Title: "It All Began with Malcolm X"**:** Reparations, Political Consciousness, and Japanese Americans Activism, 1960-80

I. Introduction

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. This order imprisoned 112,000 Japanese Americans in prison camps across nine states. For most Japanese Americans, the three years of captivity from 1942-1945 destroyed their economic status, faith in America, and ethnic pride. It took forty years for the government to finally pass the Redress Movement, or the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The Act granted $20,000 to every surviving Japanese internee. However, it was a long road to Redress given the lack of a strong foundation of Asian activism and internal friction between young and old generations of Japanese Americans. In this paper, I turn to oral histories of Japanese Americans who worked from the 1960s-1980s to identify three steps of activism that led to the passage of the Redress Movement. In particular, I will focus on Seattle because of its well-documented digital archive and its importance as the birthplace of the successful Redress Movement. Interviews from this time reveal the hidden tensions and relationships between Japanese American activists and their families, other minority groups, and national organizations.

While the eventual success of the movement was a huge testament to the power of Asian activists, older generations of Japanese Americans (*Issei*) strongly resisted it initially. They not only refused to talk about internment, but also found reparations from the US government both unreasonable and humiliating. When second and third generations of Japanese Americans (*Nisei* and *Sansei*) led the Redress Movement in the 1970s and 1980s, they were berated by their parents and grandparents for "rocking the boat."

Through interviews, I have identified three steps of activism that led to the passage of the Redress Movement: solidarity with other minority groups; local efforts; and influence from the national Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). In this paper, I will explain how Japanese American solidarity and respect for other minority groups inspired Seattle activists into launching local activism efforts throughout the 1960s and 1970s. These local efforts then gained momentum and trust from the Japanese American community in Seattle, eventually leading to the support of the JACL and passing of the Redress Movement by the government.

Despite America's long claim to freedom, oppressed groups constantly have to rise up against the system. The story of the Redress Movement is even more significant because it was the first time large political consciousness had emerged within the Asian American community. Japanese Americans found community strength and inspiration from other minority groups to demand reparations from their government, turning their internal shame into pride.

II. Family Background and Attitudes Toward Internment

To understand the activists' strong motivation for reparations, we first turn to their childhood upbringing. A common thread exists where younger Japanese Americans often found themselves at odds with their parents' passive view on internment.

Activist Larry Matsuda was born in an internment camp in Eton, Idaho in 1945 with more than 10,000 other internees. His parents immigrated from Hiroshima but still left family in Japan. One of his cousins barely survived the bombing and was only protected when her house collapsed in on her. After the war, he returned with his family to an extremely insular Japanese-American community near Seattle's International District. His family's milkman, grocer, and even insurance agent were all Japanese. Often, he felt like he only knew about the outside world from TV shows since his parents forbade him from traveling outside the

community. It was not until he left for college and faced strangers' racial slurs that he realized that 'Asians lived in a different America." Matsuda is not alone in this upbringing. Phil Hayasaka, Sharon Maeda, and several others also grew up in isolated communities of Japanese-Americans within Seattle. They did not experience racism until they went to college or joined the military. When Matsuda was in the Army during the Vietnam War, for example, he was told the Vietnamese enemies "looked just like him" and was forced to remain quiet to avoid harassment.

Unlike several other families, though, Matsuda's parents actually talked often about their time in the internment camp. "The stories always started with something small, like my mom talking about how we used to have a beautiful piano, but then it was gone," he explains. His father was clearly bitter; once an independent grocer before internment, he could barely find employment as a janitor at the local high school after the war. After having already survived the Great Depression, he was not able to overcome the internment or public racism against Japanese businesses. Matsuda's mother also faced severe health problems after having two children and a miscarriage in prison. After internment, she constantly worried about food and shelter for her kids until she qualified for social security. Despite all of this, many Japanese Americans in Matsuda's community shared the feeling of *gaman*, which loosely translates to "enduring the unbearable with grace," and *shikata ga nai*, meaning "it can't be helped." Together, these sentiments prevented the older Japanese Americans from demanding reparations and instead kept them silent.

