

Proposal Title – **Power of Words**

Introduction – The Call - Can we activate the “Power Of Words” and liberate ourselves from the confines of euphemisms and misnomers developed during WWII? Do we hear the repeated calls from all corners of the Japanese American communities with a mandate for EDUCATION. “The Legacy of the Concentration Camp experience must be to insure that it will NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN to any group of people.” We who had our freedom stripped from us can be effective in reminding other to treasure the preciousness of freedom. Let no one suffer the loss of freedom without “due process of law” as stipulated in our United States Constitution. Let us answer THE CALL boldly, forthrightly and effectively.

Goal – JACL will actively work to educate and encourage the use of accurate terminology and eliminate euphemisms and misnomers related to the forced removal and incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry living in the West Coast region during the 1940s.

Rationale – The continued use of the outdated and misleading terms about this historical experience distorts the reality of what actually occurred. No organization is better suited than the Japanese American Citizens League to launch a campaign to eradicate words that hide the truth of the incarceration experience of Nikkei people during WWII. Words are important. Accurate terminology can lead the way to building bridges leading to significantly improved educational understanding. True history is the rightful heritage and legacy of all future Americans.

Strategy – Each level of the JACL entity is encouraged to commit to reach out within to JACL members as well as outside the JACL family, and discuss the issue of terminology connected to the incarceration experience. Raising awareness is the first order of business. Creative and effective means by which to achieve this goal will be determined by each entity. The more people engaged in discussions on this subject, the more education is bound to take place.

The Seattle Chapter Plan

The Seattle Chapter's plan of action toward the implementation of the "Power Of Words" proposal begins by indentifying two groups of specific terms the Board decided to label as "Preferred Terminology" and "Targeted Words for Replacement." The Board felt the identified set of words will serve to stimulate discussion. The Board will reserve the option of modifying the lists of words after extensive input.

Preferred Terminology: Forced removal, expulsion, uprooting, American Concentration Camps, Incarceration, Imprisonment, prisoners, inmates, incarcerated, Temporary Concentration Centers, confinement.

Targeted words for replacement include – terms that were developed by the government to conceal the true nature of what it was doing.

Evacuation – This term is generally used in *rescue* situations such as 'evacuating' people out of dangerous situations like fire, earthquake, etc. The 1942 forced removal of Nikkei into prison camps, was certainly *not* a mercy/rescue mission. The more accurate terms would be forced removal or expulsion.

Relocation – This term is a government euphemism to soften the impact of the expulsion, forced removal and incarceration. The word overlooks the miserable conditions and the loss of precious freedom involved in this removal action. The Nikkei were forced out of their homes and incarcerated.

Relocation Centers – This again avoids the harsh circumstances of the situation and suggests a more hospitable setting. Places designated as 'relocation centers' were in reality concentrations camps, prison camps, incarceration camps.

Assembly Centers – The government labeled the temporary concentration camps as 'assembly centers'. The term again avoids the true nature and the purpose of the camps. They can properly be called temporary

concentration camps, utilized while the more permanent camps were being built.

Internment – This term is particularly egregious because of the frequency of its misuse and inaccurate reference it perpetuates. Internment is a legal term designating the imprisonment of civilian enemy nationals.* Two thirds of prisoners during WWII were citizens of the United States by birthright, which makes “internment” inaccurate as applied to them. The US Constitution states “no person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due “process of law.” Accurate alternative words may include incarceration, imprisonment.

Non-Alien – This is an amazing term devised by the government to overlook the birthright citizenship of the Nisei population. It works to deny the shabby treatment of its own citizens by referring to them as “non-alien”.

Ideas for District/National participation -

-Develop educational materials and strategies in support of this campaign from the grassroots to the potential of Congress itself.

-Encouraging each entity to select terms which they would accept as appropriate and ones they would discard as inappropriate.

-Provide informational support such as flyers/brochures/speakers explaining the need for the change in terminology.

-Remind chapters to edit all written material from the organization to meet the goal of the above campaign. Request JAACL speakers learn about the misuse of terms and use terms which more accurately describe the incarceration experience.

