

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

### SYNOPSIS

At the height of the World War II incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans, 85 young men refused to be drafted out of the American concentration camp at Heart Mountain, Wyoming. They were ready to give their lives in battle to defend the Constitution... but not until their rights as American citizens were first restored and their families released from camp.

It was the largest organized resistance inside an American concentration camp, leading to what is still the biggest mass trial in Wyoming history. Yet for fifty years the story of the **Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee** has been regarded by the Japanese American community as shameful, even traitorous, and omitted from the community's folklore in favor of the more popular story of Japanese American service in the U.S. Army.

The Heart Mountain resisters have been pariahs in the Japanese American community for fifty years. Two generations have come to adulthood believing Japanese America endured the loss of all their civil rights, and three years in camp, without protest or resistance. Why? The surprising answer has been: the **Japanese American Citizens League** (JACL). Using the original words and pictures of the 1940's, we show how the Heart Mountain resistance challenged not only the U.S. government, but the government-sanctioned leadership of the JACL. We see how the JACL rejected offers from the ACLU to challenge the internment and instead sought to prove the loyalty of Japanese Americans by collaborating with government intelligence before Pearl Harbor, cooperating with their own internment, opposing all test cases, and lobbying for reinstatement of Selective Service and suppression of all resistance.

This is a story of resistance and betrayal. The difference between those who cooperated, and those who resisted, is the story of Japanese America.

(more)

## STYLE, FORMAT AND APPROACH

The program is narrated by poet Lawson Fusao Inada, widely regarded as the poet laureate of Japanese America. Letters and documents of the government, the JACL and the resisters will be read by actors Mako, George Takei and others. Musician and folklorist Charlie Chin will create a score that twists musical genres, for example using a Japanese shakuhachi and a fiddle and bass to reinterpret the Western swing most heard on the radio in 1940's Wyoming.

**Part I: The Betrayal:** The wartime leader of the JACL was the late Mike Masaoka, a Utah native who prided himself on being a "Moses" in reverse for leading his people out of the promised land and into desert camps. Through surviving film and video and readings from his memos, we see how Masaoka positioned the JACL to speak for the community and urged cheerful cooperation with internment as proof of loyalty. In memos he advises the government on use of the camps as indoctrination centers for the creation of "Better Americans in a Greater America" through eradication of Japanese language and culture. The JACL rejects offers from the ACLU to mount a test case challenging the constitutionality of the camps in court, convinced such cases could not succeed.

To corroborate the documents and comment on the JACL's policies we will interview renowned historians Michi Nishiura Weglyn and Roger Daniels. Weglyn authored the landmark history, **Years of Infamy**, which lends its title to this program. Her research in the National Archives provides much of the new information that informs our script.

**Part II: The Resistance:** Seeing no effort by their leaders to fight for their rights, a grocer, Frank Emi, emerges at Heart Mountain to lead the Fair Play Committee. A flower grower, Mits Koshiyama, is among the first group to refuse induction in order to bring the question of their citizenship rights to court. Journalist James Omura throws them a lifeline by printing their press releases and editorializing in their favor. The JACL, having promoted creation of a segregated Army unit as a means of generating sympathy for the Japanese Americans, brands the resisters as "draft-dodgers, delinquents and disloyals" and urges their prosecution for sedition.

Through interviews, photos, and readings from their letters and bulletins, we follow the resisters from their organizing to their arrest to their trial and imprisonment, and their ultimate ostracism from the community. Portions of interviews are shot with the face off to the side, leaving the rest of the screen for photo images, or highlighted excerpts from their letters.

**Part III: The Return:** After 50-years the community turns out to welcome home the resisters and recognize their principled stand. To bring this story alive for television, we staged two public homecomings for the resisters in Los Angeles and San Jose. Through the laughter and emotion of live audiences we see Japanese Americans of today rediscover the difficult truth of their collective history, as the resisters read from their bulletins and letters, tell stories, and autograph a blowup of their courtroom portrait.

We then follow Mits Koshiyama and Frank Emi into the lion's den at Salt Lake City, attending a Mike Masaoka memorial tribute and appearing before a JACL national convention, where a spokesman still defends the group's wartime actions.

### THE AUDIENCE

For 50 years America has subscribed to the stereotype that Japanese Americans submitted passively to their wartime incarceration out of a mixture of blind loyalty and patient resignation. The Japanese word was shikataganai: it can't be helped. After the war the government and JACL urged that Japanese Americans be scattered across the nation rather than recreate their "ghettoes" on the West Coast, and tens of thousands sought to assimilate into the East and Midwest. Their children were called naive when they asked, "Why didn't you resist?"