Other activists, like Mike Tagawa, Chuck Kato, and Alan Sugiyama did not have their racial reckoning until going to college, but grew up in racially diverse and inclusive

environments. There were small instances of discrimination, still, like Sugiyama saw when his brother was rejected from an apartment that refused to rent to minorities.

It is important to note, even though their parents and grandparents were emotionally scarred from the government's betrayal and their economic ruin, all these activists were emotionally distanced from the internment because they were still children at the time. In fact, many of the activists did not even understand what the concentration camps were until their pre-teen years. Sharon Maeda explains that, "Initially, as young children, we thought camp meant like girl scout or boy scout camp or something. But my uncle once removed [Minoru Yusui] was one of the three Japanese Americans who refused to go to the camp, so I kind of knew about it more so than other people."

Opinion also differed among the older generations on what to do after re-entering society. While some wanted to become "110% American" and avoid any unnecessary attention, others carried a sense of hopeless bitterness for the rest of their lives. Many lost their small businesses for good and had to turn to low-paying service jobs that caused health problems. At the same time, several families like Matsuda's and Kato's had to come to grips with the fact that they also had family in Japan during World War II. Complicated feelings about American patriotism and resentment passed down to their children.

Kato and Sugiyama quickly adopted this sentiment while attending American public school. Saying the Pledge of Allegiance felt like a lie, and they desperately wished to be white to stop their peers from making fun of their school lunches and bilingualism. The internalized self-hatred even led to mocking other Japanese students who continued to go to Japanese school and wear traditional clothing. "I still remember going to school with rice balls and kids laughing at you, so you had to take a quick bite, and put it back so no one could see because I was

embarrassed to be Japanese," Sugiyama explains. "But this was all a negative reaction to the things we didn't want to be associated with, like World War II, so when people talked about those 'dirty Japs,' we could say, 'That's not me, I'm American.'" It was not until these young men went to college in the 1960s and joined student groups that they began embracing their culture and fighting for their rights.

Internment and its impacts on their families was an impetus for this wave of Japanese American activists. While they ultimately understood why their parents felt the need to comply, it was harder to forgive the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) for supporting the mandate and encouraging its members to obey. Only three Japanese Americans fought the internment order, one of them Maeda's uncle once-removed. Indignance on behalf of their families gave these activists the encouragement to "rock the boat" and push for social change despite their family's disapproval.

III. Solidarity with Other Minority Groups

While each activist had a different racial awakening in the 1960s, several were inspired by the work of African Americans. After Larry Matsuda was forced to "practice the art of invisibility" while enlisted in the army during the Vietnam War, he learned about Malcom X. Malcolm was the first to teach Matsuda that white people are privileged and that Matsuda has no obligation to conform to Japanese stereotypes. Malcolm was a huge inspiration for Larry's desire to teach and help others. Family was another motivator. "I've experienced discrimination and can deal with it, but it hurts to think that my son might have to go through the same things I did," explained Matsuda.

Alan Sugiyama was also personally inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in 1967. While the Seattle summer riots led to the closing of several Asian American businesses, they

showed Sugiyama the level of determination and willingness to fight that the Black community had. Sharon Maeda "personally identified more with Blacks than Asian students," as they had stronger pillars of community at the University of Washington. She was not alone in this sentiment. Others felt that they "found the model of the 'black brother' to be far more vibrant and attractive than the ideal of the 'yellow father.'"[2] In short, this acknowledgement and respect for the Black and Native organizations helped inspire this wave of Japanese American activists. For several, it also acted as a model for the future of Asian activism and awakened their political consciousness.

Mike Tagawa is an extreme case of Maeda's ideology. He was one of the three Japanese who joined the Black Panther Party. While taking classes at Berkeley, he first became politicized by Anti-War protests. Coming back to Seattle, his anger grew after learning about Japanese internment and the Vietnam War. After witnessing police brutality and explicit discrimination against his Black peers while in the US Air Force, Tagawa became increasingly frustrated with the passivity of Asian student groups. Then, while on a drive, he discovered the Black Panther Party. The first time he saw "50 to 60 Black brothers and sisters marching in military formation and running drills," he knew he wanted to be a part of the organization despite its history of violence. "Some people think the strong stance would have been getting involved with the nonviolent way like Martin Luther King," Tagawa explains. "But there's gonna be knuckleheads who aren't going to listen to intellectual reasoning, and they're going to think the only way to deal with other races is with violence. It's those types of guys that the movement has to have an answer to. So I always saw the nonviolent and potentially violent movement go hand in hand, like yin and yang."

