

Pay for pain

Japanese-Americans get detainment v

TOM MENDOZA / DAILY NEWS

By Rense Tawa
Daily News Staff Writer

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Two hands, two choices, she thought.

So Oda, a first-year medical student, took her most precious possession — a microscope — along with a suitcase full of clothes, and waited with about 200 other quiet, orderly evacuees. It began to rain.

Nearby, a 40ish woman with two small children looked up at the sky.

"Kami sama ga naiteru," the woman said. "Even the gods in heaven are crying for us."

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Forty-eight years later, Oda still is crying about that April day and the 1½ years she spent in Manzanar before getting special permission to leave for college. Oda, now a physician in San Fernando, says that painful chapter in her life may begin to close.

In October, Oda and about 5,000 Los Angeles-area residents will begin to receive brown, first-class-mail envelopes with a tax-free \$20,000 check, the U.S. government's first redress payments for the wartime detainment of about 120,000 people of Japanese descent.

When the war ended, many Japanese had lost everything — their homes, their businesses, their self-esteem, their health.

And, some argued years later before Congress, they lost their faith in a government that imprisoned people for their ethnic heritage.

Almost five decades after the war's end, the government is extending official redress. The first Treasury Department-issued checks will go to the oldest camp survivors, from a 107-year-old



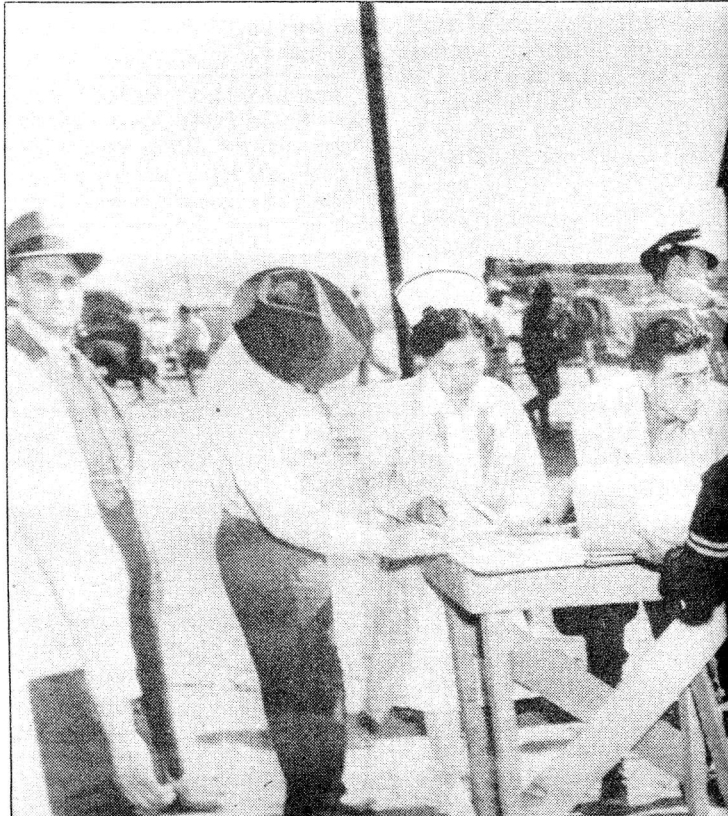
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Seventy-three percent of the redress recipients live in California, and the Los Angeles-area contingent is one of the country's largest.

Despite a long wait and sometimes-bitter fight for redress, there is little jubilation. In the Los Angeles area, most of some four dozen camp survivors over 69 inter-



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Almost five decades after the war's end, the government is extending official redress. The first Treasury Department-issued checks will go to the oldest camp survivors, from a 107-year-old woman in Phoenix, to about half of those former internees in their 70s, depending on how far this year's budget allocation goes.

Camp survivors will receive their payments in order of age. About \$500 million is expected to be distributed this year through 1991, and \$200 million in 1992, according to the Justice Department's Office of Redress Administration. Nationwide, about 60,000



