

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HONORABLE S. I. HAYAKAWA,
UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM CALIFORNIA

NOT FOR MEDIA RELEASE

FROM JAPANESE AMERICA

Thirty-seven years ago, on February 19, 1942, forty years of race hatred exploded against "all persons of Japanese ancestry" in the form of a Presidential Executive Order. Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 forced three generations of Nikkei out of our homes, birth-places, businesses; made us give up, curtail, or abandon our property and education; deprived us of all civil rights; stigmatized us as "enemy aliens;" legitimized the race hatred against us; and forced us into concentration camps, where most of us lived regimented lives behind barbed wire, under guard, for an average term of two and a half years.

You, Senator Hayakawa, were not there with us on the West Coast, where the Issei established the Nikkei as working, productive members of the American nation that denied us access to naturalized United States citizenship. You were not with us in the camps.

You have repeatedly, in the press, on radio and television, in the United States and Japan, called the move for redressing the wrongs done the Nikkei and American justice "ridiculous and absurd." You have said we "weren't in prison camps," that "they were relocation centers . . . nothing prison-like about them." You credit the mass removal of Japanese Americans to concentration camps for breaking up the Japanese American "ghettos" and for our higher education in "Antioch, Oberlin, the University of Chicago, Temple University, Mount Holyoke, and so on," and further credit the camps for giving the Nikkei the opportunities that led to our enjoying the highest per capita income of any group in the nation.

They were concentration camps. Barbed wire, electrified fences, dogs, armed soldiers, machine gun towers made them concentration camps.

AN ABSENCE OF CRIMINAL CHARGE, TRIAL, OR OTHER AMENITIES OF DUE PROCESS MADE THEM CONCENTRATION CAMPS.

The per capita income of the nation rose during WW II. The population increased. For us, our per capita income dropped to nothing; our suicide, madness, and death rates increased; our birth rate flattened out.

The colleges and universities you name are fine schools. We had been attending those schools years before WW II, and did not need the concentration camps to spark our academic achievement. Prior to camp we had been in other good schools: the University of California at Berkeley, UCLA, Stanford, the University of Washington.

It was not our removal to camps that opened up the ghettos, but the repeal of the anti-Oriental laws that barred the Issei from U.S. citizenship, owning property, and certain jobs. After camp, we had nothing. That nothing is what camp gave us, not opportunity. It was our hard work, combined with the help of a few good friends, that brought us our present success. Our success does not make the concentration camps of yesterday any less heinous a violation of American justice. Our success does not excuse the camps from American history.

(more)

What you call the white hysteria of the time does not excuse or lessen the damage done to Japanese America or American justice. The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco assessed the value of our property lost in 1942 at \$400 million. The Evacuation Claims Act of 1948 paid out a total of \$38 million--8½%. The redress we seek is not for property losses, but for the violation of civil rights, wrongful imprisonment, loss of income, and psychological, social, and cultural damages.

Japanese Americans were as outraged and shocked by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor as any other Americans, and as anxious to defend America. The need for revenge against the Japanese enemy in no way justified the willful mistaking of three generations of Japanese Americans for the foreign Japanese enemy.

Everything you say justifies the mob hysteria of 1942 and ignores the fact that--as Mayor Charles Royer of Seattle wrote this January:

The people of our nation never before and never after have turned so violently against a mass of their own citizens and violated the humanitarian spirit of equality that has always been the moral basis of American law, American pride, and American spirit.

In camp we maintained our faith in the justice of a nation that had broken faith with us. Our all Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team fought in WW II with a distinction marked with the highest death and casualty rates of any unit who fought in that awful war. In that same spirit of faith in American justice, we seek redress for the camps. What you have said about white backlash and forgetting the hardships we endured in camp convinces us that--unless the concentration camps become a recognized and essential part of American history--our ideals and system are vulnerable to the very tyranny Americans loathe. The concentration camps can happen again.

From an obscure Canadian immigrant to noted scholar, educator, and U.S. senator, you have become a prominent Japanese American in many ways. We regret that you choose now to make your reputation characterizing yourself as our "public enemy no. 1." You call yourself that as if the title brings you glory. In our eyes it does not. And on the concentration camps and our concern for redress, you do not speak for Japanese America.