Fortunately, Tagawa's wife was supportive of his endeavors, but many in the Japanese community considered him a "crazy thug." Elders did not understand Tagawa's desire to speak out and create trouble for their communities. Part of this hesitation comes from concepts like the Model Minority Myth, which praises Asians for their success, but only if they remain passive and silent. This myth is also used to drive a wedge between communities of color, especially Asians and African Americans, which provides context for the novelty of Tagawa becoming involved with the Black Panthers.[3] He continued to remain a foot soldier, teaching younger members how to march and shoot, until the Party fell apart and was permanently inspired by the boldness of their actions.

While Tagawa is a unique example, his path in becoming an activist showed us more about general Japanese American sentiment during this period. Many Japanese American activists felt the burden of breaking through the "quiet and passive" stereotypes in their local efforts. They also had to balance their growing political consciousness with the stereotypes assigned to Asians. In fact, in order to have successful sit-ins and protests, Asian student organizations had to rely on the support of Black, Mexican, and Native American Student Unions.

One example is a sit-in led by the Oriental Students Union (OSU), founded by Tagawa and Suyigama in 1970 at the Seattle Central Community College (SCCC). The two men were largely inspired by the Black Students Union. The OSU sit-in was meant to advocate for the hiring of five Asians in the college's Administrative and Board positions that had previously been rejected for being "overqualified." They received the support and help from the Radical Women's Movement, the Socialist Party, and the Black Panthers themselves. These other organizations acted as scouts and provided numbers, as the OSU only had 10 official members.

The combined efforts made the OSU the first Asian organization to shut down SCCC's administration for a day, causing large publicity. Many encouraged the OSU to take this accomplishment as victory and end the campaign. But Tagawa and Sugiyama, who grew up watching Black activists achieve their goals, were set on making the administration agree to some of their demands. Continual pressure led to the hiring of Frank Fuji as the first Asian American at SCCC in a top administrative position.

However, the relationship between minority groups was complex as well. The President of the SCCC was an African American at the time and seen as a groundbreaker for the Black community. The Black Student Union (BSU) felt personally attacked by the OSU, while the OSU viewed their protest as entirely against the institution as a whole. The Black community also felt attacked when John Eng became the first Chinese American voted into the House of Representatives, replacing a newly elected Black official. Matsuda explained the Asian initiative behind this, "We didn't want to be on the outside anymore, knocking on the doors of politicians who just turned us away. So we thought, why don't we become the man and run someone for office?"

Both examples demonstrate the complicated nature of Japanese Americans' reliance on solidarity with other minority groups while trying to fight for their own initiatives. In a society primarily dominated by whites, Asians felt the pressure to work their way up the social ladder by targeting other minorities. I hesitate to call these actions exploitative given the inherent oppressive system against all minorities in America, but there certainly exists a fine line between respecting and targeting Black groups. Ultimately, though, Japanese American solidarity with other minority groups inspired many of the activists interviewed. Black organization's work

paved the way for Asian American rights, and their work served as a model for the interviewee's local efforts and path to Redress.

IV. Local Efforts

Indignance on behalf of family led the activists to local efforts in educational reform and further pushes for Redress. The efforts brought many different Asian ethnicities together, helping all Asian communities see that they could affect change by working together. This sense of community also built trust within the Japanese American community that people would provide support and show up at events when necessary. Combined, these factors were a large driving force in convincing older generations of Japanese Americans of the necessity for Redress.

At the university level, Larry Matsuda and Chuck Kato worked on creating more equal opportunities for Asian Americans. Matsuda and his friend, Tony Ogolvi, succeeded in making the University of Washington's Special Education Program (SEP) acknowledge Asian Americans as an underrepresented minority. The main impetus was once again family; Ogolvi's brother was rejected from several colleges, and Ogolvi wanted to ensure his brother would receive a good college education.

