

**The  
World War II  
incarceration of  
Japanese Americans and  
the struggle for  
reparations/redress**

# Introducing *UNITY*

*UNITY* is a revolutionary newspaper published by the League of Revolutionary Struggle (Marxist-Leninist). With its comprehensive coverage of national news, the labor movement, the oppressed nationality peoples' struggles, international news, cultural reviews, sports and more, *UNITY* strives to provide a broad overview of current events and issues in the revolutionary movement.

*UNITY* publishes a biweekly edition in English and Spanish. For our Chinese-language readers, *UNITY* publishes a monthly magazine.

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## Table of Contents

A history of the camps: Japanese American imprisonment during World War II .....	1
Winds — A poem .....	12
A revolutionary view of the reparations/redress movement .....	17
Interview with Jim Matsuoka .....	23

# A history of the camps: Japanese American imprisonment during World War II

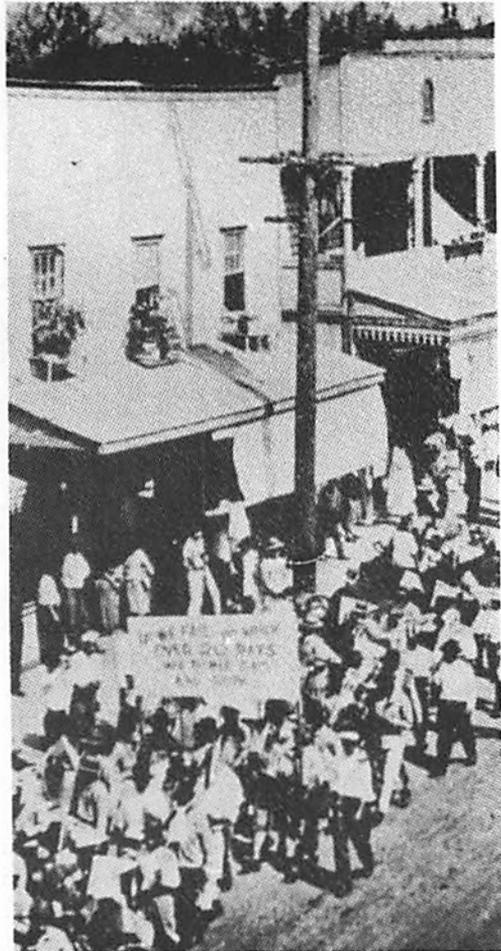
During World War II over 120,000 Japanese, three-fourths of whom were U.S. citizens, were forcibly removed from the West Coast and herded into inland concentration camps. No other event in the 100-year history of Japanese in this country has had such a shattering impact. Communities were torn asunder, families separated and property seized — all under the guise of “military necessity.” The concentration camps have left many scars — emotional suffering, a sense of unfounded guilt, and loss of identity and pride in being Japanese.

Among Japanese Americans today, the camps still weigh heavily on people’s minds. Wide-ranging opinions continue to exist about why the incarceration ever occurred. Was it just racist hysteria? Was it to protect Japanese from racist mobs? What has been the impact of the incarceration upon the Japanese people today? A fuller understanding of these years is necessary in order to build greater unity and strengthen the struggle for the rights of Japanese people.

## Early Japanese history in the U.S.

In order to understand how the camps ever could have happened in the first place, we must look back upon the history of Japanese people prior to World War II.

The first point of entry was Hawaii, which had been colonized by U.S. capitalists. In 1868 a group of Japanese contract laborers



*3,000 Japanese and Pilipino sugar plantation workers went out on strike in 1920 for better wages.*



*Japanese lumber team, Tacoma, Washington, 1910.*

arrived to work the sugar and pineapple plantations. After the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the U.S. capitalists, looking for a new source of cheap labor, pressured the Japanese government to allow its workers to emigrate.

The early immigrants came over mainly as contract laborers and worked as migrant farm workers in the fields, orchards and vineyards of the West Coast. Others worked on section gangs on the railroad lines of the Great Northern Pacific and Central Pacific or in the Alaskan canneries, and the copper and coal mines of Utah and Colorado. These workers were greatly exploited by the

capitalists. For example, Japanese railroad workers on the Northern Pacific labored in the bitter cold for less than \$1 a day.

Together with the labor of other Asian peoples and Chicanos and Mexicans, Japanese labor contributed to the rapid growth of the nation's agricultural industry and other important areas of the economy. The wealth created by Japanese and other laborers contributed to the overall growth and consolidation of U.S. monopoly capitalism in the late 1800's.

But while this backbreaking labor helped build this country, Japanese faced economic exploitation, hostility, violence and rejec-

tion. They suffered all round oppression. Japanese were scorned by labor unions, though many Japanese fought militantly to better the lives of working people. Japanese children were not allowed to go to public schools. The media was constantly attacking and degrading Japanese people.

Years later, even Japanese Americans who had a college degree could not find work in the civil service or in other professions. Other Japanese commonly worked in farming or in service industries as gardeners, housekeepers and other occupations.

Because of segregation and hostility, Japanese established Nihonmachi or Japantowns for mutual support. The largest Japanese communities were in San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Jose and Sacramento in California, and in Portland and Seattle. All facets of life revolved around the community. Different *kenjinkai* or prefectural associations, cultural associations and the Buddhist churches kept cultural traditions alive in a hostile land. Many Japanese communities had their own press which was the sole source of news to most Issei. Little Tokyo and Nihonmachi became home for thousands of migrant male farm workers. Barber shops, restaurants, bath houses, hotels, small cafes and *nomiya* (bars) catered to the needs of the Japanese workers. In addition, legal and medical services were available for Japanese who would often journey in from the rural and outlying areas.

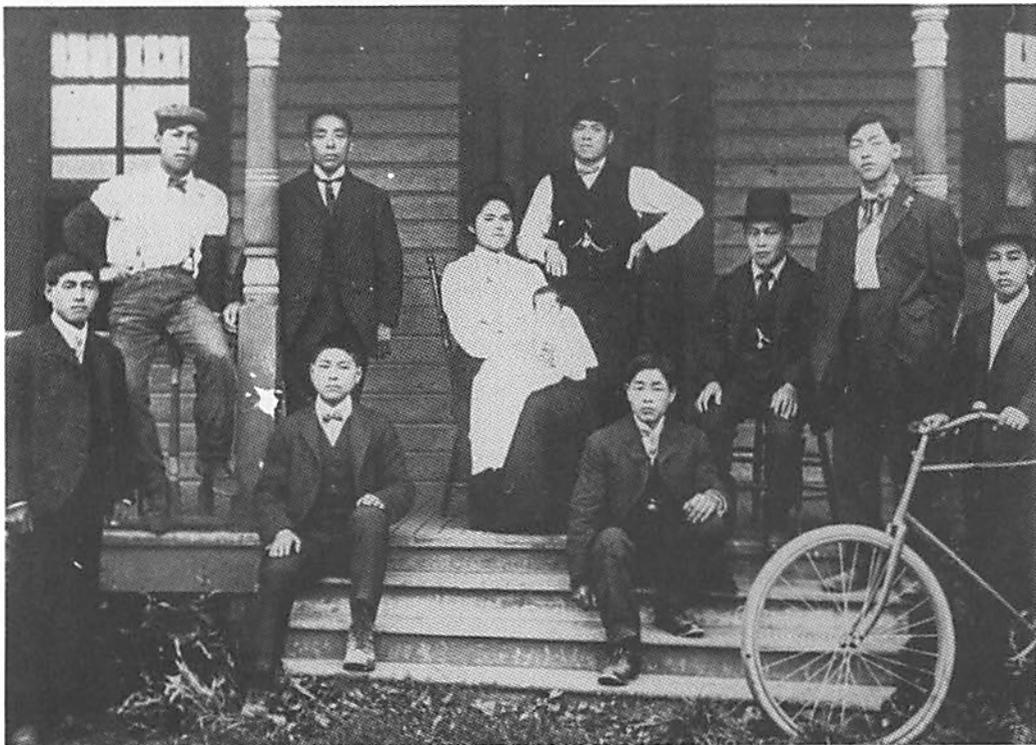
Japanese developed into an oppressed national minority, restricted and exploited economically, socially and politically. They were prevented from gaining any foothold in this country. Japanese tilled the land but were barred from owning it. They settled here to live but weren't allowed to become

