

THE RETURN OF THE FAIR PLAY COMMITTEE:
Japanese American Resistance in WW2

Project description

For the first time, this program will show how the U.S. government, in collaboration with Japanese American leaders, suppressed the largest organized resistance inside America's wartime internment camps. Revelation of this as-yet untold story belies the stereotype that all Japanese Americans submitted to their incarceration with a mixture of passive resignation and patriotic loyalty.

Our story is told through the eyes of the surviving resisters from the camp at Heart Mountain, Wyoming. Eighty-five young men refused to be drafted out of camp for military service until the rights of all Japanese American citizens were first restored and their parents released from camp. They called themselves the Fair Play Committee. Their cry was "One For All -- All For One," and their bulletins bristled with references to Abraham Lincoln and equal protection under the law.

In the largest mass trial in Wyoming history, the first group of 63 was convicted of draft evasion and sentenced to three years in prison. The government then went after the leaders of the Fair Play Committee and one journalist, James Omura. All but Omura were convicted of counseling draft evasion. The resisters served their sentences. After the war President Truman issued a blanket pardon of all resisters, and the resistance was quickly forgotten by Japanese America -- written out the books produced by the unofficial keepers of Japanese American history.

For fifty years the resisters have been pariahs in their own community, branded as draft-dodgers who betrayed the best interests of their people.

Our program begins as the resisters prepare to meet the community once again at a pair of ceremonial homecomings in San Jose and Los Angeles.

rented halls and prepared to

They rented halls, organized potluck, but the question hangs over them: Will the community come?

We then see the story of the resisters unfold through old photos, period music, and interviews. The letters of the resisters will be read by themselves, or by internationally-known actors George Takei, Mako, and others.

For music, there will be no Japanese flutes or koto. We will use period music, including Western Swing emblematic of the Wyoming locale, and themes from Tin Pan Alley.

Would the community come? Yes. Last May and this February, we

brought the boys of Heart Mountain home, before hometown audiences of 300 in San Jose and 400 in Los Angeles. Our cameras captured the emotion of the moment as the resisters read from their bulletins and letters, and signed a blowup of their trial photo.

The result is theater. Audience is part of show. The audience makes an emotional public connection with a history that until now has been unspoken and unspeakable. This project is the next step in the restoration of an authentic Japanese American history. It comes from the same creative team that helped spark the redress campaign, unacknowledged public art projects call the Day of Remembrance, we started first two in 1978, it's now embraced as an invested tradition, part of culture. Our approach here is the same.

This event and this documentary is conceived and produced by the same creative team that helped spark the initial campaign for Japanese American redress, a campaign that forced Congress to reopen the question of American wartime injustice and ultimately led to the unprecedented awarding of redress and reparations to all Japanese American internees. Though there had been pilgrimages to camp before, Frank Abe, Lawson Inada, and Frank Chin created the very first Day of Remembrance car caravan and community reclaiming at the Puyallup detention center in 1978. This was the first event ever to dare to "remember the camps, stand for redress with your families." National publicity from that successful event led to an invitation to produce a similar event in Portland, in Feb. 1979, and share the formula with groups in San Francisco and Sacramento, (LA?) in Feb. 1979.

need money to tell other side of story the JAACL collaboration and animation of documents veterans

audience part of the story, signal community acceptance of the resisters story, restore connection to history. Both in the ceremonial homecomings, and through this video, we are restoring a connection to a history that has been denied us for 50 years.

The power of this story is in its telling in the words of the resisters themselves, there is no invention here, no slanting, no editorializing. The story itself is powerful enough. And the response from the community

The audience is a character in our documentary. the audience is the community. Their response is clear in the laughter and applause, the warmth and goodwill of the resisters.

The audience is a character in this movie, verifying the hunger for this knowledge and the desire for a truer version of their history than they've been allowed until now. This story cuts to the heart of the question of what it meant to be Japanese American, arguably, with far more integrity.

My own father was at Heart Mountain. He was too young for the draft. I grew up in the Santa Clara Valley not knowing that the resisters were living in obscurity all around me. This documentary, with an accompanying oversized book version of the script, is my chance to go back and knock on their door and say I'm glad they stood up for Japanese American integrity and our rights.

-- Frank Abe

I'm trying to walk them through the video, and give background at same time, then show how we produced two ceremonial homecomings.

The recovery of the resisters through this project has been covered on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," in the Los Angeles Times, and in the San Jose Mercury-News "West" Magazine (copies available upon request).

CO-APPLICANT
LAWSON FUSAO INADA

Lawson Fusao Inada's reputation is unchallenged as the unofficial poet laureate of Japanese America. His 1971 collection, *Before the War*, (Morrow) was the first volume of poetry by an Asian American to be published by a major firm. In his recently published collection, *Legends from Camp* (Coffee House Press, 1992), Inada acts the part of the Poet-Statesman in giving readers access to WWII incarceration of Japanese Americans.

Inada has taught at Southern Oregon State College since 1966. He speaks on multicultural curriculum for the Modern Language Association. He has appeared at the White House to read in "A Salute to Poetry and American Poets." He serves on the Commission on Racism and Bias in Education, and has been the subject of a documentary film sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education.

Inada is also co-editor with Frank Chin of the groundbreaking *An Anthology of Asian American Literature* (Doubleday, 1976) and *The Big A* (New American Library, 1992).

