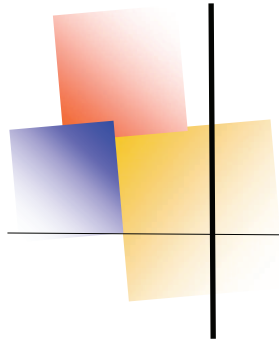


"THE ROAD TO REDRESS AND REPARATIONS"
Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Civil Liberties Act



Japanese American Citizens League– San Jose

High School Essay Contest
Commemorating Redress and the
20th Anniversary of
The Civil Liberties Act of 1988

Sponsored by San Jose JACL

In honor of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, the San Jose Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League sponsored an essay contest for high school students to reflect on the legislation's importance and the state of the civil liberties today. Students were asked to write about the spirit of this legislative victory, how it can be carried forward, and how it can reiterate the importance of civil liberties, especially in a time of war.

Participants wrote about one of two themes:

1. In 1988, the Civil Liberties Act was passed authorizing redress to Japanese-Americans, what is the significance of this Act today?
OR
2. There is much discussion about the state of civil liberties in America on topics such as wiretapping, torture, imprisonment of citizens and immigrants without due process, etc. What do you think is the most pressing issue concerning our civil liberties today and why?

Essay Contest Participants:

Leland Au	Laurie Handa	Andrea Hyde
Darren Lee	Jeffrey Morimune	Terence Nonato
Kevin Onishi	Michael Pearce	Matisse Yoshihara

Awards:

- 1st place - **Michael Pearce, Lincoln High School, San Jose**
Michael received, \$ 300 cash prize, 2 tickets to the annual SJ JACL Recognition dinner (November 1, 2008), and the opportunity to read his essay at the SJ JACL-sponsored Redress Forum, and at the SJ JACL Recognition dinner.
- 2nd place – **Andrea Hyde, Leigh High School, San Jose**
Andrea received \$200 cash prize, 2 tickets to the SJ JACL Recognition Dinner.
- 3rd place – **Kevin Onishi, Del Mar High School, San Jose**
Kevin received \$100 cash prize, 2 tickets to the SJ JACL Recognition Dinner.

All participants will receive a ticket to attend the SJ JACL Recognition Dinner.

Leland Au

After decades of discrimination, suffering, and the terrible legacy of internment camps, countless Japanese-Americans finally received the assurance from the federal government that what they had suffered was ultimately unjust and cruel. Their cries for justice and the ability to place a sense of closure on their suffering were answered. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 not only benefited those affected, but also illustrated the importance of justice and the freedom to exercise civil liberties. It not only gave hope to Japanese-Americans, but also to other groups, in the United States and other countries alike, that governments will eventually acknowledge their mistakes and reestablish equality and justice.

The passage of the Civil Liberties Act stands as a symbol today of how the government of the United States maintains the image of the American Dream, which is what attracts numerous ethnicities of numerous countries to the United States. Many of these immigrants seek refuge from political conflict or oppression that has compromised their sense of security and their abilities to possess and exercise freedoms. Even with lapses of judgment, the United States manages to allow almost every group residing within its borders the opportunity to create a life of their choosing, a life that reinforces other lives in order to create a society of vibrancy, color, and tolerance. With the Civil Liberties Act, Japanese-Americans have gained their freedom of security, and so have other groups in the United States, as this act made sure that future breaches to their freedoms would not occur, as the United States government would have to remain consistent with the Civil Liberties Act and compensate those that would suffer from civil rights violations in the future.

Unfortunately, human right violations affect the livelihood of many in various parts of the world, such as in China, North Korea, and Sudan. Discrimination against certain groups by the government as a result of differing ideologies, ethnicities, cultures is not uncommon in the world sphere. Torture, ethnic cleansing, and censorship are not only words of the past. They are of the present, and sadly, of the future. The Civil Liberties Act is not only significant today because it provides an example of how a certain group suffering from oppression and injustice from the government can eventually regain its freedoms, but

because it also symbolizes the power of democracy, in that governments that attempt to discriminate against certain groups will eventually have to reconsider their actions. Civil liberties ultimately supersede discrimination

Even in the United States, no one can escape the harsh reality that there are always certain groups at any one time that suffer from a compromise of their civil liberties as a result of misconceptions or differences. For example, the liberties as a result of misconceptions or differences. For example, the issue of same-sex marriage is one that has the potential to significantly affect the status quo. There are certain states today that have legalized these types of marriages, but the people involved in same-sex marriages still do not have all of the rights that traditionally married couples possess. In addition, the states that do not recognize same-sex marriage, but still legalize homosexuality, still discriminate against homosexuals, as they do not receive the same rights as others who marry. Even more disturbing, it reinforces social discrimination against this group, as others will view these people as sub-human because this discrimination reinforces the idea that they deserve fewer rights than "normal" people and thus are not "normal" people. The Civil Liberties Act represents to those affected by this issue encouragement to stand up for their rights, as the federal government will eventually compensate for the discrimination that they had to endure for many years, for freedoms and rights that they deserved, but were denied.