citizens. And when they began to sink roots, the doors to further immigration were slammed shut by the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924. Over 500 pieces of anti-Japanese legislation were eventually passed. The fervent hope of the capitalists was that the Japanese, limited in numbers and restricted from having families, would eventually die out, saving the West Coast for the white race.

### Resistance

Japanese struggled against innumerable odds to secure a decent life for their families and future generations. The fact that Japanese people continued to grow and develop is testimony to the strength and endurance of the first generation Issei who faced a daily struggle to survive.

But Japanese did more than overcome hardships on an individual basis. They organized to fight for a better life for themselves and other oppressed people and the working class as a whole. Japanese were very active in the labor movement from the very beginning. In the sugar cane and pineapple plantations of Hawaii on through the heroic battles in the fields of California, like the famous 1903 Oxnard sugar beet strike, Japanese have responded to injustice with courage and determined struggle. They organized into the Alaskan Cannery Workers Union and in the coal mines of Colorado. Some Japanese were part of the famous mine workers' strike that led to the brutal Ludlow Massacre of 1914. In the community, too, Japanese fought for their right to unionization, such as in the 1931 *Nichi Bei Times* strike. Japanese trade unionists and communists helped establish unions in the Los Angeles produce markets and among



*Yoshida family. Fife, Washington, 1909*

retail clerks.

Many heroes stepped forward from the struggles of Japanese here in this country. Sen Katayama, one of the founding members of the Communist Party, USA and a leader of the Communist International of the 1930's, was active organizing labor and socialist groups among the Japanese in the U.S. Jack Shirai, a New York restaurant worker, joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and gave his life fighting the fascists in Spain.

Japanese also produced revolutionary and progressive newspapers like the *Rodo Shinbun* (labor newspaper) in San Fran-

cisco and the *Doho* (Brotherhood), an anti-Japanese militarism newspaper published in Los Angeles.

### **Before the War**

In 1940, there were approximately 130,000 Japanese living in the U.S. Eighty-five percent were concentrated on the West Coast. Almost-half of the Japanese had jobs related to agriculture, primarily as tenant farmers or sharecroppers, although there were about 1,600 small Japanese-owned farms. Though Japanese owned very little land (held in the name of the American-born Nisei because of the Alien Land Laws),

due to their long hours of labor and introducing advanced agricultural techniques, they controlled 35% of the commercial truck crops in California, and in some crops like strawberries, they had a monopoly. Japanese also played a major role in the fishing industry. Because of their success, white agricultural and fishing interests were hostile.

### **Pearl Harbor and its aftermath**

Internationally, the late 1930's saw the German and Italian fascists consolidating their power throughout Europe. Already Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, France and Ethiopia had fallen victim to the fascists' expansion. In Asia, Japan's invasion of China was followed by the 1941 seizure of Indochina, then under French colonial rule.

Japan, unopposed by the Western powers, grew more and more bold. The U.S. and other Western European countries had waited, hoping that Germany and Japan would satisfy their appetites, but this policy of appeasement was to no avail. Besides, certain U.S. capitalists were more than happy to supply the fascists with weapons and oil and did so until only months before Pearl Harbor.

By the fall of 1941, war between the U.S. and Japan seemed likely. By September, U.S. intelligence had decoded a message from Tokyo to the Japanese Consulate in Hawaii for detailed information about military vessels in Pearl Harbor. The U.S. government knew that an attack on Pearl Harbor was imminent, yet it did nothing to prevent thousands of people, including many Japanese Americans, from being killed.

Hours after the Pearl Harbor bombing, the FBI swarmed down on all Japanese communities and arrested 1,500 Issei. They in-

cluded Buddhist ministers, language teachers, cultural arts instructors, officers in various community organizations and editors of Japanese newspapers. There were no convictions of espionage, but some of these men were separated from their families for months, even years, imprisoned in special Justice Department detention camps. They later rejoined their families who were behind barbed wired encampments.

Japanese American fishermen were restricted from going out in their boats; their wives were barred from their jobs at the local canneries. Although there were many Italians working alongside the Japanese, they were allowed to remain on their jobs. Many other Japanese were immediately fired from their jobs, and businesses owned by Japanese, especially in rural areas, were terror-



*All Japanese forcibly evacuated had to wear identification tags.*

ized by shootings and vandalism. Profits in the produce industry alone fell 50% in one year, and insurance companies canceled or marked up rates to Japanese policy holders. "Jap hunting licenses" were sold and displayed on cars, and Japanese were even denied treatment in hospitals. Later, there were proposals in the legislatures to strip Nisei of citizenship, deport all Japanese and sterilize all Japanese women.

Many people began the painful task of destroying cultural objects like family shrines, dolls, books in Japanese, swords, Japanese clothing, cooking utensils and even letters from family back in Japan. These and other innocent items were confiscated by the FBI, who would come unannounced, search without warrants and sometimes take the head of household for questioning.

Repression against Japanese took other forms — bank accounts were frozen, "contraband" such as radios was seized, curfews were established and freedom to travel was limited. These were all signs that the U.S. government viewed Japanese in the U.S. regardless of citizenship, as enemies.

Within the Japanese community, there was much anxiety and tension. No one knew what was going to happen next. Many Nisei and Issei protested the racist restrictions placed on the Japanese. A Nisei florist in San Francisco, James Omura, testified before the Toland Hearings, a Congressional "fact finding" committee to determine whether evacuation was necessary. Omura pleaded for fair treatment, "I would like to ask the Committee — Has the Gestapo come to America? Have we not risen in righteous anger at Hitler's mistreatment of the Jews? Then is it not incongruous that citizen Americans of Japanese descent should be similarly mistreated and per-

secuted?" Another Nisei, Joe Kurihara, attended a Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)-sponsored meeting, "with a firm determination to join the committee representing the Nisei and carry the fight to the bitter end." But JACL leaders encouraged non-resistance. Others, such as Minoru Yasui in Yakima, Washington, and Gordon Hirabayashi in Oakland, California, violated the curfew orders and the evacuation order to protest their violations of civil liberties. Other protests were more tragic. One Issei man chose suicide rather than be imprisoned. Another Issei who killed himself was found with his World War I service medals and discharge papers clutched in his hands.