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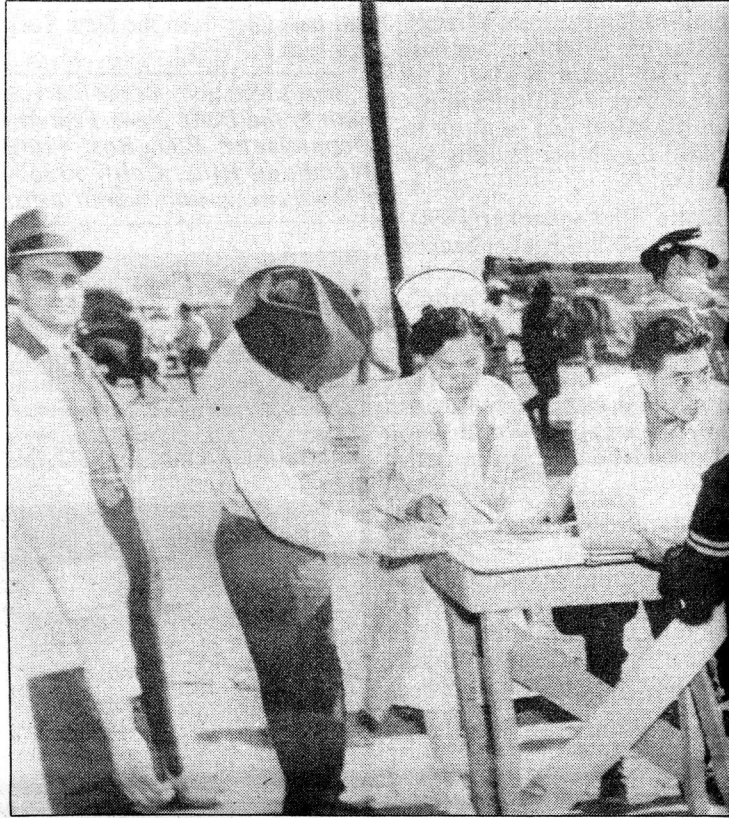
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"We're almost collectively like rape victims," said Betty Kozasa, 70, a Los Angeles community activist who's eligible for redress. "You don't want to talk about it.



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Oda is an exception. She looks toward the government to defend its wartime actions, although at one time she looked inside herself.

Oda is 70, soft-spoken but opinionated, tiny with her hair pulled

back unceremoniously in a bun. She is a general practitioner who sets up college scholarship funds for needy high school students. She is not given to grand gestures, but when she talks of the internment camp, her mouth and eyes become expressive.

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Non-Americans get detainment reparations

TOM MENDOZA/DAILY NEWS



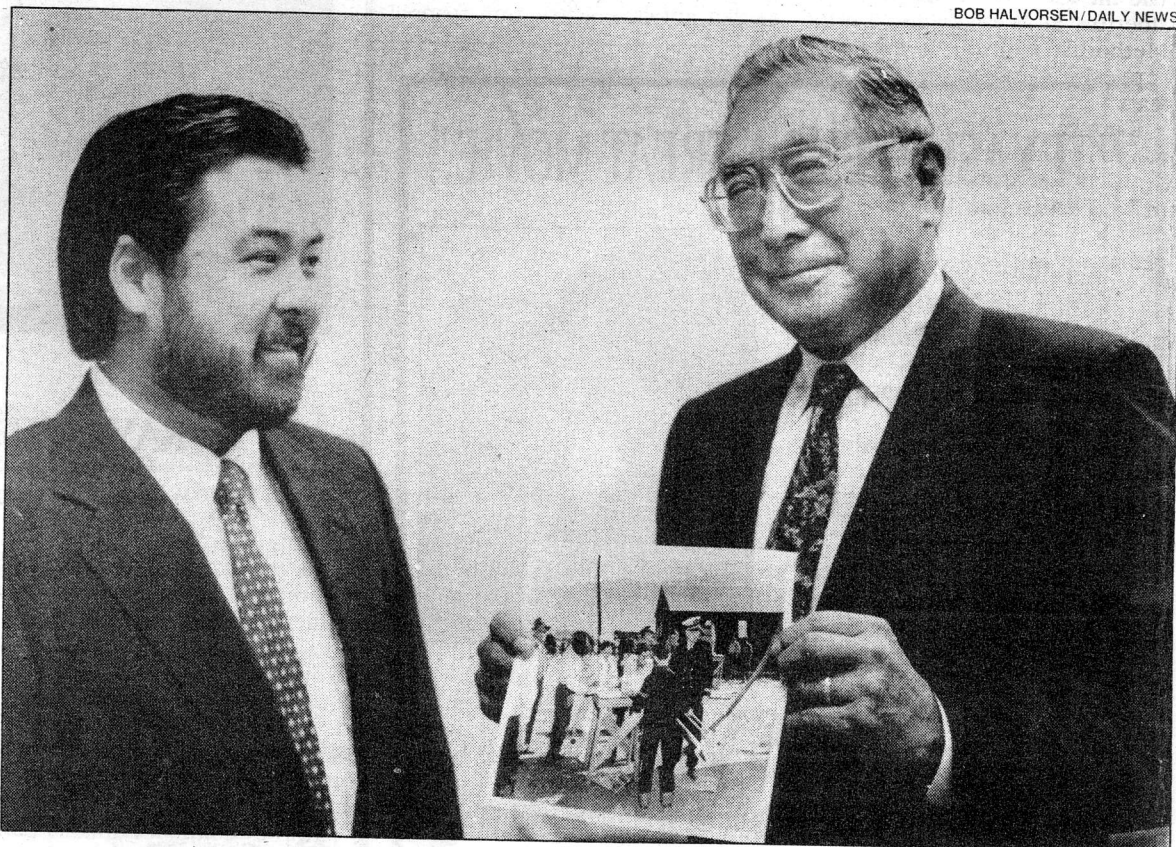
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In the photo above, Frank Chuman, in glasses, assists with organizational duties at Manzanar in March 1942. Below, attorney Chuman, with son Paul, will receive a \$20,000 redress check.