From its beginning in 1988, to today, the Civil Liberties Act has maintained its relevance as a symbol of justice and forgiveness. Even though countless examples of human and civil rights violations occur today, from China to the United States, there is still hope. Nobody should live with the fear of not being able to pursue one's calling or passion in life, to not be able to obtain justice when necessary, or to express concerns or feelings. With the legacy of the Civil Liberties Act, no one has to.

Laurie Handa

I never had to face harsh prejudices from Americans who chose to focus their attention on the group rather than the individual. I never had to watch while my natural rights as an American citizen were stolen before my eyes. I never had to live in an internment camp. But two of my grandparents, Polly Reiko Handa and Sumito Horio, did, along with a multitude of other Japanese Americans, during World War II.

Living in the Bay Area today, with its rich diversity and wide tolerance of all cultures, I often take for granted the sacrifices that my ancestors made two generations ago and the suffering they had to endure, along with the struggle to win redress following the end of the war. I also do not dwell much on the actions of the American government – not the one that, under Franklin Roosevelt, forced the evacuation, relocation and internment of Japanese Americans, but the one that, under Ronald Regan, enacted the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. This act was significant to a huge degree not because of the monetary compensation of \$20,000 to all the remaining survivors, but due to the fact that the American government was offering a full and formal apology for its actions.

It took a long time for America to change its mindset, forty-three years to be exact. Finally, forty-three years following the end of the war, did Americans of Japanese ancestry receive some redemption. And now it has been twenty years since that historic event took place. Now, another war is being fought against another country, another culture. What is the impact of the Civil Liberties Act on today's society? Does its existence help to remind today's Americans and government leaders about the perils of racial discrimination, or has its message been forgotten?

There can be no denying that discrimination and prejudice still exist. Racial profiling is currently being used against those who appear to be of Muslim faith. Some Americans view Arab-Americans in a much different light than before as they shy away from and shout hurtful accusations at them. But it is quite clear that the reaction from Americans is nowhere near as severe as it was to the Japanese-Americans back in the 1940's, when houses were being trashed and hateful words were smeared on the walls.

Laurie Handa

Page 2

due to the Civil Liberties Act. Because of this act, there are groups like JACL, people who know that their government isn't always right in its judgments. People who take the Constitution very literally, who believe in the "equality of all men." People who know that innocent beings who have the luck of having ancestors of the same country that is America's enemy, are just that, innocent.

These people are proof that the Civil Liberties Act is still very much remembered, even if unconsciously so. It proved to the world that the government was so very wrong, so very prejudiced; and Americans today are not as likely to believe what government leaders say today, because the one back then acted violently, and imprudently so. And American citizens know that there is no good reason for taking away any group's natural rights. The Civil Liberties Act is a reminder that the internment was a mistake, and it was enacted in the hopes that nothing of this sort would ever happen again, to anyone.

No one hopes this more than those who already had to endure the suffering of being treated as less than human, those who were evacuated, relocated and interned. Those who were beaten down, pushed around, but who never wanted to be anything more than free and American. This inspired their children to go through the unbelievable struggle of trying to win redress with a fierce determination; and finally they rose, victorious. They were finally free, and they inspired hope not only in those of their own community, but in all of the ethnicities that make up the wonderfully diverse country that is America. The Civil Liberties Act continues to inspire today, to fight for what is right in the battle between right and wrong. Because in the end, a person is not made up by the color of their skin or the slant of their eye, but by the courage of their heart and the strength of their mind. Every human deserves to be treated like one, to have the freedom to speak their own mind, and to pursue happiness in life.

What happened in America in the 1940's and what followed is not something to be forgotten, rather it is something to be remembered, not just for the horrific lack of humanity, but also for its return forty-three years later. It also serves as a reminder to the world, how uniting a community can bring about something no one thought possible.

Andrea Hyde

In 1988, the Civil Liberties Act (CLA) was passed authorizing redress to Japanese-Americans; what is the significance of this Act today?

This year, 2008, marks the 20th anniversary of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. This monumental legislation, which finally acknowledged the terrible injustice perpetrated by the United States government through Executive Order 9066 against persons of Japanese descent, marked the beginning of a healing process and closure to a dark part of American history when Japanese-Americans and those of Japanese ancestry were forcibly removed from their homes, stripped of their property and imprisoned in concentration camps.