Although many resented the government's restrictions, there were few organized protests. The organized leadership of the community, the Issei, had already been locked up and sent away to Lordsburg, New Mexico, and Crystal City, Texas, and other Justice Department camps.

With the vacuum in leadership and the tremendous pressure placed upon the Japanese to prove their loyalty, the JACL, a predominantly Nisei organization formed in the 1930's, rose to prominence. The JACL opposed discrimination by protesting the 1939 Alien Fishing Bill and others, but their emphasis was always to get Nisei into established American institutions by rejecting anything Japanese to "prove" they were 200% American. Although there have always been, and remain today, militant fighters and progressives within the JACL, the leadership has always been accommodationists seeking to win favor with the U.S. government. To illustrate the lengths to which the leadership cooperated with the government, Mike Masaoka, a

prominent JACL leader, desperately proposed that the Issei be held as hostages while the Nisei form a suicide battalion to fight overseas.

Another force in the community which could have provided leadership in this time of crisis were the communists who had been organizing among the produce, fishing and cannery workers. But the official Party position on the camps was an open endorsement of the evacuation done in the name of the United Front Against Fascism. The CPUSA was correct in joining the international united front which was called by the Communist International (Comintern), but a number of deviations in the Party led it to make a serious error around the camps. Chauvinism within the Party and their lack of understanding the national oppression of Japanese in the U.S. led them to make no distinction between the Japanese imperialists and Japanese and Japanese American working people. The CPUSA expelled all their Japanese cadre, estimated at over one hundred, except for one or two Japanese cadre who were close to the leadership.

The second error made by the Party was the liquidation of the independent work. In the united front, the Party promoted all unity and no struggle with the U.S. bourgeoisie. The revisionist line of Earl Browder, chairman of the CPUSA, promoted class collaboration. Browder claimed that the U.S. was not imperialist but still "progressive." Thus, the Party urged the working class to ally with the U.S. monopoly capitalists on the sacrifice of the rights of the Japanese people. The CPUSA also liquidated its communist work in the trade unions, dissolved its organizing within the military and lost its ability and desire to propagate communist views among the masses. The incor-

rect policy of the CPUSA which sold out the Japanese masses caused many Party sympathizers to abandon their support.

Faced with the threat of military force, the community, disarmed and misled, had little choice but to submit to the evacuation orders.

### **Preparation for evacuation**

The forced removal of 110,000 Japanese from the West Coast, and the deportation of another 10,000 Japanese from Mexico, Central and South America to be incarcerated in the U.S. did not happen overnight. Nor was it simply an act of racist hysteria.

In an highly organized campaign, the military, government officials, politicians, anti-Japanese groups and economic interests all abetted one another.

The military was in desperate need of a scapegoat to take the heat for being caught "offguard" at Pearl Harbor. What better excuse than to cry out "sabotage" and "fifth column." The Navy and Army leaders were the first to come out with insinuations and outright lies. On December 15, 1941, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox said at a widely publicized news conference, "I think the most effective fifth column work of the entire war was done in Hawaii." General DeWitt, Army commander of the Western Defense Zone, declared, "The Japanese is an enemy race, and while many second and third generation Japanese born on United States soil, possessed of U.S. citizenship, have become 'Americanized,' the racial strains are undiluted . . . . It therefore follows that along the vital Pacific Coast over 112,000 potential enemies of Japanese extraction are at large today."

The suspicion cast upon the Japanese was

just the green light needed by the regional forces on the West Coast who had wanted the “Japs” thrown out all along. Encouraged by government and military information, the Hearst newspapers, famous for their “yellow journalism,” and other newspapers and columnists began propagating anti-Japanese stories. Headlines like “Jap Boat Flashes Message Ashore,” printed in the *L.A. Times*, were total fabrications used to fan up racism against the Japanese.

The government, via the congressional hearings of the Toland Committee, gave an open forum to the military and agricultural interests like the Farm Bureau and reactionary groups like the American Legion. Congressman Martin Dies, chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, joined in the clamor for the removal of

the Japanese with accusations of Japanese espionage in America.

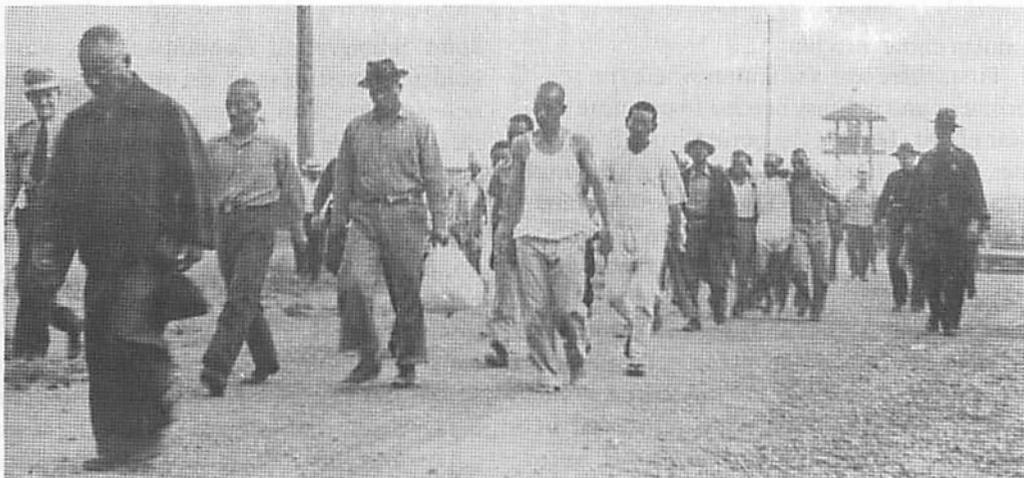
The government never played a neutral role in the planning for evacuations. FBI, Army and Navy surveillance of Japanese in Hawaii and the mainland had been going on for close to a decade with detailed reports going into Washington about the structure of Japanese communities, leaders and sentiment of various segments in relation to Japan. But President Roosevelt was not satisfied with the findings and appointed a “Special Representative of the State Department” to get a precise picture of the degree of loyalty of Japanese in Hawaii and the mainland’s West Coast.

The investigation by Special Investigator Curtis Munson, carried out in October and November 1941, certified a great degree of loyalty to the U.S. among the Japanese. This report, which reached the same conclusion as the investigation by the FBI and Naval Intelligence, was not made public and seemed to have been purposely disregarded.

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which authorized the forced removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast. Rallying behind the “military necessity” excuse, Congress approved the evacuation unanimously. The Supreme Court also bowed to the wartime powers of the President and sanctioned the curfew orders, expulsion and incarceration. So while the U.S. was making a big hue and cry about fighting against fascism and defending democracy overseas, within its own borders the most basic constitutional rights were abruptly swept aside. The right to a trial, presumption of innocence before guilt, freedom of speech and assembly, etc., were just hollow words when it came to an oppressed



*Manzanar concentration camp, 1942.*



*Prisoners at the Tule Lake concentration camp.*

national minority like the Japanese.

