

By the *Justice For All* Conference Committee

**This position paper addresses the intersectionality of the structural racism facing Japanese Americans before during and after World War II and the racism, discrimination, and hatred facing marginalized groups today as well as where there is opportunity for change.**

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### **About the Redress Conference**

The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) was appointed by Congress in 1980 to study the facts, circumstances, and long-term consequences of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066. This order forced West Coast Japanese Americans (JAs) from their homes and incarcerated them in "camps" during World War II. Forty years ago, September 22-23, 1981, **Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU)** hosted one of ten CWRIC public hearings that took testimony from over 750 survivors. The Commission concluded that the wartime incarceration of JAs was not a military necessity but the result of "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership." (*Personal Justice Denied*) This conclusion served as the basis for the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 which offered survivors a formal apology, individual monetary reparations, and a public education fund.

While these past injustices against JAs were redressed by this Act, systemic racism, oppression, and hate are the centuries-old reality for millions of African Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Muslims, Jews, and many other vulnerable groups. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference of the CWRIC hearings at NEIU, ***With Liberty and Justice for All: Racism, Redress, and Reparations*** is intended to help people take action to eliminate unfair practices and gain true equality for everyone.

The focus will be on what can be done to pass House Bill 40 (HR40, Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act), stop the detention and separation of families at the U.S. southern border, and get immigration reform so Dreamers and immigrants can obtain citizenship, as well as end racism and discrimination for all minorities.

### **Immigration**

The Japanese were allowed to enter the United States as cheap labor, but were denied citizenship. This also happened to the previous wave of Chinese immigrants, and this practice continues with minorities today: the United States continues to seek cheap labor to do jobs Americans choose not to do, while denying these workers citizenship. Dreamers brought to the United States as children are still

deemed illegal aliens. Even though this is the only home many of them have ever known, they are still waiting for a path to citizenship, and for immigration reform.

The current situation on the southern border echoes the treatment of JAs during World War II. Immigrant children are incarcerated en masse, being kept in some of the same detention centers once used for JAs. A vast majority of Americans agree children should not be separated from their parents and need to be reconnected to family members as soon as possible. Everybody knows immigration laws need to be changed but year after year it is delayed for political reasons. How can immigration reform be accomplished? What can be done now to help Dreamers and longtime immigrants gain citizenship?

## **House of Representatives HR40, Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act**

The pandemic was difficult for everyone this past year, but it was made more disruptive with bad police actions against Blacks that could not be ignored. What happened to George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many others was too blatant, and cannot be unseen. Discrimination based on race was out in the open, and engendered protests all across the country. Past atrocities such as the Tulsa Race Massacre in 1921 received more widespread coverage. Racist violence against minorities has occurred all too often. Still unknown to most Americans is the massacre in Los Angeles Chinatown in 1871, during which a mob of 500 attacked, robbed and killed 19 Chinese residents. Fifteen were hung – the largest mass lynching in this country—yet no punishments were given.

There were many discriminatory laws passed against JAs such as being denied citizenship, prohibitions against owning property, anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting Whites and Japanese from marrying, and a two-year limit in renting property. JAs experienced segregation, being locked out of jobs and unions, being beaten, run out of towns, and suffering major economic losses. However, compared to JAs, the prejudices held against Blacks have gone on longer and been much more severe. Coming to light are laws that placed Blacks at a disadvantage in housing, banking, voting, and health care, all of which have resulted in generational income inequality, poorer health, and shorter life spans.

While HR 40 has passed out of the House Committee on the Judiciary, it still does not have the required 218 Congressional co-sponsors to advance the bill to the Senate. A concerted push by all minorities banding together is insufficient to make this happen. White people are beginning to acknowledge what has happened in the past to Blacks. The public is finally open to looking at what has been kept in the dark for so long. What actions can we take to help establish a commission and get reparations for African Americans?

## **Racism, Discrimination and Hate**

When America is pictured positively, the images are usually of white people, even though minorities form a large portion of this country. When negative aspects of America are portrayed, then minorities are very visible. Although in the wake of last summer's protests this portrayal is changing somewhat, the majority message continues to be if you are not white, you do not belong here.

Anti-Asian hate has been with America from the beginning of Asian immigration. In 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic (labelled with inflammatory names such as “the China virus” or “kung flu”), according to the Stop AAPI Hate coalition, there were more than 2,800 anti-Asian hate incidents and crimes ranging from verbal/online harassment, to civil rights violations, to physical assaults including murder.

Being blamed for things that happen across the ocean is not new. In 1982, Vincent Chin was beaten to death in Detroit by Ronald Ebens and his stepson, who were angry at Japanese car makers. Their punishment—a mere \$3,000 fine and three years of probation. And in Georgia, hate and anger resulted in six Asian American women being killed on March 16, 2021. Asian Americans have been threatened, shot, stabbed, assaulted, set on fire, killed, and mass victimized in shootings. In response to the skyrocketing increase in these crimes, President Biden signed the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act on May 20, 2021. We must stop targeting Asian Americans and ALL minority groups. Targeting Muslims and destroying Jewish and Buddhist temples for being different from Christianity are not acceptable behavior. Action must be taken to stop all racism, discrimination and hate crimes for everyone.

## **Coming Together**

Life for white Americans is nothing like life for minorities in America. Being strong and in the majority, they make the rules and wish to maintain their position. However, the number of minority Americans is increasing. In 1980 whites comprised 80% and minorities 20% of the population. The 2020 Census shows the white population to be 60% and minorities 40%. Continuation of this trend means that white America will not be in the majority, and thus unable to always get their way.

Because of past experiences, JAs are quick to stand up and speak truth in support of targeted groups. No one stood up for JAs when they were placed in camps. Though small in number, their voices count, and when people join together and form coalitions, they are stronger and change becomes more possible. But today, even if all the minority groups join together, there needs to be the support of white Americans to correct injustices being perpetuated and to fulfill actions for change. With unbelievable events happening now people are finding it more difficult to not know what has gone on for centuries. Support is needed for change as everyone is becoming more aware of the injustices that exist. It takes more than all minorities together to grant everyone true equality.