Matsuda and Ogolvi's battle for change would need more than a few supporters behind it since the University of Washington already prided itself on its steps towards inclusivity. Sharon Maeda explains the University's culture, "There was a clear decision to include Native Americans, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Pacific Islanders when most schools only had spaces for Blacks and Whites. There were still times of strife between groups, but this was mainly because of personal romantic relationships. A fight could be characterized as Black vs Latino but was really just two guys fighting over a woman."

They first turned to the Asian Coalition for Equality (ACE), a newly formed organization in 1969. ACE had no structural support yet, and had many older members who were more content discussing issues instead of leading movements. Still unsure if ACE would support them, Matsuda and Ogolvi scheduled an appointment with SEP's chair. The day of, Matsuda met with Ogolvi and his girlfriend in the cafeteria, and the three marched alone to the office. To their relief, they were met with the ACE, BSU, Native American student groups, and radio reporters. The chair had to find an empty conference room to accommodate all of the protestors and quickly agreed to Matsuda's demands. Solidarity once again helped this movement, but this event also proved to the broader community that the ACE and Japanese American activists could be relied on to create results at the university level.

Following this success, Alan Sugiyama created the Asian Student Coalition (ASC) in the early 1970s at the University of Washington. The ASC's main purpose was to tackle any issues that its student body felt necessary to address. Two committees quickly formed to incorporate Asian Studies into ethnic studies and American studies programs. They also organized a demonstration on the Director of Financial Aid's Office after seeing that many Pacific Islanders were unable to receive financial aid and that there were no Asian American staff present. Asian organizations no longer had to fear a lack of participation from the student body. Chuck Kato was also able to create a scholarship fund, which developed into the Asian Ancestry Scholarship Fund. Undoubtedly, this accomplishment was made easier by the earlier prominence Asian Americans had demonstrated on campus. From these examples, we can already see how momentum within just one university created so much change.

Educational activism also worked as a final tipping point to convince older generations of Japanese Americans to support Redress. A few years before the events at the University of

Washington, Larry Matsuda began creating the first Asian American history class in Seattle following his inspiration from Malcolm X. The class barely had any reading materials and even had to resort to a textbook titled *Our Oriental Americans*. Slowly, the curriculum continued to develop and local activists were brought in as speakers. His work caught the attention of the JACL in 1970, who helped him receive a grant from the University of Washington Museum of History to create a traveling exhibit celebrating the Japanese American community. Although many thought the exhibit would focus on Japanese culture, Matsuda wanted to create an exhibit titled "Pride and Shame" to focus on the Japanese internment experience.[4] "The name was kind of stolen from someone special I watched, so it wasn't original," explains Matsuda. "But pride came from what the Japanese 442nd combat came and did. They were the most decorated unit in American history. And shame for being put into the camps without committing a crime."

The exhibit continued for months longer than it was expected and attracted over 100,000 people. It was the first time Japanese Americans publicly addressed the internment. In 1988, after the Redress Movement was passed, Judge Charles Z Smith, the first African American Washington State Supreme Court Justice, specifically emphasized the importance of this exhibit in raising awareness. Many Japanese Americans were also appreciative of this exhibit, but to understand their sudden approval of talking about their internment experience after decades of silence, we must go back in time to explore Seattle's local efforts that led to the Redress Movement.

Local efforts first had to create a stronger Japanese American community. Phil Hayasaka led a key movement in the early 1960s to begin creating more Asian American representation at the local government level. He was the only staff member of the Jackson Street Community Council, whose job was to finish projects taken on by the city. His proudest project is the "pot

lot," where he turned a vacant lot into a playground for kids, gathering equipment and support from the city. He also popularized the "rickshaw race," where Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino residents came together to race and build community ties.

Hayasaka was later promoted to the Human Rights Commission, where his main role was to fight discrimination and keep peace in the community. He would often send staff to quell riots and, on one memorable occasion, de-escalated a violent situation after a shop owner pulled a gun on a group of Black kids. Through his time in these positions, Hayasaka found that the focus of civil rights issues in the late 60s was between Blacks and Whites. To fix this, he started ACE in 1969, the same grassroots organization that helped support Matsuda and Oglovi's demonstration.[5] ACE began with 4 Japanese, 4 Chinese, and 4 Filipino members. He wanted to see more Asians appointed to higher positions and "breaking the bamboo ceiling."

