



BANNER

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NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR REDRESS/REPARATIONS

SEVEN MONTHS LEFT FOR REDRESS

NCRR STEPS UP REDRESS EFFORTS, CALLS FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

By Richard Katsuda

August 10, 1988, was a momentous day for Japanese Americans and all who vigorously guard the civil rights of all Americans. After some ten years of grassroots organizing and lobbying within Congress by the Nikkei Congressional Members, Japanese American Citizens League, National Council for Japanese American Redress, and National Coalition for Redress/Reparations (NCRR), the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was signed into law by then-President Ronald Reagan.

The enactment of the Civil Liberties Act was a great symbol of the potential power that Japanese Americans, like all Americans, have to redress wrongs committed by our government. But like all symbols, the Civil Liberties Act would not bear true redress without further action by the Japanese American community.

After the Act became law, NCRR and others in the community still needed to put pressure on Congress to provide appropriations to fund the redress program and payments. Redress apologies and payments finally became a reality in October 1990.

We then found out that there were more than 20,000 survivors of the exclusion and internment than had originally been estimated. So, in 1992, NCRR and our community had to go back to Congress to push for an amendment to the Act to add appropriations



Railroad workers' families, Japanese Latin Americans hold press conference with NCRR, JACL and ACLU on August 10, 1997 (photo by J. Small)

for those survivors.

Then NCRR began to learn of people who were being denied redress. Through the years, NCRR fought for those denied redress through meetings with the officials of the Department of Justice and members of Congress, letter-writing campaigns, constant communication with the Office of Redress Administration (ORA), support of court cases filed on behalf of claimants, and sustained education of the community. Some categories have won their due redress; others have not.

Among those who have won their redress/reparations during this last period are: children born to so-called "voluntary" evacuees after their parents had moved from the West Coast (if born on or before January 20, 1945); minor children of Japanese Americans who had been forced to be part of a prisoner exchange with Japan; Japanese American residents of the Phoenix/Glendale, Arizona area since the enactment of the Civil Liberties Act, twenty years since our community began organizing the Redress Movement, and we are still fighting to win justice for all those who were deprived of their civil liberties during World War II.

There is a great deal of urgency because the doors of the ORA are

scheduled to close on August 10, 1998. Now is the time for our community to show what redress is really all about—people coming together to fight for justice for all!

As we continue our grassroots efforts, working with the Campaign for Justice for Japanese Latin Americans, Japanese American

Citizens League, and other organizations, NCRR is also working with a team of lawyers to pursue court cases on behalf of redress claimants.

NCRR has made it known to ORA that more time might well be required to successfully exhaust all potential remedies by the August 10 deadline. NCRR has inquired about the possibility of extending the life of the Civil Liberties Act. The ORA said that it does not foresee a need to do so, given its current disposition on redress denials and anticipated workload to process those currently deemed eligible for redress.

With that position, the ORA has stated, "We must receive all new cases by January 31, 1998 to ensure that a determination can be made before the end of the program." For new cases filed after that date, the ORA cannot promise that the processing will be finalized by the August 10 scheduled closing date.

NCRR therefore asks all of you to spread the word to any potential redress claimants. Even if you and the potential claimant think there's no chance for redress, urge that person to apply anyway. Given all the denials-turned-redress we have fought for and won in the redress campaign, one can

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never be sure what will happen in the next seven months.

NCRR's will do everything within our means to exhaust all potential remedies by August 10. And we are upbeat, optimistic. We have come too far and won too many victories to feel otherwise. This twenty-year Redress Movement has been amazing—there have been so many apparently hopeless situations that have, with perseverance on the community's part, turned into redress won.

We are confident that, in the next seven months, this redress momentum will break through the remaining categories of redress denials, and that justice will be won for all those who were deprived of their civil liberties during World War II. But to do so, to keep up the momentum, we need the community to come out in full force so that everyone in the community gets their due justice.

Please write to President Bill Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno to stand up for justice and grant redress to those who have been denied.

To redress Japanese Latin Americans, they need simply to settle the lawsuit currently in the Federal Court of Claims, *Mochizuki vs. the United States America*. To redress railroad workers and their families as well as mine workers who were fired at the onset of the war simply because of their Japanese ancestry, they can utilize the "benefit of the doubt" clause of the Act.

Plans are also under way for Japanese Latin American internees and their supporters to travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with Administration officials and Congress members. Railroad workers, their families, and mine workers will also travel with supporters and lawyers to meet with the Department of Justice.

To help these efforts, NCRR is asking the community to donate money to defray the cost of travel for railroad and mine workers and Japanese Latin Americans and all supporters.

This is the last chance for the Japanese American community to recognize and bring to general public awareness the injustices done by the U.S. government during World War II by speaking up for redress. The community must take charge and work together to insure that justice is served to everyone.

