

Dear JACL National Council and JACL Membership,

Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress (NCRR) voices its support for the resolution of reconciliation and apology that will be presented at the 2019 JACL National Convention. We believe that the 75 years of internal turmoil within the Japanese American community during and after the WWII incarceration must come to an end. We believe that, as a community, we must remember that it was the U.S. government—not fellow Japanese Americans—that brought on the deep divisions within of our community.

Our government orchestrated the exclusion and incarceration of Japanese Americans. It decided to listen to military and political leaders who called Japanese Americans potential saboteurs and spies. It decided to listen to nativist groups who called for getting rid of Japanese Americans. It decided not to listen to intelligence reports from its own Department of State, FBI, US Navy and US Army that largely stated that Japanese Americans did not pose a threat to national security. With the full force of the military, our government carried out this miscarriage of justice against Japanese Americans.

Our government did what it could to destroy our community. It dismantled the Issei leadership by having the FBI lock up Issei community leaders, business leaders, Japanese-language instructors, Buddhist ministers, and others. With that vacuum in community leadership, our government then appointed the very young and untested JACL to take on leadership in getting Japanese Americans to cooperate with exclusion orders and eventual incarceration. NCRR asserts that the JACL was manipulated. We believe that the government “used” the JACL to carry out many of the government’s dastardly efforts to create dissension and division within the community, thereby stirring up turmoil and hostilities that would tear up the community for decades.

NCRR believes that the finger-pointing and scapegoating within our community must stop. On the one hand, many in our community still condemn the Tule Lake resisters for their acts of dissent; on the other hand, many still blame the JACL for the pain and trauma that many former incarcerated still feel.

Both groups have been unfairly blamed for conditions over which they had no control. For the most part, people from both groups were acting in concert with their honest view of what was best for their families and the community as a whole. Our government manipulated and exploited the finger-pointing and scapegoating that Japanese Americans inflicted on fellow incarcerated —for they were terribly vulnerable to acting out in such a manner because after the government forced them to answer Questions 27 & 28 of the loyalty questionnaire.

The loyalty questionnaire tore the community apart. The government said you were disloyal if you answered “no, no” or refused to respond to Questions 27 & 28. Yet it was the government that was disloyal to its own Japanese American citizens and residents, for it presumed them to be guilty until proven innocent, which is totally contrary to our American democratic promise that each person accused of a crime is innocent until proven guilty. Our government was the guilty one, as it locked up Japanese Americans without any charges yet implied that many Japanese Americans were potential spies and saboteurs. Remember: not one Japanese American was ever indicted, let alone convicted, of any act of sabotage or espionage during the war. It was our government that was guilty.

Those in Tule Lake who had answered “no, no” to Questions 27 & 28 or later renounced their citizenship had various reasons for their actions. Many saw these actions as their only way to dissent from what the government had done to Japanese Americans. They were locked up without due process and backed into a corner.

Some felt compelled to lash out against that government. Many in Tule Lake were Kibei Nisei, who had grown up in Japan and therefore had strong Japanese cultural sensibilities that Nisei who had grown up in the US didn't necessarily have. These Kibei had dual affinities and allegiances—many had deep affection for both the US and Japan. When WWII broke out, these Kibei were torn. Perhaps Ko Wakatsuki, the patriarch of the Wakatsuki family in the film *Farewell to Manzanar*, said it best: “When your mother and father are having a fight, do you want one to kill the other or do you want them to just stop fighting?”

Suppose that, in that situation, one parent is beating you badly and forcing you to take his/her side. Such was the case in Tule Lake, where Kibei were

forced to take sides by a government that had betrayed them. Locked up in the pressure cooker that was Tule Lake, some were so angry and fed up that they said, "You, the government, are telling us that we're bad. Well, we'll show you how bad we can be!" Often, when people are so brutally stigmatized, they respond in irrational, extreme ways that they would not even consider if they hadn't been treated so badly.

Soon a pro-Japan frenzy was being fanned up at Tule Lake. Many got "caught up" in the drama, being coerced to join a pro-Japan faction because family members or friends were pulling them in. Some might have been lulled by a "gang mentality." Others were in great fear of these forces. But in the end, all those at Tule Lake were painted with a broad brush: they were the "disloyals," the "bad ones from Tule Lake."

NCCR believes that there is much healing and redemption that needs to occur at this time to allow the community to let go of these government-caused scars and deep feelings of recrimination. The JACL was also painted with such a broad brush. NCCR hopes that the greater community will soon be able to better understand the role and actions of the JACL during and after the war. It would be a powerful gesture if the JACL was able to reconcile with and apologize to the Tule Lake resisters for its 1946 condemnation of them and other actions it took against them. Such an apology would show that today's JACL stands for healing and reconciliation.

Signed: Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress/Los Angeles
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