### **Reasons for evacuation**

While the main reasons given by the government and military were “military necessity” and to “protect” the Japanese by removing them from the West Coast, these were rationales for other motives. If Japanese were supposed to be such a security threat, why were Japanese in Hawaii, which is thousands of miles closer to Japan, not removed?

By June 1942, the battle of Midway had crushed Japan’s ability to launch an invasion of the West Coast. Yet because of “military necessity,” the evacuation still continued for months afterwards.

The argument that evacuation was necessary for Japanese people’s protection is also mistaken. There were incidents of anti-Japanese violence, but what kind of logic stipulates that the victims be punished instead of the criminals?

What then were the real reasons that led to the incarceration and forced removal of

the entire Japanese population of the West Coast?

The fundamental cause for the incarceration of the Japanese was national oppression. The treatment of the Japanese people in the United States as an exploited, restricted, oppressed national minority caused them to be singled out and imprisoned. As long as national oppression exists, the concentration camp experience of the Japanese could happen again to another nationality or group. During the Korean War, there were suggestions raised to incarcerate Chinese Americans to use as potential hostages in exchange for American prisoners of war. In response to the urban rebellions of the 1960’s, the U.S. government made contingency plans to reopen the concentration camps to incarcerate Blacks.

While the national oppression of the Japanese people was the main cause for their incarceration, there were other factors. All the workings of capitalist society, with its inherent national oppression, hypocritical bourgeois democracy and political oppor-

tunism came into play.

First, there was a situation where the government and military needed to promote the war effort. During the period from December 1941 to June 1942, Japan was winning victory after victory. The U.S. ruling class needed to rally popular support for the military effort. The fact that the war was with Japan, a non-white people, and that Japanese in the U.S. had already been subjected to national oppression made it that much easier to point to them as “the enemy in our midst.” All Japanese were slandered as emperor-worshipping fanatics who were bent on helping fascist Japan win victory.

Then there were the economic interests involved. Agricultural interests like California’s Farm Labor Bureau and Associated Farmers coveted the fertile lands Japanese had created with their backbreaking labor. As a spokesperson for the growers and shippers said, “We’re charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons. We might as well be honest, we do. It’s a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the Yellow man. If all the Japs were removed tomorrow, we’d never miss them, because the white farmers can take over and produce everything the Jap grows. And we don’t want them back when the war ends, either.”

Political opportunism was another factor contributing to the decision for forced evacuation. Since 1942 was an election year, local politicians such as California Governor Olson and Attorney General Earl Warren jumped on the anti-Japanese bandwagon. President Roosevelt, not wanting to alienate the California electorate, weighed the political gains he could make in deciding to incarcerate the Japanese.

For reactionary groups like the California

Joint Immigration Committee, this was a golden opportunity to get rid of the Japanese forever. This factor of the underlying racism on the part of government leaders and military dovetailed with the more blatant white supremacist sentiments of the reactionary groups. There should be no doubt that those who were in power actually believed that Japanese were inherent traitors, that there was “no way to determine loyalty.” Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, who promoted the fifth column slanders, was a former editor of the Hearst newspapers and was well schooled in professional racism.

### The moving out

In March 1942, signs were posted by the government in areas where Japanese lived instructing “all persons of Japanese ancestry” to report to centers to find out when they would be evacuated. People were given an average of two weeks to sell all their belongings and property, pack only what they could carry and be ready for the buses on a certain date. As this evacuation was being implemented, curfew and other restrictions were being relaxed against Germans and Italians living in the same areas.

The U.S. government not only evacuated U.S. Japanese, but was instrumental in implementing a “hemispheric plan” which included 20,000 Japanese evacuated and imprisoned in Canada and thousands of Japanese living near the Pacific Coast in Mexico, Central and South America. This was part of a plan to hold a hostage reserve of Japanese who would be exchanged for American prisoners of war.

In addition, 150 Japanese from Alaska and over one thousand Japanese from Hawaii were sent to mainland camps. The

government criteria for removal was any person with as little as  $\frac{1}{16}$  Japanese blood. Families of mixed marriages were split up, although some non-Japanese spouses volunteered to go to the camps to keep the family together. The total imprisoned exceeded 120,000.

The forced removal also applied to hundreds of native Aleutians who lived on the Pribilof Islands on the Alaskan coast. They were removed from their lands on which they had lived uninterrupted for 8,000 years and removed to camps in Alaska, while white fishermen and residents on the islands were allowed to remain. Many died in abandoned gold mines and canneries which had been converted into camps.

The short notice proved to be a particularly cruel aspect of the imprisonment. Opportunists, hearing of the plight of the Japanese, would wait until one or two days before a family had to leave to buy their homes, property and possessions. Stoves, refrigerators, washing machines were sold for \$5 a piece. One family was forced to sell fourteen acres of farmland for \$6,000. Ten years after the war, each acre of this land was worth \$10,000 to \$15,000. The Issei farmer who had spent years of backbreaking labor to save the money became a defeated man.

One Arizona grocery store owner sold his store, valued at \$15,000, for \$800 two days before he had to leave. The government was supposed to safeguard evacuees from these rip-offs, but little or nothing was done. People who couldn't or wouldn't sell their property were forced to pay to store it. After the war, it's been estimated that close to 80% of the privately stored goods were "rifled, stolen or sold" during the owners' absence.

The toll was not only monetarily measurable. Many suffered nervous breakdowns, severe depression and illness. The stigma of being "untrustworthy" and "criminal" was reinforced throughout the incarceration. Family members had to wear tags en route to the assembly centers. Many Japanese felt like cattle or goods being shipped. As the buses came to pick people up, many openly sobbed. One Nisei, ten years old at the time, recalls how pet dogs chased the departing buses and some children had plants or pieces of trees from their backyards to remember home while they were imprisoned.

### **Temporary Assembly Centers**

The Japanese were first taken to one of 15 assembly, Relocation Centers spread throughout California, Washington, Oregon and Arizona. The facilities were similar. Quarters were almost always cramped with little or no privacy. At the assembly centers that were race tracks, horse stalls were converted into apartments. During the summer, most stables had merely been scraped out and had no floors, so the stench would become unbearable. At Santa Anita race track, the largest assembly center housing 18,000 people, hospital records show that 75% of the illness recorded came from the unsanitary conditions in the horse stalls.

By summer 1942, Japanese were shipped from the assembly centers to ten permanent "Relocation Centers" spread across seven states.

