without many people getting involved on all different levels. In order for NCRR to grow we need your help in the following areas:

1. **REDRESS** - Help us continue to monitor the redress payment process and assist eligible individuals.

2. **EDUCATION** - We need help working on curriculum issues and especially, we need Nisei and Issei who will share their camps experience with others.

3. **CIVIL RIGHTS/RACISM** - Racist violence is on the rise and the civil rights of minorities are being threatened daily. NCRR strives to speak out on these issues (e. g., harassment and violence against Arab Americans) and needs your voice and participation.

4. **CHILDREN** - Our children are our future. We need help putting on children's workshops and activities about the camps and Japanese American experience.

5. **ART/CULTURE** - Art and culture is a right not a privilege! Help us set up a committee to protest discriminatory entertainment as well as work on our annual mochitsuki.

Educational Video Draws Criticism

One of the greatest lessons learned from the World War II internment is that we must be vigilant in protecting the rights of all Americans. We must not let this lesson be lost at any time, especially during a time of crisis, when civil rights are most vulnerable. This point is very relevant today. Just before the U.S. went to war with Iraq, the Justice Department authorized the interrogation of Arab Americans by the FBI, thus casting unwarranted suspicion on the loyalty of all Americans of Arab ancestry.

Education about the injustice and suffering that Japanese Americans endured during World War II is critical so that Americans will take this lesson to heart and not permit such events to happen again.

A good place to start is in the schools. America's children must learn about the past so that they can be informed citizens of the future. We must provide the clearest message possible in their education.

There is now a video being considered for official use throughout California schools to educate high school students about the evacuation and internment. Entitled, "Without Due Process", the 50-minute video was initiated by Assemblyman Mike Roos in 1987 and was funded by the State for \$50,000. Passing over more qualified groups, the State Department of Education chose Jerry Griffith of KIXE-TV in Redding, California, to produce the video. Griffith, by his own admission, lacked the knowledge and understanding of the complex issues and history surrounding the internment. This choice appears to have doomed the project to failure.

"Griffith's earliest versions of the video were reviewed by Japanese American groups throughout the state and were thoroughly criticized and deemed unacceptable. Even many of those interviewed in the video were embarrassed by out-of-context quotes and by the overall poor quality of the video. One of the main criticisms was that there was a blurring of viewpoints—the distinction between what was right and wrong was much too subtle, especially as an educational tool for young students. One example is the use of the term, "Jap" in several quotes by leading elected officials at the time, without any comment about the derogatory nature of the term, thus leading a student to believe that the term is acceptable.

Many educators who reviewed the video concluded that as an educational tool, the video failed. They felt that the video was boring, scattered, and failed to drive home a clear message.

After almost 3 years, and with the generous and able assistance of the Japanese American community, the most recent version of the video corrects some of the serious defects. Next month, the video will come before the California Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission, which will decide whether or not to approve it. If approved, the video would stand throughout California as the authoritative and comprehensive instructional material dealing with the internment.

The central question is not whether there has been improvement or whether the video is "better than nothing", but rather, is it good enough to be the only or the main State-funded resource on the internment? The Statewide Steering Committee of NCRR believes that the answer to this question is NO. While the video contains some useful information and footage, it fails to clearly convey the tragedy and injustice of the internment. The Committee does not have the confidence that

the present producer, however well intentioned and hard working, can or will produce a video of acceptable quality. Rather than prolonging this controversy, the Committee feels that it would be in the best interest of all concerned for the current work on the video to be ended and the project turned over to a more qualified film/video maker.

NCRR has been working with other Japanese American organizations in the Northern and Southern California Ad Hoc Committee on the Japanese American Internment Video. The Southern California Ad Hoc Committee voted to reject the final version of the video.

We urge people to express your concerns to members of the History/Social Science Committee of the Curriculum Development Commission. The Chairperson of the Committee is: Daniel Chernow, Pacific Theatre Corporation, 120 N. Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90048.

ORA Redress Update

Bob Bratt, recently announced that less than 2,000 checks (of the first 25,000 eligible persons) remain to be dispersed. Confirmation letters are now being distributed to eligible individuals between the ages of 64-69 years of age.

The ORA recently held workshops in the Los Angeles area to individually answer questions and process eligible persons. Bratt said similar workshops will be held over the next few months.

A reminder to all recipients: your redress payment is not taxable, but you must report it on your income tax returns.

NCRR General Meeting

March 2, 1991

11:00 a.m.

244 So. San Pedro St., Room 411
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Join NCRR! Renew your membership today!

NCRR is on a new membership drive. We need your input, participation and support in helping chart NCRR's future direction.

- ☐ \$20/General
☐ \$10/Students/Seniors
☐ \$ Donation _____

Name _____

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Send to: NCRR
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