

May 17, 1979

Dear Congressman Yates:

Enclosed is a copy of the resolution passed at the May 9th meeting of the Chicago Chapter of JACL. The action is a dissent from the decision of the national JACL to legislate for a Studies Commission as a means of obtaining reparations. I know you will weigh the decision of the Chicago Chapter carefully in your consideration of this important issue.

I have discussed this issue by correspondence with the national president of JACL, Dr. Clifford Uyada. Clifford is a person for whom I have the highest regard. We disagree on this issue. His opinion is based primarily on the JACL leadership's discussion with Japanese American legislators (Mineta, Matsui, Inouye, and Matsugaga). His conclusions indicate that in these legislators' judgment, the only viable approach to achieving reparations is through a Congressional Studies Commission. Such a Commission would allow time for the climate to change (away from budgetary austerity) and for education of the general electorate. On the other hand, it is said, an appropriations bill for reparations would surely fail and be permanently unsuccessful. This assessment of the alternatives is called "political reality."

I agree that the Commission approach is cautious and prudent. But I disagree with it for the following reasons:

1. It has been 37 years and the first generation group, the Issei, are rapidly disappearing. Justice delayed for them is justice denied.
2. The Studies Commission is to conduct an inquiry and to determine facts which we Japanese Americans already know. We do not need a Commission to tell us what we know. The concept is paternalistic and offends me deeply.
3. I think the democratic process works best when the citizen formulates his or her will with as much clarity and truth as possible, without regard to legislative obstacles. It may seem prudent, sophisticated, even wise to incorporate legislative obstacles into the expression of one's will. But this incorporation, in my judgment, only obscures the will. Thus, the Commission is quite different from an appropriation. One is looking for answers. The other, for money.
4. The issue of reparations is one of justice. I question the notion that the proper exercise of justice requires a sophisticated analysis of political realities. For that makes justice contingent upon such realities and therefore, effectively, not just at all.

- 2 -

Most of my Japanese American friends are quite sober about a reparations bill. That is, they don't think success will be easy. It will be difficult and maybe impossible. But only one of them favors the Commission approach. The rest echo Dr. Frank Sakamoto's words, "Let's go all the way!"

I am flying to Seattle tomorrow to meet with friends who are drafting a redress bill for introduction from the Pacific Northwest. (They insist on "redress" rather than "reparations.") May I urge you to give this bill your serious consideration?

Peace,

William Hohri