### **Life in "Relocation Centers"**

In the "Relocation Centers," a family of eight was given a bare room measuring 20  
continued on pg. 14



## WINDS

*Hot delta breeze  
Stirs light kimono sleeves  
Laughing, intent on following  
The graceful steps of older sister  
Miners dance, harvest rhythms  
Growing quickly  
In the (o) Bon time heat —*

*Gusts kick up the desert sand  
She looks outside  
Its loneliness reflected inside  
Dreams and plans shattered  
Wondering about a brother who fights  
Halfway around the world  
For democracy here at home  
At Tule Lake —*

*Soft tradewinds unfurl a flag  
Near the young women who stop  
Taking out simple props  
Mock guns, coolie hats and paper bombs  
Playing out a battle, Asian faces on both sides  
Pressing leaflets into soldiers' hands —*

*Cool night air  
She steps out leaving stage lights,  
Bamboo flute and electric guitar  
Weave songs of Asians in America  
Artistry soft and hard  
Streets of gold and railroads  
Opportunity and exclusion  
Learning grandparents' wisdom  
Finding pride in her people —*

*Steam bangs on metal  
Work rhythms too new for songs  
Glistening cans move in rows  
Sorting, picking, discarding  
At break she trades her sukiyaki recipe  
For adobo, guacamole and sweet potato pie  
The corners of the world touch  
And enfold each others' rhythms —  
Breezes play with kitchen curtains  
She stands making manju  
With grandchildren crowding round  
Oba-chan! Oba-chan!  
In the fullness of her years  
Picture-bride, cane-cutter, cannery worker  
Bearing children in a rural house  
Be proud, the sky rests on your shoulders*

— A.F.

**continued from pg. 11**

feet by 24 feet. Smaller rooms of 16 by 20 feet were given to smaller families. A barrack was made up of four to six such units. Twelve to fourteen barracks comprised a block. Each block housed 250 to 300 people and had a common mess hall, toilet and recreation hall.

People began trying to make some order out of the upheaval. Block managers were chosen, schools organized, and social, cultural and sports activities were organized. The Wartime Relocation Authority (WRA), in a perverse irony, wanted the camps to be a model of democracy in action. Community town hall meetings and camp council elections were promoted. But all the platitudes about democracy could not erase the cold reality that Japanese were locked up behind barbed wire fences and faced machine guns.

While "democracy" was stressed by the WRA, they prevented any real exercise of democratic rights when they banned the use of the Japanese language in all meetings, classes and programs. Thus, more than half of the camp population, Issei and Kibei (Japanese Americans educated in Japan), were excluded from voicing their views. All Japanese books, except a few religious books, were confiscated.

In all the camps, demonstrations against bad conditions took place. Work stoppages and general strikes were called to protest poor inadequate food, lack of medical facilities and WRA harassment of "troublemakers." Much of the anger was directed at the camp administration and also at those believed to be *inu* (dogs) who collaborated with the authorities.

At Manzanar, resistance to these intolerable conditions led to a series of mass dem-

onstrations, culminating in the guards opening fire on people with tear gas and shotguns. Two people were killed, one injured by gas and nine wounded by gun fire. For two weeks, the camp was under martial law, during which time the administration rounded up the supposed "ringleaders." Sixteen men were sent to a Citizen's Isolation Camp where conditions resembled a maximum security federal penitentiary.

At Tule Lake, martial law was declared for four months after internees declared a general strike to protest a long string of abuses by the camp administration. Resistance rose to such a pitch that the government turned the camp into a segregation center for "troublemakers" from other camps. Later, those who refused to answer affirmatively on a loyalty oath given to all internees were sent to Tule Lake.

In other camps, such as Poston, there were protests and strikes as well as mass demonstrations against unfair treatment and jailing of community leaders.

### **"Loyalty oath"**

The camp administration often accused the protesters of being disloyal and tried to segregate them from the community. In early 1943, the government took the offensive in further sorting out the "loyal" from the "disloyal." The timing had to do with the government's decision to draft the Nisei into the military. As proof of loyalty, all male and female internees, 17 years and older, were expected to answer two questions at the end of a long questionnaire. For draft-age Nisei men, the questionnaire was entitled "Statement of U.S. Citizenship of Japanese Ancestry (Selective Service Form 304A)." For Issei women and men, and Nisei women 17 years and older, the identical question-

naire was entitled "Application for Leave Clearance (WRA Form 126)."

The two crucial questions were: Question 27: Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States in combat duty, wherever ordered? and Question 28: Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attacks by foreign or domestic forces, and foreswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?

The loyalty oath was a total setup because of the lack of explanation and the basic assumption of disloyalty. For the Issei who were "aliens ineligible for U.S. citizenship," the questionnaire asked them to foreswear allegiance to the Emperor of Japan, which would have left them without citizenship. There was a great deal of bitterness even on the part of the pro-American, patriotic Nisei who resented the assumption of disloyalty. In some camps, like Tule Lake, the bitterness was such that internees en masse refused to cooperate with the questioning process.

Overall, this recruitment drive for the U.S. military resulted in only 1,181 volunteers from all ten camps. In addition, there were numerous protests against the draft after the Selective Service decided to begin calling up Nisei.

There were a number of Nisei, especially from Hawaii, who volunteered and served in the segregated 442nd and 100th Infantry Battalions. Many of those who volunteered did so out of justifiable sense of responsibility to fight fascist aggression. They were sent to fight in Europe where they sustained some of the highest wounded and casualty figures. Although they were the most decorated battalion in the war, many Nisei GI's

returned "home" to receive their honors behind barbed wire.

Towards the end of the war, the WRA began transferring some Japanese out of the camps. Through programs like the National Student Relocation Council and other job placement programs, many Nisei were dispersed to various parts of the country. Those left behind until the camps closed in 1946 were mainly the elderly and the very young. Because anti-Japanese violence on the West Coast reached its peak in these later years, many Japanese became fearful and apprehensive about returning to hostile neighborhoods. Some even refused to leave the camps at first.

For many, getting out of the camps was not much better than being in the camps. Saving accounts were frozen and did not become unfrozen until years later; property was stolen; homes were broken into. Many had no homes to return to and had to stay in temporary quarters set up in churches in the Japanese community.

### **Effects of the camps**

The forced removal of the Japanese and their incarceration for four years in harsh and degrading conditions brought personal loss and suffering and destroyed many communities. Following the camps, Japanese were urged to resettle in the Midwest and East to avoid returning to the hostile West Coast. Many communities simply died and were never rebuilt. Just as some communities started getting back on their feet, Japanese communities such as Los Angeles Little Tokyo and San Francisco Nihonmachi were ripped apart by urban renewal.

Economic losses in terms of property and possessions has been conservatively estimated at \$400 million, and this does not in-

clude loss of income and educational opportunities, nor damages for loss of life and psychological trauma.

Perhaps the most damaging effect of the camps was the ideological impact. Culminating 60 years of vicious anti-Japanese attacks and discrimination, the camps experience brought tremendous pressure to bear upon Japanese. Japanese were cruelly forced to reject anything "Japanese" and to "prove loyalty" by accepting imprisonment and by volunteering for the Army. Even the questionnaires Japanese had to fill out for leave clearance as they left the camps asked, "Will you assist in the general resettlement program by staying away from large groups of Japanese? Will you try to develop such American habits which will cause you to be accepted readily into American social groups?"

The camps period saw assimilation and integration being pushed onto Japanese as a false solution to their oppression — as a way to survive in this society. Many Japanese resisted this pressure. In the course of rebuilding their lives, they struggled individually and collectively against inequalities on the job, in housing and education. Progressive Nisei continued to organize even during the McCarthy era.

