

Los Angeles Times

B6

TUESDAY, AUGUST 27, 1996

LOS ANGELES TIMES EDITORIALS



Decency Demands an Apology

Even World War II cannot justify civilian abductions by the U.S.

During World War II, the Roosevelt administration ordered the abduction and detention of more than 2,200 people of Japanese ancestry from 13 Latin American countries, mostly from Peru. There appeared to be no compelling reason for the sweep, save for the dubious possibility that they constituted a military threat. Peru had no role in the conflict.

After the war, many of the abductees were refused reentry to the Latin countries. Some eventually returned to Japan. Others remained in the United States after being released from an internment camp in Texas. Now, at least 300 survivors of this bizarre episode are seeking an official letter of apology from the U.S. government and a modest monetary compensation. They deserve it. The United States can do no less.

The episode began in 1942, the year that the government began rounding up Japanese Americans in Southern California and elsewhere on the West Coast and interning them in rough, remote camps. Later the sweep was broadened to South America, and for the next three years, affluent Japanese businessmen and

community leaders and their families, with the apparent consent of South American authorities, were taken to the internment camp, in Crystal City, Texas. Some lived there until 1948.

A small number of Peruvian Japanese who had become legal residents of the United States before 1946 did receive redress payments in 1990, when onetime Japanese American internees finally were compensated by Washington. But some of the Latin American-based Japanese families never became legal American residents and thus did not qualify for the 1990 payouts. Since they came to the United States through abduction by the American military, it stretches a fair conscience to understand how they could be denied the grants.

Frustrated with the bureaucratic quagmire, a group of the Latin American Japanese intend to file suit this week in Federal Claims Court in Washington. How, under the circumstances, can they be denied? They should receive compensation and a nation's apology, and Washington should close this chapter of our history. Many things can be excused by the exigencies of war. This is not one, not close.