1981 Los Angeles CWRIC Hearings Video Available Soon

By Janice Yen

After months of video viewing and indexing and a full week dedicated to video format transfer, and NCRR and Visual Communications have just finished transferring 25 hours of VHS videotape footage from the 1981 Commission hearings in Los Angeles to the more permanent medium, beta digital tape.

In 1980, NCRR was disappointed that Congress chose to create a study commission, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), instead of granting immediate reparations to the former internees. However, NCRR realized that the hearings would offer Japanese Americans the opportunity to speak out about their incarceration in concentration camps.

NCRR also recognized the potential educational and historic value of the hearings to future generations for many had never even told their own children about their World War II imprisonment and their struggle to recover economically and psychologically after the war.

In 1981, NCRR approached Visual Communications about taping the Los Angeles proceedings. In August of that year, with NCRR providing the funds for the blank videotapes, Visual Communications with its crews of several volunteers taped the entire three days and one evening of testimonies and the one outdoor, noon-time rally.

Knowing that VHS tape does not have an indefinite shelf life, the two

organizations have felt considerable urgency in the recent years to preserve the hearings tapes by transferring their content to digital tape.

Fortunately, this year we obtained a \$30,000 preservation project grant from the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund Board. This grant helped to defray much of the expense associated with the preservation of the tapes.

We have made a digital master of the 25 hours of testimony and will use the master to produce VHS copies for distribution.

Former Japanese American internees, local and national elected officials, proponents and opponents of redress, and CWRIC Commissioners are all featured on the tapes. Commissioner Dan Lungren's cool attitude towards monetary compensation contrasts sharply with the pain, outrage, and suffering which was expressed by Japanese Americans 39 years after 120,000 of them were deprived of their civil and Constitutional rights and imprisoned by their own government in concentration camps.

Since June, 1997, NCRR's Education Committee and John Esaki from Visual Communications have held bi-weekly meetings to make the project a reality. NCRR members working on the preservation project are James Bechtel, Chester Hashizume, June Hibino, Maryann Ito, Richard Katsuda, Suzy Katsuda, Ruth Wakabayashi Kondo, Kathy Nishimoto Masaoka, Patty and Steve Nagano, and Janice Harumi Yen.

Our hope has always been to make the tapes accessible to the public

and to educational institutions. The tapes, individually and as a complete thirteen-tape set, will go on sale in the first half of 1998. Accompanying the tapes will be a "Viewer's Companion" which summarizes and indexes the testimonies and provides an introduction to the tapes, a chronology and a glossary.



(L-R) Kathy Masaoka, Janice Yen, James Bechtel, Suzy Katsuda, and John Esaki at video transfer session. (Photo by J. Yen)

Fired Rafu Shimpō Workers Deserve Justice, Dignity

By Jim Matsuoka

David Kubo, Alan Kubo, and Jose Valdez never thought they would be the center of controversy within the Japanese American community. The Los Angeles Times covered the issue, even though there has been very little mention of it in the newspaper it affects, The Rafu Shimpō.

The problems began when ten employees of the Production Department within the Rafu were abruptly terminated, without prior notice, in April 1997 as part of a "business plan." The sudden layoffs not only stunned the workers of The Rafu Shimpō but also alarmed many members of the Japanese American community who felt that a community newspaper should not

treat its own loyal employees in such a callous manner.

David Kubo, for example, had been a loyal employee for over 34 years. His daughter, Joyce, described the endless hours he put in at the paper as the Production Manager, never thinking that he would be put out of work on a day's notice. Kubo, recalling the days with the late former Publisher, Akira Komai, fondly remembers what he now calls the "good times."

"Aki was there for us all the time," he said. "He made me believe in the newspaper. That's why I had so much loyalty and trust."

Alan Kubo, former Head Pressman, found it hard to express how he felt that day. "I can't say in words the hurt, an-

ger, and shame I felt. I gave the Rafu the best I had to give, six days a week for 30 years. For me to be told one day to turn in your keys, sign a paper and leave, to me was a heartless thing to do."

The Kubos, Valdez, and others received a "severance package" of some three months' pay. For someone like David Kubo, with more than 34 years of work for the Rafu, three months of pay seemed like a pittance. It would evaporate quickly, and at 53 years of age, finding a job has proven to be very difficult. Over eight months later, most of the terminated workers are still looking for jobs.

Despite repeated attempts by prominent community leaders as well as the Rafu Shimpō Support Committee to meet with Michael Komai, a wall of silence has been his answer. Komai has rebuffed attempts to reach some sort of settlement involving an increased severance package.

Komai continues to not allow reporters to write on any of the controversy or community support activity that has been deemed worthy of reporting by the Los Angeles Times, or to print any letters to the editor that have been submitted on the subject. Censorship seems to be another area that Komai must reckon with.

H. T. Komai, former Editor and Publisher of The Rafu Shimpō, wrote in an editorial in 1938 that The Rafu Shimpō was a "community institution" as well as the "soul of the community." Somehow, the guiding principles and the commitment to the community seems to have gotten lost.