Some Japanese mistakenly believed that their concentration in communities along the West Coast, a condition imposed by segregation, allowed them to be singled out and imprisoned, and that Japanese were too clannish and should adopt "American ways." If they dispersed, they felt, white society would be more amenable to absorbing them.

This argument is based on the racist assumption that Japanese are inferior and, if carried out, ultimately could help lead to the

total disappearance of the Japanese national minority with its distinct culture, language, historical experience and physical communities. Already today, due to the camps, redevelopment and assimilation, Japanese are widely dispersed and the intermarriage rate for Japanese has steadily increased to the point where today, over 50% of the third generation Japanese marry outside of their nationality.

The World War II incarceration was no accident of history but the outcome of a century of national oppression of Japanese in the U.S. Among Japanese, a thorough understanding and discussion of this period will go a long way towards strengthening unity and combating the effects of the camps. It will help Japanese reclaim their true history, sort through the different opinions that exist and help explain how the camps affect the communities today.

Through exposing the injustice of the camps and fighting for reparations for losses and damages, Japanese people will reaffirm their pride and dignity in their culture and heritage. This will help Japanese people resist all forms of oppression, such as the racist ideology of assimilation, and will strengthen overall the struggles of Japanese for full equality and political power.

## Commentary

# A revolutionary view of the reparations/redress movement

Thirty-eight years ago, Japanese people in the U.S., both citizens and noncitizens, were subjected to one of the most cruel and outrageous acts of national oppression ever perpetrated upon a people. Over 110,000 Japanese living on the West Coast were forcibly removed under military order and shipped to race tracks and fairgrounds which were converted into assembly centers. Months later, they were moved once again to dusty desert camps or to remote mountain areas where they spent nearly four years behind barbed wire.

Millions of dollars in property, possessions and businesses were stolen. Many Japanese lost their lives in the harsh camps; others suffered severe illness and mental anguish from the incarceration. It was an event that forever altered the course of Japanese people by destroying their communities and dispersing them throughout the country.

Many Americans are still unaware of these events because the ruling class, the monopoly capitalists, have tried to bury this episode of U.S. history. They have tried to dismiss it as a "mistake." But the forced removal and incarceration of the Japanese was no more a "mistake" than the forced marches of the Native American peoples onto government reservations in the 1800's, or the deportation of thousands of Chicano and Mexican farm workers in California

during the 1930's. All these events are linked together, stamped with the mark of national oppression.

The late 1960's witnessed a new generation of progressives and revolutionaries in the Japanese national movement who have raised the issue of the camps and have helped bring about increasing awareness about the incarceration of the Japanese. Today there is a new upsurge of activity in the Japanese national movement. Japanese people are standing up and demanding that the U.S. government admit its wrongdoing — that it unjustly imprisoned Japanese, denied them basic civil liberties and caused severe damage to the Japanese community. This demand for redress, righting a wrong, is accompanied by a call for reparations — monetary compensation for losses and suffering caused by the incarceration.

### **Significance of the reparations/redress movement**

The League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L), a multinational communist organization, supports the hundreds of thousands of Japanese Americans in their demand for reparations and redress. The League has a long history of work in the Asian and Japanese national movements as I Wor Kuen and East Wind Organization. Many of our cadre and supporters have been conducting education and organizing around the camps

issue for many years. We helped plan and build for the first pilgrimages to Tule Lake and Manzanar concentration camps. The League supports the reparations/redress movement because it is part of the fight against national oppression, part of the struggle against the monopoly capitalist class, which exploits and oppresses the majority of people in the U.S.

The struggle for reparations/redress is part of the Japanese people's fight for full equality and political power — demands which spring forth from their conditions of exploitation and restriction as an oppressed national minority in the U.S. As communists, we recognize the special demands of the oppressed nationalities, take up struggle around these demands and bring them before the entire multinational working class in order to build the strategic alliance between the working class and the oppressed nationality movements. This alliance is crucial to waging a socialist revolution in the U.S.

Within the Japanese national minority, the issue has special significance. There has always been divided opinion and conflicting views about the cause and impact of the camps. The bourgeoisie likes to promote the views of sellouts like Senator S.I. Hayakawa who maintains that the camps were for the protection of the Japanese and that it helped them get out of West Coast ghettos. This view of the Japanese people as passive, quiet Americans who have "made it" runs counter to reality — to the fact that over the years thousands of Japanese fought against the inequalities they faced. It ignores the fact that today Japanese people still suffer from restrictions in job opportunities, immigration harassment and a destructive policy of forced assimilation and inte-

gration.

The reparations/redress campaign is a good opportunity to refute incorrect views and unite people around the true history of Japanese Americans. This history brings out the criminal nature of the capitalist system and the hypocrisy of U.S. democracy.

The reparations/redress campaign can raise the political consciousness of the Japanese national movement. It can rally together the progressive and revolutionary forces and strengthen the masses' confidence and ability to organize collective resistance. In the reparations/redress movement today, the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations is drawing together activists from throughout California, the Pacific Northwest, Chicago, New York and New England. People are coming together to hammer out a common strategy for winning reparations/redress. All four generations of Japanese and even new immigrants are working and uniting together and learning from each other. This reinforces a pride in Japanese identity and culture and builds a consciousness of a people fighting for their rights.

Reparations and redress is a demand which taps the democratic aspirations of the Japanese masses. It is a call for justice, for vindication and retribution for a massive and blatant violation of the rights of a whole nationality.

For many years, Japanese have kept the bitterness deep within their hearts, perhaps fearful that the government would single them out again for imprisonment; individually each of them has had to continue to fight national oppression as a struggle to rebuild their lives. Today there is a new spirit moving throughout the Japanese community, a new call for unity, a new movement

composed of activists of all ages working together to reclaim the dignity and pride of Japanese people.

### **How the League views the demand for reparations and redress**

The demand for reparations / redress is a battle for a reform, a partial demand which, while not directly challenging the rule of the monopoly capitalists, would strike a blow against the imperialist system and enable Japanese Americans to win concrete improvements in their lives and community. While reparations can never fully repay the Japanese for the suffering and losses caused by the camps, Japanese are entitled to sue for damages when falsely accused and imprisoned. Reparations could help Japanese communities build new, low-cost housing to enable thousands of Japanese who were evicted and forced out by government-backed capitalist redevelopment to return to their historical, geographical communities. It could benefit the elderly Issei and Nisei, many of whom are in poverty. There is a need to fund services and programs which can educate about the camps and similar instances of oppression.

The call for reparations and redress is especially urgent because so many of the Issei have already passed away. Many Nisei are fast approaching retirement. Issei and Nisei have cried out for reparations/redress militantly, because as the victims of the camps they deserve priority in getting compensation.

But how can Japanese expect to win this demand? What kind of leadership should communists give to the struggle?

Winning reparations and redress will take a protracted struggle. The government is not even willing to admit it acted unjustly, much



*Manzanar pilgrimage, 1980. (UNITY photo)*

less grant compensation. The government will cling to its position that the camps were a "wartime necessity" and try to absolve itself of all responsibility. Only mass pressure can force the government to give in to the people's demand for justice and compensation.