With Chin and Frank Abe, Lawson Inada helped invent a new folk tradition in modern Japanese American culture. The three created the very first DAY of REMembrance in 1978,

Abe forced disclosure of the JACL's own internal inquiry that

produced so-called "Lim Report." two stories in vernacular press that

Our project is daring, in that our "track records" are in collateral fields. We do not make documentaries for a living. But we have that foundation with a renowned and committed photographer and bring a new vision.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY PHIL STURHOLM has just been inducted into the "Silver Circle" hall of fame of the Seattle chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. He was director of photography for the national-Emmy nominated "Two Decades and a Wakeup" (1991), the story of Vietnam vets returning to Vietnam; for "Reflections of China" (1979) he was in one of the first American TV crews to enter the People's Republic of China, and won a National Press Photographers award. For his other work on PBS, PM Magazine, and the CBS and NBC affiliates in Seattle, Sturholm has won two national Emmy's, 29 local Emmy's, and multiple first-place awards and gold medals from the Los Angeles International Film Festival, Atlanta International Film Festival, Dupont Awards, Ohio State Award, the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi, and was part of a team that won a Peabody Award. Sturholm has long admired the work of Frank Chin from the time they produced documentaries at King Screen Features in the late sixties, and worked with Frank Abe at KIRO-TV.

GEORGE TAKEI is known world-wide as "Mr. Sulu" of Star Trek fame, but he appeared on PBS as a bitter Chinatown tour guide in Frank Chin's "year of the DRagon," on Exxon's Theater in America in 1975.

MAKO was nominated for an Academy Award for his supporting role in Robert Wise's 1966 film, The Sand Pebbles, and starred in Steven Sondheim's 1974 musical, Pacific Overtures. He founded East/West Players, the nation's first professional Asian American theater company, and was the first to recognize Frank Chin's ability as a playwright.

A journalist, a poet and a playwright collaborate to recover the story of the largest organized resistance inside America's wartime concentration camps. Through the words of the surviving resisters, we see how the U.S. government collaborated with Japanese American leaders to suppress that resistance, and how the resisters alone fought to maintain Japanese American integrity. The story climaxes with two ceremonial homecomings in which the Japanese American community is reconnected with its own living history.

Producer/Writer FRANK ABE
Narrator/Writer LAWSON FUSAO INADA
Director/Writer FRANK CHIN
Director of Photography PHIL STURHOLM
Narrative voices MAKO, GEORGE TAKEI

NAATA

We have managed to produce and videotape two full ceremonial homecomings through private donations and donations of our own time -- ten years of research and preparation. NAATA's funds will be crucial in moving the project towards full production. Our script is nearly written. Our next task is the research and collection of many more photos to fill out the visual story, and the conducting of key interviews in San Jose, Chicago, and Wyoming, to move our narrative along.

The sample work collects highlights of our two ceremonial homecomings and other video we've already shot. Poet Lawson Inada provides a brief introduction and background.

The sample is written, assembled and produced by applicant Frank Abe. It was shot and edited by director of photography Phil Sturholm. The music may be used as our theme. It's western swing from Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys.

FUNDRAISING

The Motoda Foundation on March 9th provided our first significant grant of 5,000. We have an application in to ITVS for 100,000.

The Motoda Foundation is willing to entertain another proposal in its next round of applications this fall. As the result of the Los Angeles homecoming, the Southern California ACLU has offered support of an as yet undetermined amount.

We are seeking major funding from ITVS. An earlier and less-realized version of this proposal was a finalist in that groups' 1991 Open Call. Failing that, we may be able to obtain an advance on a proposed book based on our successful script for the ceremonial homecomings, and apply that towards

The success of the ceremonial homecomings has encouraged us to consider launching a fundraising drive in the community itself, starting with the resisters. Our efforts in that regard have until now relied on personal contacts.

One thing is certain: we will not allow lack of funds to keep us from finishing this project.

COMPLETION TIMELINE

We are determined to complete production of this video and an accompanying large format book by the summer of 1994 -- the 50th anniversary of the trial of the first 63 Heart Mountain resisters, and the subsequent conspiracy trial of the Fair Play Committee leaders and journalist Jimmie Omura.

Time is of the essence as the resisters are all in their seventies. We need to get everything on tape, and we want them to see the results.

DISTRIBUTION PLAN

ITVS funding carries with it national distribution.

The public television station in San Jose, KTEH, has expressed interest in serving as our entry station for PBS, should we choose to go that route. We have also made contacts with KCET in Los Angeles and KCTS in Seattle.

In either event, we would work closely with NAATA and Crosscurrent Media in any distribution plan. We very strongly want the video used in classrooms, and have many personal contacts through our colleagues in the Association of Asian American Studies, the Before Columbus Foundation.

The San Jose homecoming was staged as part of the national convention of the Association of Asian American Studies, which also printed Fair Play Committee documents in its book-length proceedings.

We are already receiving many requests for the finished product from schools, museums, and community groups,

----- SAMPLE TAPE INFORMATION SHEET

"...And Still Champion!: The Story of Archie Moore" (1967)
60 minutes
16mm
cost: \$1,000,000.

writer and associate producer FRANK CHIN
photography by PHIL STURHOLM

produced and directed by Loy Norrix
narrated by Jack Palance

A King Stations Production.

The one-time light-heavyweight champion of the world tells his life story as his greatest fight. The sample is very close to the tone and style of the current proposal, in its use of interviews, photographs, headlines and other source material. The sample also showcases the ability of co-applicant FRANK CHIN to tell a story and photographer PHIL STURHOIM to visualize it.

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