The Rafu Shimpō Support Committee recently held a fundraiser for the terminated workers. Members of the Taiko Center of Los Angeles, Nobuko Miyamoto and Asian Persuasion donated their time and performed at this event, which was attended by over 100 people and raised over \$6,000.

The Committee continues its efforts to dialogue with Michael Komai and will hold a community meeting on Saturday, January 17, 2 PM, at Centenary United Methodist Church, 300 S. Central Ave. in Little Tokyo. This Town Hall Meeting is open to the public and all community members concerned about the future of our community paper are welcome.

International Struggle Against Kajima Continues

By Jim Matsuoka

On December 10, 1997, a Tokyo District Court denied the redress claims of the surviving slave laborers at the Hanaoka mines. The reason given by the Court for the denial of the claims against the Kajima Corporation, who ran the mines at Hanaoka, was that a twenty-year statute of limitations on the case had expired.

On June 30, 1945, Chinese workers who had been forcibly brought to Japan revolted due to the harsh living conditions of the mining camp. Some 1,000 workers were assigned to the Kajima-run mining camp, but harsh working conditions, little food, and disease accounted for many deaths.

Geng Zhung, an 81 year-old former Hanaoka mine worker, and a small group of other survivors filed a claim against Kajima in 1995. They demanded that Kajima acknowledge responsibility for their crimes and what they had done to the laborers.

Stated Geng, "The painful deaths of my fellows have never left the back of my head, and my heart has sunk because of our growing resentment."

Takashi Niimi, the Japanese lawyer that represented the Chinese survivors, said, "Unless we make clear the wartime responsibility of Japanese companies, Japan can never come to terms with its wartime

past and gain trust from the rest of the world."

David Monkawa, who represented NCCRR at the Tokyo Court's reading of its decision and related protest activities, stated, "It was a monumental injustice for the Tokyo District Court to dismiss the case so abruptly, with only one sentence from the judge."

Mr. Geng reassured supporters not to lose hope and to continue fighting until justice is won. "I have pursued justice for 52 years, and cannot stop now," said Mr. Geng "I wouldn't know how."

Mr. Niimi will file an appeal after 60 days, where he believes a review of the case would be possible.

Locally, in Southern California, there has been a move toward removing or rededicating the prominent white sculpture in the form of an upright knot (so-called "Friendship Knot") that stands at the corner of Second and San Pedro Streets near Weller Court in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles.

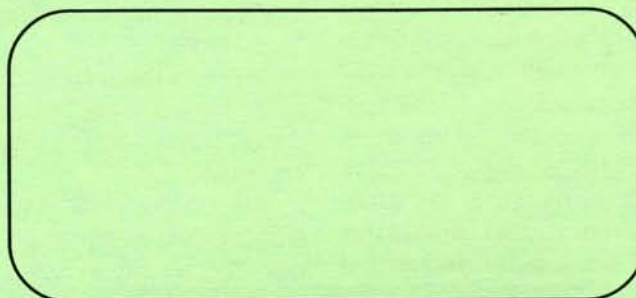
Unknown to the artist, Shinkichi Tajiri, his statue was dedicated to Morinosuke Kajima, the founder of the Kajima Corporation. An upset Tajiri, now residing in Europe, only found out about this in 1996 and wrote a letter to The Rafu Shimpō stating that he would like to see the name of Kajima removed from his statue.



NCRR

**231 E. Third St.
Suite G-104
Los Angeles, CA
90013**

**Seven Months Left for Redress -
Hundreds Still Denied, Call for
Community Action
(details inside)**



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- ☐ \$30 - One Year Membership
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THE BANNER

NCRR CHAPTERS

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NCRR 231 E. 3rd St., Ste. G-104, LA, CA 90013

Edited by Coordinating Committee, NCRR - LA
Contributors: Richard Katsuda, Jim Matsuoka,

Janice Harumi Yen

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LOS ANGELES
231 E. Third St.
Suite G-104
Los Angeles, CA
90013
(213) 680-3484

BAY AREA
1911 Bush St. #1-G
San Francisco, CA
94115
(415) 922-1534

SAN JOSE
Nihonmachi Outreach
Committee (NOC)
P.O. Box 2293
San Jose, CA
95109
(408) 942-8642

DENVER
(303) 455-4987 or
(303) 333-2130

Tax deductible contributions allowed

Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress, incorporated in Apr. 1991, received a tax-exempt, nonprofit status on Oct. 1992. This tax status is retroactive to Apr. 1991. The purpose of the Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress is to educate the public about past and current struggles for civil rights in the Japanese American communities. Tax deductible contributions may now be made to this organization to support its educational and charitable programs.

ed. note - National Coalition for Redress/Reparations is an independent body. Contributions to this civil rights organization sustain important and urgently needed advocacy and political lobbying activities, and are not tax deductible.