

February 17, 2021

Chairman, Ranking Member and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kathy Masaoka, representing the Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress and Nikkei Progressives.

The Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress (NCRR) and Nikkei Progressives (NP) are located in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles, represented by Congressman Jimmy Gomez of the 34th District, and have members throughout Southern California. NCRR was formed in 1980 as the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations with the sole purpose of building a grassroots campaign to win redress and continues to build solidarity with other communities, such as the Muslim community after 9/11. Nikkei Progressives continues in that legacy and supports immigrants seeking asylum.

NCRR and NP support HR40. "HR40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparations Proposals for African Americans Act, seeks to examine the grave injustice of slavery, as well as the lasting economic, moral and social impact of institutional racism and discrimination from 1619 until the present day."

We support the Black community's demand for reparations because: 1) it is the right thing to do; 2) it is long overdue and 3) because we know it is possible.

### **NCRR and NP Support reparations based on our values.**

*"America was built on two fundamental evils: the brutal enslavement of African Americans, and the genocidal robbery of all of the lands of the indigenous tribes in this country. Completely free, stolen real estate with all its natural resources from coast to coast, and never paying 4 million African Americans for their brutally hard labor...By 1860, the 4 million enslaved were worth some \$3.5 billion, making them the single largest financial asset in the U.S. economy at that time, worth more than all the manufacturing and railroads combined."* (Yuri Miyagawa<sup>1</sup>).

We believe in a society that treats its people fairly and justly and when that society commits wrongs against a group, it must be held accountable to make reparations by righting those wrongs and restoring wholeness.

The wealth of this country was built on the stolen lands of the Indigenous people, and on the free slave labor of Black people. In other words, reparations are owed to Black people and to the Indigenous people, as guided by these communities.

### **Reparations Is Overdue**

Reparations for slavery is long overdue. Black folks have long demanded reparations. "In 1963, Queen Mother Audley Moore, the mother of the modern-day reparations movement, launched a campaign for reparations, claiming \$36 million in back pay for descendants of enslaved people

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<sup>1</sup> Miyagawa, Yuri. (2020). Why Japanese Americans Should Support African American Reparations. pg. 2,16.

as well as job quotas and job training.” (M4BL Reparations Toolkit<sup>2</sup>) Groups like the Self Determination Committee, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in American (N’COBRA) founded in 1987 and the National African American Reparations Committee (NAARC) along with other groups have called for reparations for the institution and legacy of slavery, And HR40 has a long history since the late Congressman John Conyers introduced the bill over 30 years ago.

We know that many in this country did not know about Japanese American incarceration during WWII and that a great deal of education was and still is needed. So, too, many in this country, including ourselves, do not know the long history and legacy of slavery. We have been studying Black history and realized how much we did not understand about the depth and breadth of the impact of slavery or of Jim Crow, which lasted from 1877 to the mid-1960’s and continued to enforce segregation through state-sanctioned terror and policing. We learned how racist practices like “redlining” systematically prevented Black folks from better housing. We learned how they were prevented from building wealth and that when Black folks did achieve some success, their communities were destroyed - like the community of Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where the town was burned down and over 300 Black people were killed. No wonder the wealth of Black families is one-tenth the wealth of white families today.

We often think that the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery, but it did not end lynchings. We learned that 6,500 Black people were lynched from the end of the Civil War to 1950 (which is two people per week). We often think that laws like Brown v. Board of Education, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Fair Housing Act meant equal rights, but racism continued to find a way around real equality. “Virtually every institution with some degree of history in American, be it public, be it private, has a history of extracting resources out of the African American community - behind all that oppression was actually theft.” (Ta-Nehisi Coates<sup>3</sup>)

### **Precedence for Reparations/Reparations Is Possible**

There is well-established precedence for reparations both internationally and in this country. “Germany paid nearly \$89 billion in reparations for the Holocaust between 1952 and 2012. This included \$7 billion paid to the state of Israel. Most of the reparations paid by Germany went to individual survivors through both one-time payments and ongoing monthly pensions.” More recently, “in 2017 the Canadian government agreed to pay \$750 million to survivors of the so-called ‘Sixties Scoop,’ when Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families between the 1960s and 1980s and placed in foster care or adopted by non-Indigenous families.” (M4BL Reparations Toolkit<sup>4</sup>).

Even before the Civil War and since Emancipation, individual Black Americans fought for and won limited redress. “One example of a successful individual petition was made by Belinda Sutton, seeking reparations for wages for her forty years of enslavement. In 1783, she was

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<sup>2</sup>M4BL Reparations Now Toolkit. (2020). History of Reparations Demands. pg. 54. <https://m4bl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Reparations-Now-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Coates, Ta-Nehisi. (2019) Ta-Nehisi Coates Revisits the Case for Reparations.