The white ^{AMERICANS} ~~of~~ today are different people. Today the mayors of the cities that once called for our elimination are welcoming us home. The owners and governors of the fairgrounds, livestock exhibition halls, and racetracks that once were hometown concentration camps, are giving us free use of the old assembly center sites to gather four generations of Nikkei together--Issei, Nisei, Sansei, and Yonsei--to remember the camps and stand for redress. In Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco, the white establishment, far from reviving their race hatred, are joining us to remember, to heal, and to encourage the triumph of law. We firmly believe American law can heal itself. We look to you as one of the physicians and are saddened by your mouthing of the cliches of an ancient mob.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HONORABLE S.I. HAYAKAWA,
UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM CALIFORNIA

Thirty-seven years ago, on February 19, 1942, a half century of accumulated race hatred exploded against all persons of Japanese ancestry in the form of a Presidential fiat. Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 wrenched three generations of Nikkei out of our homes, our birthplaces, our businesses. [It not only] forced us to abandon our property, curtailed our education, ^{and} deprived us of all of our civil rights, ^{but} it stigmatized us as "enemy aliens, legitimized [the campaign of villification against us] and forced us into concentration camps, where most of us lived ~~regimented lives~~ behind barbed wire for ~~an average ten~~ of two ^{to} ~~and~~ ^{three} years.

You, Senator Hayakawa, were not there, either on the West Coast where Japanese Americans were established as productive members of the American nation, or in the camps. Yet you would have the public believe that you speak as one of us, ~~as an authority on Japanese America.~~ You do not.

You have repeatedly, in the press, on radio and television, called ~~the~~ the move for redressing the wrongs done Japanese Americans "ridiculous and absurd." You dispute history by insisting that the Nikkei "weren't in prison camps"; that "they were ^{benign} relocation centers"; that there was "nothing prison-like about them." Check any standard encyclopedia. Officialdom referred to them then, as they do now, as concentration camps. Barbed wire, armed soldiers, machine gun towers, made them concentration camps.

You credit the mass removal of Japanese Americans to concentration camps for breaking up the Japanese American "ghettos" and for providing higher education in "Antioch, Oberlin, the University of Chicago, Temple University, Mt. Holyoke, and so on." The colleges and universities you name are fine schools. In fact, we had been attending those schools for years before World War II. We did not need concentration camps to spark our academic achievement.

It was not our removal to camps that destroyed the ghettos and opened up opportunities for us, but the repeal of anti-Asian laws that barred so many of us, especially the immigrant Issei, from U.S. citizenship, owning property, and entering certain professions. After camp, we had nothing. NOTHING is what camp gave us -- including broken health, suicides, madness -- not opportunities. It was hard work, sweat, tears, combined with the help of a few good friends, that has brought us where we are. Our "success" does not make the concentration camps of yesterday any less heinous a violation of American justice.

What you call ~~the~~ "hysteria" of the time does not excuse the damage done to Japanese America or American justice. The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco assessed the value of our property loss alone at \$400 million--in 1942 dollars. Only a token payment of \$38 million--8% on the '42 dollar--has been made to date. ~~The redress we now seek is not for losses involving property~~ Many received not a cent. The redress we now seek is not for losses involving property, but for the violation of civil rights, wrongful internment, loss of income, psychic, social and other damages too numerous to mention.

Japanese Americans were as outraged by the Pearl Harbor attack as all Americans. The need to avenge the Japanese enemy, or to use us as a hostage reserve, in no way justified the peremptory roundup of innocent men, women and children under the guise of "protective custody." Your innuendos and half-truths only serves to "justify" the ~~governmental~~ ^{governmental} excesses of 1942 and ignores the fact that the State Department's own pre-Pearl Harbor findings had indicated that Japanese Americans "possessed an extraordinary degree of loyalty to the United States."

In camp we maintained our faith in the justice of a nation that had broken faith with us. [Our men fought on far-flung battlefronts with stoic heroism to purchase the freedom of their loved ones and others suffering oppression.] It is in that spirit of indomitable faith in American justice that we now seek redress for scandalous wrongs

that many history books still choose to ignore. What you have said about the need to simply forget the injustices, the hardships, convinces us that, unless the existence of those concentration camps become a recognized part of American history, concentration camps can happen again.

As a one-time immigrant from Canada, you have achieved fame and recognition as a member of the U.S. Senate. But when a legislator turns deaf to his community and grossly offends his fellow ethnic constituents in order to curry the ~~votes~~ votes of racists and reactionaries, he does not bring honor nor integrity to the title of Senator. In characterizing yourself as "public enemy no. 1" of those who speak out for equal justice under the law, we question your motives. In our eyes, you are as demagogic as those who succeeded in stigmatizing us as less than first class citizens and in sending us to those camps.

Today the mayors of the cities that once called for our elimination are welcoming us home. Governors and even the owners of the fairgrounds, livestock pavilions, and racetracks that once were our concentration camps, are giving us free use of them so we can gather together, to emblazon on the public conscience the memory of the wrongs then perpetrated, to stand together for redress. Far from reviving a "white backlash" as you put it, white Americans are joining us in these pilgrimages to help remind one and all that this did happen in America. And by so doing, they are helping to heal, they are sharing with us their humanity, they are encouraging the triumph of law.