Nor are Japanese Americans alone in this fight. Within the U.S. today, many oppressed nationalities, Blacks, Chicanos and Native Americans, are putting forth their claims for land, reparations and political power — all directed at the U.S. government and monopoly capitalists. As the work develops between these movements and

connects up with the working class movement, the ruling class — feeling the heat — must decide whether and when to grant these demands or face an even greater social upheaval.

The struggle for a reform such as reparations/redress must be led in a revolutionary way. Communists must organize the masses to fight militantly, persevere through twists and turns, and educate about the need for socialist revolution. While reforms are important and can improve the lives of Japanese people, reforms alone cannot change the basic inequality of the Japanese people which is maintained by the monopoly capitalists as a source of superprofits. This inequality can be seen in the fact that Japanese at all levels of education still earn less than whites. Many Japanese are still restricted to certain occupations such as warehouse work, restaurant work, gardening and lower level clerical work.

In explaining why Japanese are fighting for reparations/redress, we need to bring out why and how Japanese are an oppressed national minority. We need to explain how Japanese can achieve true equality and political power through socialist revolution — where the basic exploitation of one class over another is eliminated, and the equality of nationalities is established.

### **Building a united front to win reparations/redress**

The best way to fight for full equality and to win reparations/redress is to build a broad united front within the Japanese national minority. Because national oppression affects various classes and sectors of the Japanese people, it draws these different forces into motion against national oppression. Thus, the united front is an objective

alignment of classes and sectors, developed over a period of time, which can be welded together to fight national oppression.

Within the united front, we must rely on the working class and lower petty bourgeoisie who are most severely affected by national oppression and who have taken the most consistent and militant stands against national oppression. The petty bourgeoisie, which includes professionals, small merchants and others, can be won over to the side of the working class and are potential allies of the working class. Only a tiny handful of people within the Japanese national minority hold interests contrary to the majority of Japanese Americans and align themselves with the monopoly capitalist class.

Within the reparations/redress movement, specifically, there should be a united front to unite all who can be united to support the demands. This, again, will include people from different classes and sectors. There are currently a number of groups which have been participating in the reparations/redress movement, and they reflect different class backgrounds and interests. There is the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), a national civil rights organization, which is dominated by middle and upper petty bourgeois elements. There are also community-based mass organizations such as the Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization (LTPRO) and the Japanese Community Progressive Alliance (JCPA) which are rooted among workers, students and small shopkeepers.

Forging unity between all the groups in the reparations/redress movement around common principles would be a positive step forward for the Japanese national movement and would provide a strong offense



*Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization in Los Angeles is one of several community based mass organizations fighting for rights of Japanese people. (UNITY photo)*

against the government. The formation of the National Coalition for Redress / Reparations (NCRR) is an attempt to bring together all the organized forces in the reparations / redress movement such as the JACL, the National Council for Japanese American Redress, LTPRO, JCPA, the Asian / Pacific Student Union and others. As a network of local organizations, the NCRR is trying to unite around the demands for individual monetary payment, a community trust fund and overturning the Supreme Court decisions, as well as supporting other struggles for reparations and educating the public about the camps.

At the same time, the different class backgrounds of groups and individuals in the reparations / redress movement gives rise to

varying perspectives and approaches to mounting the campaign. Because of the JACL's petty bourgeois leadership, they tend to direct the reparations / redress campaign at winning the acceptance of the politicians and government leaders. This is because their class outlook on fighting national oppression is based on accommodating the capitalist system. The League and others disagree with this approach and, while utilizing support from progressive legislators, will rely mainly on building mass support to win reparations / redress. These differences, rooted in class outlook, must be resolved around concrete issues and with the long-term interests of the masses in mind. Thus, the relationship of the groups should be one of unity-struggle-unity.

Within the united front, communists have a duty to put forth their ideas on how to best organize the campaign, how to raise our demands in the boldest, sharpest way and educate broadly about our views. Communists must put forward concrete proposals which correctly assess the state of the movement and guide it in a revolutionary direction.

In addition to work in the united front, communists have a responsibility to conduct independent education and organizing among workers, students, small shopkeepers and professionals, and to draw out the advanced elements. Thus, the League will be conducting workshops and providing materials such as this pamphlet which explain our views on the significance and direction of the reparations/redress movement.

### **Commission hearings**

One of the questions facing the reparations/redress movement is what stand to take regarding the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians which was authorized by a congressional bill passed in August 1980. The seven-member commission, which will be appointed by the President and Congress, is mandated to conduct "fact finding" hearings in 15 cities. It is supposed to determine whether an injustice was committed and whether monetary compensation is necessary. The Commission has one year to make a report and can recommend legislation to Congress. Hearings are expected to start after January 1981.

There has always been divided opinion around the hearings. Some people feel that the hearings are just a farce and a waste of time. Others feel that the commission hearings could be used to educate about the

camps.

There is validity to both positions. The League did not support the commission bill because we felt it was important to demand a direct reparations bill instead of letting the government off the hook with a fact-finding study. Time is running out for many of the elderly Issei and Nisei. The commission delays, by at least one more year, the possibility of attaining some reparations.

However, the commission is now a reality, and the U.S. Congress will not consider any other redress bills until after the hearings. We must judge whether what we do with the hearings can advance the long-term interests of the reparations/redress movement; whether organizing around the hearings can build up the strength of the working class forces in the Japanese national movement. With this context in mind, the League encourages progressives and activists to organize for the hearings and to present a militant call for reparations and redress.

While we have no illusions that the commission will grant all our demands, the hearings can be used as a forum for the militant, progressive sentiments of the masses. Within the hearings, we should encourage testimony from people of various generations and backgrounds to show the broad unity for reparations and redress. This testimony should expose the government's complicity with the military and the capitalists (primarily large agricultural and fishing interests) who wanted the Japanese removed from the West Coast out of greed and racial hatred. We should indict the government for destroying Japanese communities by forced removal and expose how the destruction continues today with government-back capitalist redevelopment projects in Little Tokyo and Nihonmachi. We want to bring

out how Japanese language and culture were restricted both in the camps and in the education system today, where Japanese American history is covered up.

Outside the commission hearings, there should be informational leafleting and picketing to inform the public about the militant call for reparations and redress.

These actions at the commission hearings reinforce the need to rely on mass support to win the demand for reparations/redress. It's important for the masses to participate in the campaign, to train them to organize and realize their collective power.

Because the commission hearings are just a stopgap measure without any guarantee of granting reparations and redress, the movement must continue to build mass support,

investigate legislative and legal channels to contest the evacuation, and raise the demand for reparations/redress.

The Japanese people are a proud and revolutionary people with a rich history of struggle. The reparations/redress movement brings out these qualities, galvanizes the people into a potent political force, and lays the foundation for future struggles to achieve full equality and political power for the oppressed Japanese national minority.

