



February 12, 2021

Dear Chairman Nadler and Ranking Member Jordan,

As an organization born out of the experiences of Japanese Americans who suffered the atrocities and legacies of U.S. concentration camps during WWII, Tsuru for Solidarity has as its mission to advocate alongside and build solidarity with other communities that have similarly experienced forced removal, detention, deportation, separation of families, and other forms of racial and state violence. As such, we express our wholehearted support for H.R. 40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act.

The linchpin of the Japanese American community's redress campaign to hold the U.S. government accountable for the economic and emotional damage of the incarceration of roughly 125,000 persons of Japanese ancestry was the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, a study commission much like the one proposed by H.R. 40 for African American reparations. A commission of this sort is essential to formally acknowledge the role of federal and state governments in supporting the institution of slavery and the racial discrimination against formerly enslaved people and their descendants that extend to this day, and to point the way toward appropriate remedies. Truth is a prerequisite to racial reparations for as James Baldwin has noted "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

The redress that followed with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 in the form of a letter of apology and modest financial recompense was the culmination of acts of solidarity from many corners of the United States, including those like Rep. Ron Dellums, the leader of the Congressional Black Caucus at the time. Dellums, in his support of the legislation, recalled his six-year-old self in 1942 being shaken to his core, as he saw his neighbor and fellow six-year-old friend Roland being taken away in a truck from their neighborhood in West Oakland, California, just for being Japanese American. Dellums recalled shouting "Don't take my friend" at the time, and in his testimony years later forcefully argued for his fellow congressmen to "Vote for this bill ... and let Roland feel that you understand the pain in his eyes and the sorrow in his heart as he rode away screaming, not knowing when and if he would ever return."

It took a multiethnic America working in solidarity to begin repairing the racial trauma of the Japanese American wartime experience. Today, nearly half of the 1.3-million-person Japanese American community is composed of multiracial individuals, including a sizeable number of Black and Japanese American families. Thus, our request that you approve H.R. 40 is rooted not only in the fact that the histories of racial injustices are interlinked, but our communities' very composition. Today, we need your leadership to officially recognize and repair these wrongs, and to respond to the demands of a broad, multiethnic movement to heal the wounds left by slavery, Jim Crow, and other practices that have continued to brutalize and disadvantage Black people after the formal abolition of slavery.



Reparations need not be a partisan issue. President Ronald Reagan noted upon signing the Japanese American reparations bill: “The legislation that I am about to sign provides for a restitution payment to each of the 60,000 surviving Japanese-Americans of the 120,000 who were relocated or detained. Yet no payment can make up for those lost years. So, what is most important in this bill has less to do with property than with honor. For here we admit a wrong; here we reaffirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law.” Although we have surpassed the 150-year mark of the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, which officially made slavery illegal, federal reparations for descendants of slavery have yet to be actualized. As a similar matter of honor, reparations for African Americans would, by explicitly acknowledging a wrong, be a necessary step to heal this enduring racial wound. All Americans deserve this long-delayed act of repair. Indeed, we believe the effort to the right the wrong of the Japanese American wartime incarceration is not complete without African American reparations.

Ta-Nehisi Coates has argued that reparations is more than a recompense of past injustices, but a national reckoning “that would lead to spiritual renewal.” In the Japanese spiritual tradition, we have an ancient repair tradition called “kintsugi”. For example, when a tea cup is shattered, instead of throwing it out, we repair it by using a lacquer resin to “rejoin” (*tsugi*) the broken shards and then adorn it with gold dust (*kin*). This is a way to acknowledge the breaks in the history of a tea cup and repair it boldly, highlighting the fissures rather than hiding them.

America’s racial wounds over many generations needs to be acknowledged and H.R. 40 is the truth-telling at the federal level needed to begin addressing the enduring influence of slavery and anti-Blackness that run so deep in our polity. While the gold may come in the form of financial recompense or in some other measure, we implore you to pass H.R. 40 out of your committee not only as a matter of justice, but as a matter of repair, healing, and reconciliation our nation so deeply needs.

Sincerely,

Tsuru for Solidarity Co-Chairs

Tsuya Yee, Duncan Williams, Carl Takei, Stan Shikuma, Joy Shigaki, Mike Ishii, Satsuki Ina, Bruce Embrey, Lisa Doi