This documentary proves the stereotypes wrong. Japanese America did resist. This program restores to Japanese Americans nationwide a renewed sense of community by identifying the nature of their betrayal into the camps. It confirms that protest and resistance inside the camps was real, not a fiction dreamed up by the Sansei, the children of the camps.

To bring the story alive for television we staged ceremonial homecomings that drew 400 in Los Angeles and 300 in San Jose. The reactions of the live audiences as captured on camera verify the emotional chord that is struck by the recovery of this story. As journalists and artists we know that to succeed in the medium of television we cannot be partisan. Because our information rejects commonly-held beliefs about this period of history, our script takes pains to build its case strictly through the words and documents of the wartime era, in the context of the times, and lets viewers judge for themselves.

We have restored the resisters to the collective consciousness of Japanese America through the very process of making this program; we now seek to share it with the public at large. **Years of Infamy** breaks new ground in its revelations about the Japanese American Citizens League, whose wartime collaboration stands in sharp contrast with its modern image as a civil rights organization. This story of betrayal and resistance has never been told on television before, other than 2-1/2 minutes on the resisters in Loni Ding's The Color of Honor. It is distinct from and goes beyond the story of the three curfew violators told in Steven Okazaki's Unfinished Business.

The movement we started has made the resistance and betrayal a hot-button topic in the national Japanese American community, prompting major coverage in the Asian American vernaculars, National Public Radio's "Morning Edition," the *San Jose Mercury-News* "West" Magazine, and the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*.

The Heart Mountain resisters never believed they would be recognized in their lifetime. After taping their interviews two of our subjects, James Omura and Dave Kawamoto, have since passed away.

**Frank Abe** / Seattle, WA  
**Phil Sturholm** / Seattle, WA  
**Frank Chin** / Los Angeles, CA  
**Lawson Fusao Inada** / Ashland, OR

January, 1996

*Tax-exempt fiscal sponsor:*

*The Before Columbus Foundation, c/o American Ethnic Studies, GN-80, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195. Federal tax ID # 94-2534340.*

## PRODUCTION PERSONNEL

This production has recruited five true pioneers in their respective fields of Asian American arts and culture. Playwright and novelist **Frank Chin** and poet **Lawson Fusao Inada** are co-writing the script and providing the direction and narration. Folklorist **Charlie Chin** will compose and perform the original music. Actors **Mako** and **George Takei** will provide voice-overs to bring alive the documents of the government and JACL, and the letters of the resisters.

This team combines the artist's eye, the historian's perspective and the journalist's accuracy with the craft of an award-winning videographer and editor. The writers have demonstrated a twelve-year commitment to the research and publication of this story, as documented in the introduction to the literary anthology, **The Big AIIIEEEEE!** (New American Library, 1991). The production team has committed three years to date to develop this TV documentary as a means of advancing this story.

Between us we have the researching, writing and producing experience to deliver a quality product with an original vision for public television.

**Director and Co-Writer FRANK CHIN** is the author of the 1975 PBS "Theater in America" production of **Year of the Dragon**. His latest novel, **Gunga Din Highway**, was published in 1994 by Coffee House Press.

Chin's extensive television experience includes 3 years as director, writer, producer and story editor at King Screen Productions in Seattle, a subsidiary of KING-TV, where he and Phil Sturholm produced **...And Still Champion! The Story of Archie Moore** (1967, narrated by Jack Palance) and 9 other original documentaries. Chin wrote and reported an hour-long documentary on New York Chinatown, **Chinaman's Chance**, for WNET-TV.

Chin is internationally known for his gifts as a storyteller and his boldness of vision in the recovery of Asian American history, literature and culture. His plays, **The Chickencoop Chinaman** and **Year of the Dragon** were the first by an Asian American to be produced off-Broadway in New York. He founded the Asian American Theater Workshop in San Francisco in 1973.

Chin is co-editor of the 1974 literary declaration of independence, **AIIEEEEE!**, and its 1991 update, **The Big AIIEEEEE!**, and author of a novel, **Donald Duk** (1991), and a collection of short stories, **The Chinaman Pacific & Frisco R.R. Co.** (1988). He has won a Rockefeller Foundation grant, a Lannan Literary Fellowship and two American Book Awards.

Chin's research on the camp resistance appears in his introduction to **The Big AIIEEEEE!**, and in a forthcoming book based on the script for this project.

**Narrator and Co-Writer LAWSON FUSAO INADA** is regarded by many as the poet laureate of Japanese America. His **Before the War** (1971) was the first volume of poetry by an Asian American to be published by a major firm. In his second collection, **Legends from Camp** (1992), Inada acts the part of the Poet-Statesman in giving readers access to the Japanese American camp experience. Inada is co-editor with Chin of the groundbreaking **AIIEEEEE!** and **The Big AIIEEEEE!**

Inada has taught at Southern Oregon State College since 1966. He has read at the White House and speaks on multicultural curriculum for the Modern Language Association. 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.