-Disseminate ideas that are working well to stimulate discussion and improve educational progress to meet the goal of this drive.

*During WWII, the Department of Justice interned nearly 32,000 nationals of Germany, Italy, and Japan. Some 17,477 were of Japanese ancestry sequestered in camps separate from those nearly 120,000 Issei and Nisei incarcerated under the War Relocation Authority

Supporting information

Definition of the term concentration camp –

“A camp where civilians, enemy aliens, political prisoners, and sometimes prisoners of war are detained and confined, typically under harsh conditions.*”

Background information - During the 1940s, a whole host of governmental officials, up to and including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, called the camps incarcerating Nikkei as *concentration camps*. Eight days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Congressman John Rankin clearly used the term in his following outburst. “I’m for catching every Japanese in America and putting them in concentrations camps.....Damn them! Let’s get rid of them now!” In a press conference in November of 1944, President Roosevelt states the following as it relates to the Nisei of the time. “It is felt by a great many lawyers that under the Constitution they can’t be kept locked up in concentration camps.” In a 1961 interview, President Harry S. Truman gets right to the point saying “They were concentration camps. They called it relocation but they put them in concentration camps, and I was against it. We were in a period of emergency, but it was still wrong thing to do.” (It might be interesting to note here that very early in its history the War Relocation Authority leaders went out of their way to deny that they were running concentration camps.)

Although there was much misery and harsh treatment in the American concentration camps, there is no comparison of this experience to the horrendous brutality and wholesale human slaughter of the Nazi concentration camps in Europe. By definition, both sets of these compounds were concentration camps, but only the Nazi camps deserve the infamous distinction of being designated “death camps” and “killing centers.”

* American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language – 4th ed, Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston/NY, 2000.

**Congressman John Rankin, Congressional record, December 15, 1941

***President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Press Conference, November 21, 1944, FDR Library, #982

**** Harry S. Truman, Interview with Merle Miller, 1961

A new word – Incarceree?

Incarcerated

Incarceration

“INCARCEREE”*

The term “incarceree” is already in use. Stephen Fugita and Marilyn Fernandez used it in their book. That is not to say that this word is currently in popular use. It is not. Perhaps with a successful drive to increase the use of the word, “Incarceree” may one day make into Webster’s dictionary.

Sample biases with words

When Mako was five years old, she took a bus trip to Puyallup with her mother and three sisters. She had no idea that she was to become a resident in this gated community for the entire summer and into the fall. Because of the friendliness of the people, officials called this place, “Camp Harmony”. Housing facilities and meals were provided at no cost. Mako had many children to play with. It was a new experience to have so many playmates available to her.

Mako was barely five years old in 1942 when she and her family were forced from their home in Seattle and put into the concentration camp in Puyallup; euphemistically call an “assembly center”. This barbed wire compound was complete with guard towers, search lights, and military personnel armed with machine guns aimed at the “assembled,” like Mako and her sisters. To call this dreadful place “Camp Harmony” is seen as a cruel joke to the inmates who were “assembled” there. In fact, the title was coined before anyone was incarcerated there.

*(Altered Lives, enduring Communities: JAs Remember Their WWII Incarceration*Seattle UW Press, 2004. See pages 4 and 6 for examples).

Additional Sources for information regarding the use of terms:

Roger Daniels “Words Do Matter: A Note on Inappropriate Terminology and the Incarceration of Japanese Americans” in Louis Fiset and Gail Nomura, eds *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese American and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century*, Seattle; University of Washington Press. 2005 pp. 183-207.

Tom Ikeda, Executive Director, Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project www.densho.org.

David A. Takami, *Divided Destiny: A history of Japanese Americans in Seattle*, University of Washington Press, Seattle & London, Wing Luke Asian Museum, Seattle. Page 7. 1998

Tetsuden Kashima, *Judgment Without Trial*, page 8 & 9, University of Washington Press, 2002

James Hirabayashi, "Concentration Camps" or "Relocation Centers" What's in a Name? .*Japanese American National Museum Quarterly*, Vol. 9, Number 3. Fall 1994. pp 5-10.