**Fight National Oppression, Support the Demand for Reparations/Redress!  
Build the Unity of the Japanese National Movement!  
Fight for Full Equality and Political Power!**

## Interview with Jim Matsuoka



*Jim Matsuoka is a longtime activist in the Los Angeles Japanese American community. He is the assistant director of the special education program at California State University, Long Beach.*

**UNITY:** What was your experience with the camps?

**Jim:** I was put into the camps when I was six years old, and I really didn't know what was

going on too much. In some ways, for a small child there was a sense of liberation because you're away from the constraints that you would normally have. But one of the things we were struck with was the harshness of the area we were put in, Manzanar. It's a desert. The weather can be capricious and change quite radically and quickly. It might be a nice day, and the next minute have a raging sandstorm coming at you. It would become very, very cold and very, very hot. The camps were quite primitive — straw mattresses, tar paper and board — that was about it. It was a jarring experience, much more for the older people.

**UNITY: How did it affect your folks?**

**Jim:** My father had been saving for years to return to Japan in comfort. That was a classic dream of a lot of the immigrants, work hard in another country and maybe go back. He was hitting his 50's. There was really nothing he could do when he got out of the camps. He tried to get a series of odd jobs and any type of labor that would come up. All of our savings were frozen, and to this day, we hardly got a penny on it. It was in Sumitomo, and the government seized that as enemy alien assets, and they wiped it off the books. We still have the receipts, and they're not any good. It's quite ironic when you see Sumitomo Bank in business now — they didn't hurt too much. You wonder what the hell happened. Those were his life savings. The furniture we had stored away was stolen, and we never saw it again. So when we came out, it was just as bad as being in. We lived in a trailer camp for 2 to 3 years in Long Beach. Nothing but Japanese. These aren't the fancy trailers you think about. These were dingy, little, grey trailers. They didn't even have a john. You

had to use a communal john. Really small and cramped. When we would go to school, and the teacher would say, why don't you draw your house, all the kids from the trailer camps would draw these pitiful little trailers. All the white kids would be drawing these nice houses. It was a rugged time right after the war.

**UNITY: What did your dad do before the camps?**

**Jim:** He worked in a drugstore as a handyman. He never did have a really good job. But if he was not employed too well before the war, he was downright unemployable after the war. He never caught on how to speak English. All he had was his labor, and as he got older, that became very expendable, of little use. I used to run into him in J-Town quite a bit at one of these hiring halls, see him sitting there all day. I thought he just went there to hang out, but he was really looking for a job. And there was really nothing for him to go home to — he lived in Hiroshima, which got blown apart. Believe it or not, as poor as we were, we were sending food packages to Japan. Things were really rough.

Everyone has their own horror story, and a lot of times they don't come out until you really begin to know people. What's worse than sitting one evening with a bunch of Nisei and getting bummed out, so we don't even talk about it. Sit around and talk about bowling and everything else. But right now, the reason we want to bring it out, is we think we can do something about this thing. Don't let them get away with it.

On a relative scale, I didn't see myself as being any worse off than a lot of other people. It was quite common that we lost all our money and our furniture, and came out

with no future. That's how tough things were for everybody. Multiply that by 100,000.

My mom had a tough time coping. She was a traditional mother, was a housewife, took care of my sisters and myself. Her whole world was gone. It was real hard to keep tabs on me, 'cause I was running all over the camp. Once in a while she would just break down and cry and give up.

**UNITY: Why are you fighting for reparations?**

**Jim:** Well, when I think about all the people that have suffered . . . there was a whole generation of people that suffered terribly. These were people in high school, like my sister, who came out and had no opportunity at all. They had to immediately go to work at any job, and forfeit any chance at an education. She went to work as a nurse's aide, and she's still a nurse's aide. My other sister managed to work her way up to a dental assistant, but that's as far as she got. Not that I think that material achievement is the most important thing, but I really felt that people were never able to reach the potential of what they really were, except in rare occasions. Thank god for gardening, but all this human potential was never tapped on. In some cases it literally broke the economic back of the Issei generation, like my father for example. I don't see my parents and my sisters as exceptional. They're representative of a very large segment of Japanese American society. They've adapted and survived, but they suffered a period of terrible cruelty, and it needs to be rectified. At first I questioned the idea of direct monetary payments, but as I talk to more and more Nisei, to them it's a given that this must take place or it's not justice. Apolo-

gies aren't good enough anymore. A community fund is fine, they'll accept that too, but they also see monetary payments as being the crux of this whole reparations thing. I have to agree.

**UNITY: How do you think the camps affected the development of the community?**

**Jim:** Well, after the war, the entire leadership of the community was destroyed, and there was sort of a vacuum, there was no focal point. What happens is that we don't have a very effective leadership speaking for the Japanese community. I've been very happy to see the development of groups that try to speak on behalf of the segment of the community that no one else has spoken for in the past, like LTPRO (Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization), who fights for the average Joe.

**UNITY: What do you think it will take to get reparations?**

**Jim:** It depends on the kind of reparations we want. I think if it's simply a matter of a small amount of money, something that's very acceptable nationally, such as a mild apology and a small amount of money into a community fund, the government may go with it. After all, they would seem very hypocritical . . . we were hostages for 4 years. Maybe they'll do that to salve their own embarrassment — not their conscience. I have very little faith in their conscience.

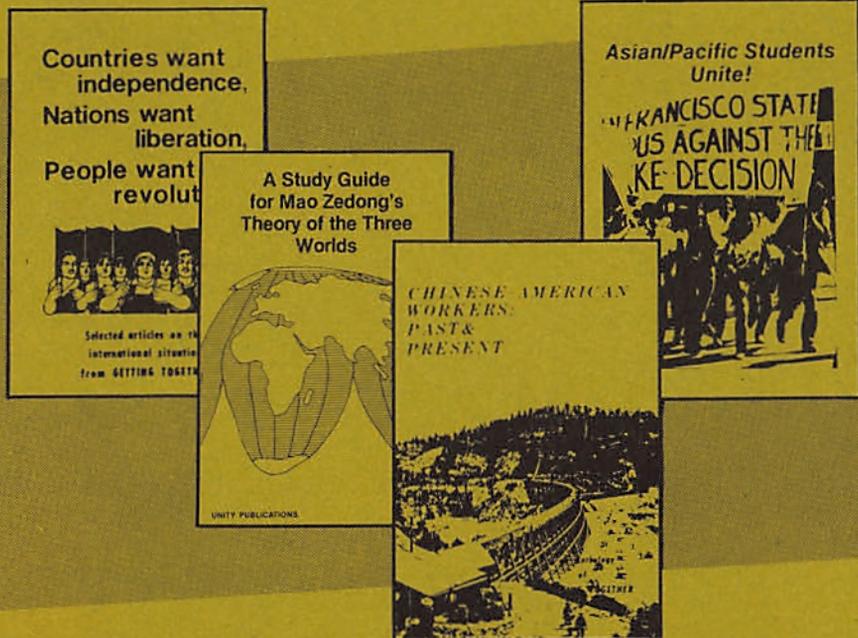
But if it comes to a substantial monetary payment, I think it's going to be a very difficult thing, and it's going to take a very united community effort and support by other segments of the minority communities in this country, plus many white people that see the errors of what occurred. □

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