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An open letter to Melvin Chiogioji, Chairman  
The National Japanese American Memorial Foundation

Dear Chair:

Thank you very much for your recent letter to the vernacular press as chair of the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation. In it you certainly have clarified your lack of concern for the following:

- ◆ That the Japanese American community and other interested persons have been largely ignored by you in developing the wording of the inscriptions for the monument ;

- ◆ That the one inscription which was published by the Associated Press in July 1999 stated that the Court had upheld the power of the government to incarcerate groups of innocent people in times of emergency, inferring that the Japanese American imprisonment was and is constitutional and "is not to be condemned." This proposed inscription resulted in such a furor among knowledgeable persons that you were forced to withdraw it;

- ◆ That you have deliberately attributed public support for the monument as extending also to the inscriptions, which is just one element of the entire monument. The foundation has not published the inscriptions for comments by the Nikkei community and has not invited input, even from the vast majority of people whose generous donations have made the monument possible;

- ◆ That requests by us common folk for information about the monument do not receive the courtesy of a response by your staff. My own request to you made in October 1999 is yet unanswered;

- ◆ That internal procedures originally established by your board to ensure orderly and democratic functioning have been abandoned by your clique on the board in order to achieve a predetermined end;

- ◆ That the original inscription about the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team failed to give them proper recognition until, by chance, a local veterans group learned of this error of omission and forced a revision of the text;

- ◆ That despite the designation on one of the inscriptions of the *Japanese American* Military Intelligence Service, there has never been such an organization;

- ◆ That you didn't care that reference to the 1399<sup>th</sup> Engineer Construction Battalion was eliminated despite its many wartime accomplishments until the organization comprised of veterans of the 1399<sup>th</sup> threatened to withhold its financial pledge;

- ◆ That both the Hawaii Club 100 and the 442<sup>nd</sup> Veterans Association, of Hawaii, have raised objections to the name of Mike Masaoka on the monument;

- ◆ That you have ignored the request of the Japanese American Korean War Veterans Association to mention in the narrative section that Japanese Americans gave their lives in the Spanish American War, World War I, the Korean War in which 246 died, in Viet Nam and all other wars;

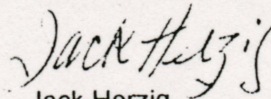


◆ That in your opinion only former camp inmates, thereby excluding some members of your own board, are qualified to contribute to your version of Japanese American and, therefore, American history. Do you rate those who spent time only in Army-operated assembly centers as equally qualified with those who spent time in camps run by the War Relocation Authority? How about those who were interned only in Department of Justice camps with those who were in both DOJ camps and then paroled to WRA camps? Under your criterion, do you allow contributions by the successful *coram nobis* legal teams, most of whom were *Sansei* but -- Heaven forbid! -- included non-Nikkei, even *Chinese Americans* and *hakujin* [Caucasians] like me? What is your assessment of those not being qualified to make additions to history, like Chinese American Loni Ding with her award-winning films, *Nisei Soldier* and *The Color of Honor*, and Deborah Lim, author of the report on the Japanese American Citizens League?

◆ That it made no difference to you that the *haiku* approved by your board was then considered so inappropriate that it was deleted, only somehow to reappear, but then to be removed again, this time at the recommendation of the Commission on Fine Arts. Will it reappear again, Phoenix-like?

So now you have made it very clear that the real issue with which you are concerned is Mike Masaoka since five of the twelve paragraphs in your news release are about him. If your limited view of Nikkei history is allowed to prevail, the memorial to the patriotism of all Japanese Americans will be perceived by many people as the Mike Masaoka monument.

It is most distressing to see the third possible catastrophe for Japanese Americans; the first being the devastation caused by the exclusion and incarceration itself; the second, the unjust implementation of the Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act; and now in this monument the disregard for the Japanese American community by your coterie of board members in order to attain its personal political ends.

  
Jack Herzig