**Producer and Co-Writer FRANK ABE** is a former senior reporter for **KIRO Newsradio** and **KIRO-TV**, the **CBS** affiliates in Seattle. In his 14-year career he covered criminal justice and county government, broadcast live from Japan, Korea and Thailand, and produced a weekly series featuring American writers of color, "**Other Voices.**" He won awards from the Asian American Journalists Association, the State Bar Association, the Society of Professional Journalists, and others. He is now communications director for King County Executive Gary Locke in Seattle.

Abe produced the very first "**Days of Remembrance**" to publicly dramatize the campaign for reparations and redress; the annual events are now institutionalized as an invented Japanese American tradition. He was project director in 1980 for a series of successful public symposiums and radio documentary, "**Japanese America: Contemporary Perspectives on the Internment,**" funded by the Washington Commission for the Humanities.

Abe is a former National Vice-President of the Asian American Journalists Association. A founding director of the Asian American Theater Workshop in San Francisco, he was featured as an internment camp leader in John Korty's 1976 **NBC-TV** movie, **Farewell to Manzanar.**

**Videographer and Editor PHIL STURHOLM** co-produced, shot and edited the recently-completed documentary, **Kontum Diary**, an ITVS-funded project offered to **PBS** this year. The program follows an American Vietnam Vet in his emotional journey back to Vietnam to return a diary to a former North Vietnamese soldier he once fought.

Sturholm was director of photography for the national-Emmy-nominated **Two Decades and a Wakeup** (1991). He won a National Press Photographers Award for **Reflections of China** (1979), as one of the first American TV photographers to enter the People's Republic of China.

For his 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 gold medals from the Los Angeles International Film Festival, Dupont Awards, Ohio State Award, and the Society of Professional Journalists. He shares a Peabody Award.

Sturholm was recently inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Seattle chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

**Music Composer and Arranger CHARLIE CHIN** is an accomplished folk, classical, jazz and rock musician who helped launch the Asian American political movement with his contributions to the landmark 1970's recordings of **A Grain of Sand** and **Yellow Pearl**. With his group "Cat Mother and the All Night Newsboys," Chin charted nationally with the 1969 hit single, **Good Old Rock and Roll**.

The Smithsonian Institute honored Chin as a "Community Folklore Scholar" for his work as an oral historian and theatrical and musical artist in New York's Chinatown.

**Voice talent MAKO** was nominated for an Academy Award for his supporting role in Robert Wise's 1966 film, **The Sand Pebbles**, and played the lead in Steven Sondheim's 1974 Broadway musical, **Pacific Overtures**. Mako founded **East/West Players** of Los Angeles, the nation's first professional Asian American theater company, and was the first to recognize Frank Chin's talent as a playwright.

**Voice talent GEORGE TAKEI** is known world-wide as "Mr. Sulu" of the **Star Trek** movies and Trek-classic TV series. He appeared on **PBS'** Exxon "Theater in America" series as a bitter Chinatown tour guide in Frank Chin's **Year of the Dragon**. Among Takei's other films are **Hell to Eternity**, **The Green Berets**, and **Prisoners of the Sun**. Takei is a trustee of the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, and author of the autobiography, **To the Stars**.

## BUDGET SUMMARY

January, 1996

CATEGORY	AMOUNT	IN-KIND TO DATE
PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	\$ 4,000.	\$ 10,000.
PRODUCING STAFF	25,000.	20,200.
RIGHTS	8,650.	0.
TALENT	3,400.	0.
PRODUCTION PERSONNEL	7,500.	4,200.
PRODUCTION EXPENSES	19,606.	4,120.
POST-PRODUCTION EXPENSES	14,520.	1,000.
PRODUCTION ADMINISTRATION	1,750.	2,177.
BROADCAST INSURANCE	7,089.	0.
CLOSED CAPTIONING, OTHER	<u>2,450.</u>	<u>500.</u>
<b>SUBTOTAL EXPENSES</b>	93,965.	
CONTINGENCY	4,698.	
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>98,663.</b>	<b>42,197.</b>
<b>INCOME TO DATE</b>		
small donors	4,240.	
Motoda Foundation	7,500.	
Anheuser-Busch Companies	5,000.	
Brooks and Sumi Iwakiri	4,000.	
Michi and Walter Weglyn	3,525.	
anonymous donor	<u>2,500.</u>	
<b>minus TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>26,765.</b>	
<b>minus EXPENSES ALREADY PAID</b>	<b>12,254.</b>	
<b>equals COST TO COMPLETE</b>	<b>59,644.</b>	