BOB HALVORSEN/DAILY NEWS



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Oda is 70, soft-spoken but opinionated, tiny with her hair pulled

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They were days of flimsy wood barracks with grass poking

through cracks in the floor. Desert storms dumping an inch-thick layer of dust on her straw-filled mattress. Losing her father and 26-year-old sister in camp from diseases that worsened in the high desert dust and wind at Manzanar, an eyesore located east of the

Redress

Continued from Page 4

majestic Sierra Nevada.

"The thing is," said Oda, bitterness in her voice, "they made us deny our own heritage. That was the sad thing. Because of the way we were treated, you began to hate yourself for being what you are, for being Japanese. You don't teach your children any Japanese.

"Now I see the mistake I made. I deprived my children of their wonderful heritage. This is what I'll regret, and no money will pay for that."

But the redress money will start to right at least one wrong, she said. Oda is planning to spend the

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money on a trip to Japan with her six grandchildren, ages 10 months to 11 years.

"We had to deny our own culture," she said. "It's just to make up for that. I want to give it to my grandchildren. I feel I owe it to them so the culture won't die out. I didn't teach my children, so they can't teach their own."

For Oda and others, the redress check is more than just money in the bank. It's justice delayed.

"Redress payment is different," said the Rev. Ren Kimura, pastor emeritus at West Valley United Methodist Church, "because it represents blood, sweat and tears."

Kimura, 71, spent the war at a camp in Rohwer, Ark., but hasn't decided how to use his government check.

"After all we've lost — especially my issei (first-generation) parents, they lost immense amounts — it's simply a symbolic payment . . . Redress represents something real deep. I would certainly be careful as to how I'd use it."

Kimura and others are already hearing from charities and groups hoping for donations from the redress checks.

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This Japanese-American family was among the 120,000 citizens sent to relocation camps.

VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS



In October, nearly 5,000 Los Angeles-area residents will begin to receive redress payments.

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year of law school at USC, and, with help from university officials, he got clearance to leave Manzanar for the University of Toledo in Ohio.

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Ota's mentally disabled daughter, Madeline, was born while she was interned in Poston, Ariz., on Indian reservation land east of the Colorado River. In the early hours of April 12, 1943, Ota was awakened when she felt warm water in her metal cot.

She knew it was time.

The inadequately equipped makeshift camp hospital was overloaded. The lone doctor on duty had delivered three babies

the night before and was resting.

For most of her 28 hours in labor, Ota was alone in the maternity ward on a metal cot, watching the clock tick away the minutes. Finally, the doctor came. "You need a Caesarean section," he told her, "but we have no anesthesia."

"Just help me have the baby," Ota said, tired and in pain.

The doctor did what he could, and Madeline came into to the world in the grip of steel forceps, the kind Ota remembers the ice man used to deliver blocks of ice.

The pale, weak baby had a big clot of blood on the back of her head, marking for life the grip of the forceps. Even today, Madeline, 47, has a bald spot at the place.

The redress money, Ota said,

probably will go to Madeline's school, the Exceptional Children's Foundation Arts Center in Los Angeles.

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Education and children. They are what make Japanese society tick, and their importance is carried in the souls of even second-generation Japanese nisei born in the United States.

Attorney Frank Chuman's parents, Japanese immigrants of a samurai line, lost their dry-cleaning business when they were uprooted for Manzanar. They had a couple of suitcases full of belongings and no money. Or so Chuman thought.

The future looked dim.

But Chuman got a break. The war had interrupted his second

year of law school at USC, and, with help from university officials, he got clearance to leave Manzanar for the University of Toledo in Ohio.

Chuman remembers the day he left in September 1943. His father reached under his straw mattress and pulled out an old sock. Inside the sock, there was a roll of bills, \$150 worth.

"Frank, this is all the money we have," he said. "We don't have anything else, but take it."

On his father's squirreled-away savings, plus scholarship and grant money, Chuman finished school and now runs a law practice with his son in a high-rise Los Angeles building, where \$150 will buy two weeks of parking.

Chuman, of Westlake Village, is



VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS



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History of relocation, redress

"No Japs."

It was war: Pearl Harbor had been bombed, and emotions were running high against the Japanese. In America, "No Japs" signs began popping up.

On Feb. 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order No.9066, authorizing the forced relocation of people of Japanese ancestry into 10 Western internment camps as protection against "espionage" and "sabotage."