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-new-yorker-interview/ta-nehisi-coates-revisits-the-case-for-reparations>

<sup>4</sup> M4BL Reparations Now Toolkit. (2020). History of Reparations in the International Context. pg. 52-53. <https://m4bl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Reparations-Now-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

awarded a monthly pension from Isaac Royal, one of the major financial contributors to Harvard University.” (M4BL Reparations Toolkit<sup>5</sup>). When Japanese Americans demanded redress for the injustice of the incarceration, it was based on the firm belief that our community was owed reparations, including an apology, individual monetary payments and a community fund. We know that reparations is possible because we won redress and reparations in 1988 with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act.

### **Where Credit Is Due - Black Support**

Our community’s demand for reparations did not arise by itself, but was inspired by the Black community’s fight for civil and equal rights in housing, education, and more. Their sacrifices and leadership opened the doors for us and encouraged our communities to rise up and demand greater civil rights, power and inclusion in education and employment.

We have to acknowledge the generous support of many Black groups and individuals who supported us in our campaign for redress and reparations - like Congressman Mervyn Dymally who authored a Japanese American redress bill in 1982; Rep. Ron Dellums who spoke in support of the bill; and the Black Congressional Caucus, which included people like Augustus Hawkins, Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, and consistently endorsed legislation for Japanese American redress and reparations. We also owe our thanks to then Assemblywoman Maxine Waters and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who educated farmers and factory workers in the middle of America about the history of the incarceration of Japanese Americans during his presidential campaign in 1984 and 1988.

### **HR40 Is An Important First Step**

HR40 is an important first step towards reparations for the Black community. In 1981 when the idea of a commission was first proposed, many of us were against it. We were angry at the suggestion that a commission was needed “to study whether a wrong had been committed.” But we soon realized its value and came together to mobilize our community. I even testified at the Los Angeles hearings which are now preserved on DVDs called *Speak Out for Justice*. For the Japanese American community, the 1981 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) authorized by President Jimmy Carter, provided an opportunity for many former incarcerated to speak out about the feelings and experiences they had held inside for 40 years. NCCR, which played a key role in organizing grassroots support within the Japanese American community, insisted that former incarcerated speak at the hearings instead of having just “experts” or “academics” testify.

Many of the Sansei (third generation Japanese Americans and children of the incarcerated) organizing this effort, heard anger, sadness, pain and strength as they listened to stories they had never heard before - none could stop listening. It was an opportunity to begin the healing process for our elders, for ourselves and for the entire community. More importantly, it was a chance for those incarcerated to express their own demands - for income and freedoms lost, for babies who died, for dignity taken away and much more. The CWRIC hearings brought Issei, Nisei and Sansei (first, second, and third generations) together to build a grassroots campaign, educate others about the incarceration, and reach out to other communities to win reparations.

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<sup>5</sup> M4BL Reparations Now Toolkit. (2020). History of Reparations Demands. pg. 54. <https://m4bl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Reparations-Now-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

HR40 is an opportunity for all of us to learn about slavery and the impact of racism on the Black community. This is a chance for many Black voices to be heard and for the Black community to express what kind of reparations it is owed.

We support this bill and the process that is being led by members of the Black community. This is an opportunity for all of us to listen and learn from stories we have never been told - from broad historical contexts to the most personal testimonies of pain, trauma and generational struggle.

While we understand there will always be resistance to great change, what we focus on is our support for the Black community to state their needs and demands. Just as it was important for Japanese Americans to self-determine our path towards redress and reparations, we fully stand behind the Black community as they self-determine their path forward.

It is a necessary step towards justice. It is a first step towards healing.

*Reparations are owed to the descendants of enslaved Africans, in a manner and form to be determined by them. Reparations must take as many forms as necessary to equitably address the many forms of injury caused by the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery. (M4BL Reparations Toolkit<sup>6</sup>).*

In Unity,

*Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress Coordinating Committee*

Richard Katsuda, Co chair	Janice Iwanaga Yen, Secretary
Kathy Masaoka, Co chair	Suzy Katsuda, Treasurer
Kay Ochi, Co chair	

*Nikkei Progressives Coordinating Committee*

June Hibino, Co chair	Alex Kanegawa, Co chair
Jan Tokumaru, Co chair	Mark Masaoka, Co chair
Joy Yamaguchi, Co chair	Alan Kondo
Mia Barnett	Carrie Morita

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<sup>6</sup> M4BL Reparations Now Toolkit. (2020). Why Reparations? pg. 17-18. <https://m4bl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Reparations-Now-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

Kristin Fukushima

Kathy Masaoka

traci kato kiriyama

Mike Murase

Kimi Maru

Miyako Noguchi

Sean Miura

Tony Osumi

*Speak Out for Justice*: The Los Angeles CWRIC testimonies available at (<https://janmstore.com>)