ACE achieved two very important goals within the Japanese American community: planting trust within the Asian community and showing them that Asians can assert power over institutions. ACE was also able to use the common enemy of discrimination to bring multiple ethnic groups together, realizing that Asians have a stronger voice when joined together. The second aspect was accomplished both through supporting Matsuda's demonstration and by organizing a meeting with the mayor and police officials after ACE demonstrators were abused by officers. They had several demands, including an oversight group to check on the activities of the police department. Although the officers refused to concede to ACE's demands, officials were still taken aback because "angry Asians" had never before been filed in a report. Despite the lack of results, the community saw the willingness of activists to challenge core American institutions. Further, similarly to the university demonstrations, the activists no longer feared a

lack of supporters. The Japanese American community could no longer deny that activists had established themselves and were now capable of creating real change.

With the historical context from Matsuda's "Pride and Shame" exhibit and a united community following Hayasaka's local efforts, Chuck Kato joined with Ed Miyatake and Ken Nakano to push for Redress in the Seattle JACL chapter in 1973. Together, they created a Seattle Evacuation Redress Committee (SERC) and brought in speakers to inspire the community to support Redress. Specifically, Gordon Hirabayashi packed crowds as one of the three Japanese who refused to go to the internment camps and went to federal prison. In a speech delivered at a Bill of Rights Celebration in Seattle in 1984, Hirabayashi said of his decision-making process: "Do I succumb to the status of a second class citizen, or do I continue to live like an American and disobey this order. . . From the beginning I had chosen to opt for the American ideals, and to work towards making as much of them real for me as possible."[6] These talks helped inspire younger generations of student activists who found it obvious to demand apologies and reparations from America after hearing what happened to their parents and grandparents. Sansei quickly jumped onto the movement, publicizing and contacting anyone they could to get the word out.

However, the older Japanese American community (*Issei*) was still not convinced of the necessity for Redress; pushing back against a local police department and University is a very different scale than pushing back against the US government. Most of the elders often accused the young Redress activists of trying to ruin the good name of Asian Americans. They did not want the truth of racism and discrimination against Asians to be publicly revealed and were ashamed of their time in internment camps. Nakaon and Kato then had to change tactics and focus on emphasizing the importance of rebuilding the Japanese American community and

culture. The Issei were most damaged by internment, as they lost their property to the government, sons to the war, and culture to both internalized and public racism against Japanese Americans. Reparations would be one solace to the terrible suffering they endured, and the money could then be used to create a cultural center to begin rebuilding community ties and pride.

With the Japanese American community finally on board with the Redress Movement, the SERC organized the first Day of Remembrance in 1978. Although the Day of Remembrance is now annually celebrated on February 19, the day President Roosevelt passed Executive Order 9066, the first was held on November 25 after Thanksgiving. Over 2500 people came to the Puyallup Fairgrounds, wearing the same name tags they were assigned in the camps. The National Guard provided trucks like the ones used when originally driving Japanese Americans to the camps in 1942. The rest of the day's program consisted of exhibitions of wartime photos, cultural performances, and speeches publicly addressing experiences in the camps. Following this successful event, the Japanese American community began to speak more openly about their internment experience and embraced the Redress Movement.[7,8]

This sudden change from decades of silence was only possible through the local efforts of many activists. Educational reform and large public events gained trust from the Japanese American community, and this momentum led to support for the Redress Movement and the people behind the movement.

V. JACL Involvement

As much as local efforts increased internal support for the Redress Movement, the public and US government also had to agree to pay reparations. Grassroots organizations and local

efforts laid the momentum and foundation for Redress legislation, but the power behind a national organization, like the JACL, was necessary to pass the Act.

The JACL's involvement nonetheless had several complications. Many young activists were fueled by anger that the JACL initially supported the Executive Order for Internment. This, combined with their desire to seek reparations for their family, motivated them again to begin "rocking the boat." However, history repeated itself and the JACL once again refused to support the Redress endeavors of Kato, Miyatake, and Nakano in the early 1970s. Kato says that, "We sent out a lot of tapes to all JACL chapters, and the reply was very disappointing - only two to three chapters replied. Most of the others simply ignored it."