In 1980, the government's Commission on Wartime Relocations and Internments of Civilians found that the internment was unjustified and "shaped by race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership."

In August 1988, President Reagan signed legislation extending an official government apology and opened the door for financial redress to camp survivors. Since then, the Justice Department's Office of Redress Administration has worked to coordinate the \$20,000 individual payments. Starting in October, the redress office will mail checks to eligible persons in order of age, beginning with the oldest recipients or their surviving heirs. So far, the redress office believes it has contacted all those who are eligible and over 80.

Inquiries on redress status or other questions should be directed to the redress office at (800) 395-4672 or write Office of Redress Administration, P.O. Box 66260, Washington, D.C. 20035.

Full current name and address, name at time of internment, date of birth and telephone number should be included with all inquiries.

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But his parents, along with thousands of other first-generation Japanese-Americans, died before they could see the money. Each year, about 2,000 former internees die, according to government estimates.

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At Keiro Nursing Home in Los Angeles, 104-year-old Ume Yamagishi was invited with the country's other oldest camp survivors to a tentatively planned White House ceremony to get hot-off-the-press redress checks from President Bush.

Redress

Continued from Page 5

But she doesn't feel up to it, said her daughter, Ritsu Yusa, 76.

"What can she do with it," said Yusa, nodding toward her mother curled up in bed, too tired to get up after a morning bath. "When she was younger, everything was taken away from her and now ..."

Also at Keiro, 101-year-old Iwa Nishimura declined the White

"I was 24 when I was in camp. I spent the best part of my life in camp. A good part of my life. If I hadn't been in camp, maybe I could have earned some good money."

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House invitation for health reasons. But every day she waits. Every time she sees her son and daughter-in-law, she asks, "Has the check come?"

For many camp survivors, government distrust still lingers, said Harry Kitano, acting director of UCLA's Asian-American Studies Center.

"Until they cash the thing to see if it's valid, there's going to be some disbelief," Kitano said.

Robert Bratt, head of the redress administration office in Washington, D.C., offered his assurances.

"They ought to believe it," Bratt said. "We're ready to go here."

Tad Nishimura said, when the check comes, his mother wants to give it to her 14 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren. His mother is alert and in good health, responding to questions with a smile. She recently had a leg amputated because of complications from diabetes and uses a wheelchair.

Nishimura, his wife and parents were interned at Heart Mountain, Wyo., 13 miles northeast of Cody. He is a retired retail produce man with folksy ways who likes to tell the story of how his wife recently sent him out for a loaf of bread, and he came home with a new car. And no bread.

He and his wife, both in their 70s and living in a Montebello townhouse, also are eligible for redress payments in October.



Diane Iwai tends to grandmother Ume Yamagishi, 104, one of the country's oldest survivors of the World War II internment camps.



Attorney Frank Chuman describes the redress payments as "an act of grace" and "democratic recognition" of government wrong.

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Nishimura said he didn't think much about how to spend the money, only figuring that he wants to enjoy life.

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"I spent my money already," Nishimura admitted. "I said, 'I'm going to enjoy this before I die.'"

He doesn't want to talk about it much. He doesn't want to anger his white friends. But fear of offending is overshadowed temporarily by pride in what he jokingly calls his "redress car" — a black, four-door Toyota Cressida, spotless and gussied up with furry seat covers from Australia. It's his last car, he vows, and a big step up



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The Nishimuras also want to donate money to the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations, a group of mostly young Japanese-Americans that fought for the government compensation. "I feel greatly for the NCRP," Nishimura said. "These young people who don't even get redress

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There's still work to be done, according to members of the redress coalition. On Oct. 20, the coalition will sponsor a Long Beach conference with workshops including "The Internment and the Constitution: Can the Camps Happen Again?"

And the National Japanese-American Caucus of United Methodist Church is organizing an Oct. 27 panel in Los Angeles to discuss the sociological, theological and psychological impact of redress and the camps.

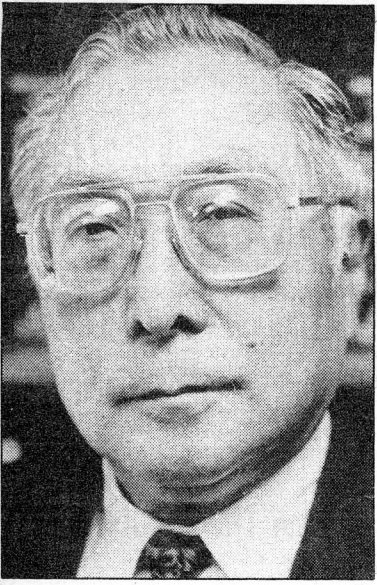
"It's a time to get people to open up," said Phil Shigekuni, a panel organizer, "and start the healing process."



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JOHN MCCOY/DAILY NEWS



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