Undeterred, the three travelled to the annual JACL convention in Sacramento and made sure their name was on the agenda. The JACL, knowing the lack of support for Redress, pushed Kato's presentation to the absolute last item on the agenda to ensure no one would pay attention to their proposal. Returning to Seattle empty-handed, the SERC began publicizing Redress within their own community, meeting often with schools, churches, and Congress members. Following the Day of Remembrance, Redress momentum began picking up. With strong support from Mike Lowry, Washington's 7th congressional district Representative, Redress legislation was introduced in 1978. Congressional hearings began, and the Washington Committee on Redress was created to mobilize support for and participation in these hearings.

An important aspect of the Washington Committee on Redress was convincing communities to speak about their experiences in internment and convince the public of the necessity for reparations. The JACL's involvement created another complication when several local communities were hesitant to associate themselves with a political organization like the JACL. Churches in particular were willing to pass on Redress to avoid taking a political stance

by supporting the JACL. So, the Washington Committee was able to garner support and testimony as a separate entity from those wary of the JACL.

These hearings ironically led to more public support for the Japanese American community when they were initially created in a Congressional attempt to slow down the passing of the legislation. While it did delay the passing of the Act, Japanese Americans finally allowed themselves to be angry instead of shameful. Many from the Midwest and East Coast also learned of the horrors of internment for the first time, increasing public demand for reparations.

The largest debate was over the financial aspect of the Act. Some within the Japanese American community did not believe money was necessary, but many of the elders were struggling to make ends meet after having any wealth destroyed after internment. Several officials were also confused why individual reparations had to be made instead of giving a lump sum to organizations like the JACL. Activists and Lowry were quick to point out that internment affected the lives of the individuals, so they should be allowed to do whatever they want with the money. After 10 years, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, granting a total of $1 billion in reparations to the Japanese American community.

Lowry is quick to acknowledge the incredible importance of the work of grassroots organizations and, specifically, the Seattle JACL chapter.

VI. Conclusion

The road to Redress was a long one. It began with Black activists and organizations supporting and inspiring a strong generation of Asian American activists. This motivation and a desire to create a better world for their families pushed Japanese American activists to lead and organize local efforts for educational reform and reparations for internment. This momentum

carried over into the national JACL, which had the power and influence to actually create and pass legislation.

While I discuss several group movements throughout this paper, it is extremely important to emphasize the importance of individual activism for the passing of the Redress Movement. Each interviewee's path of activism is interwoven and contributed to the fight for reparations. A common misconception was the idea that "because of past discrimination, people often think that the road to success and acceptance is by trying to be more like the majority of society," says Sharon Maeda. "And so they suppress their own cultural identity and don't feel comfortable raising issues or even acknowledging that they've been discriminated against." Ultimately, each activist had to learn to embrace their cultural heritage on their own terms.

Following the steps each interviewee took also provides a lesson for future Asian American activists and organizations. The JACL has shown an immediate change in practice following 9/11 and was one of the first organizations to fight against the idea of imprisoning Arab Americans to prevent terrorism. However, there are fears for the new generation of individual activists. "Students can't take voting and translated literature for granted," says Sugiyama. "We need to have the awareness of younger people that these continual changes aren't natural. They've got to be aware of who they are and expand on [our] practices to the community."

Further research in this area should look at the gender divide and ethnic divisions within the Asian community. There was only one woman out of the seven Japanese American interviews in the archive. Sharon Maeda briefly explains the divide between white women and women of color, as well as gender divisions in the leadership roles in the Asian organizations. While Phil Hayasaka tried to ensure that each officer position had a woman and a man, he is one

of few that fought for this equality. Additionally, several organizations began to splinter with the addition of new ethnic groups. Most prominently, the ACE eventually disbanded. “As Pacific Islanders, East Indians, and Koreans joined, it made us go in different ways because they had different concerns and different issues and different agendas,” explains Hayasaka. “And so it was more difficult to speak with a united voice, and it was a little bit harder to coalesce with a larger group.”

With the Redress Movement, many Japanese Americans and other Asian groups learned to break their silence. They learned to transform decades of shame to become proud of their cultural heritage and achievements.

Sources:

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