The Civil Liberties Act was important at the time of adoption, and throughout the last 45 years. Even today, the CLA is incredibly significant in light of what is happening in the United States and internationally. Now, more than ever, it seems that our civil liberties are under constant attack from many directions.

As a fourth generation Japanese-American, I saw the different impact the Civil Liberties Act had on my great-grandmother and grandmother who were internees, my mother who was not interned, but who understood the social and political significance of what had occurred and me who has seen a new hysteria over immigrants and those perceived to be a threat to America.

When the CLA was signed by President Regan, it was monumental. It was the first and only time the United States issued a formal apology and monetary compensation for a governmental action.

For my great-grandmother, the internment still seemed to carry shame. Until 1988, she almost never spoke of the internment and would not even get angry about it. It was a terrible hardship for her and her six children, but it was something rarely spoken of. When the reparation came, there was no rejoicing. I don't know if the CLA ever gave her any sense of vindication. If it did, she did not express it; however, within herself, she took comfort from it.

For my grandmother, the CLA was vindication. It legitimized how she felt; and although the \$20,000 in no way made up for what she suffered, she and her siblings began to talk about the internment differently. There was no more shame. There was anger and resentment. There were bittersweet memories and a feeling that the government had finally acknowledged that they, who were US citizens at the time, were wrongfully treated.

Andrea Hyde

Page 2

For my mother the reaction was different. For her, there was no sense of closure, but more a sense of anger over how this government treated those that were US citizens and no more a threat to the country than Italian-Americans or German-Americans. She understood the social implications and political process and was angry that it took over 45 years to get the apology the internees deserved. The CLA seemed to create more questions than answers for my mother and her generation. Why didn't they fight back? Why didn't someone stand up for them? Living in a time of civil activism, it seemed difficult for my mother to understand how the internment could have happened. However, in the end, the CLA became a rallying point. My mother's reaction was that this was something that should never happen again. As a result, she has actively fought for the rights of immigrants and to insure that our government upholds the Constitution.

As a fourth generation Japanese-American, it is difficult for me to appreciate what my great-grandmother and grandmother endured. I can understand my mother's perspective, but at that point in her life, she did not experience an ongoing threat to her civil liberties like we experience today. The CLA is very real to me. I hear about FISA, wiretapping, racial profiling, terrorism alert levels and anti-immigrant sentiment every day. I think it is a more frightening world than it was when my mother was my age.

The CLA is real to me every time I get on a plane. Even as my cheerleading team was boarding a plane to Disneyland, we were examined, searched and scanned. I saw people who looked a little different be pulled aside for more screening. Where they a threat? Did they have something to hide? It all seemed so necessary, yet unnecessary.

I could see how easy it would be for people to think that taking away someone's rights was necessary for public safety, but where would it stop? It is clear that we must not allow the government or any group to begin chipping away at our Constitutional rights.

Andrea Hyde

Page 3

The CLA represents more than just an apology and reparations. It represents something different to those who were interned and to each subsequent generation. It is a constant reminder to each of us, regardless of ethnicity, that we must remain vigilant that our Constitutional rights are not forsaken as a result of legitimate national security concerns or racist hysteria.

Today, the CLA does not only represent an acknowledgment of a terrible injustice, an apology and reparation. Just as important, the CLA promises to educate the public about what happened, discourage future civil rights injustices and gives the United States the credibility to raise concerns about human and civil rights violations in other countries. Absent the CLA we would appear hypocritical.

To other ethnic groups, the Civil Rights Act empowers them to speak out against civil rights abuses and to demand fair treatment under the law. It forces our government to base national security policy on legitimate threats and not racism.

Through the education programs supported by the CLA, young people are taught not only about the internment, but about many other periods in history where civil liberties hung in the balance. Over the years, AIDS hysteria, gay marriage, religion, and terrorism have caused groups to threaten the rights of others. And in the future, new issues will arise which will cause one group to try to suppress the rights of others.

Above it all, the CLA will stand as a reminder that injustice against a group of people will not be permitted and that we as a nation have a responsibility to protect the civil rights of everyone.

Darren Lee

Today our civil liberties are what make America beautiful. They are what make us different from most other countries. Lately though, these liberties have been in question with acts such as wire tapping and torture circling around the media. I believe that these are two of the main issues concerning our civil liberties.

According to our president, wire tapping is essential to our national security. So far, there have been few, to no reports of captured criminals being spotted or ratted out by wire tapping. Yet our government is still spending millions of dollars tracking and tapping the calls of innocent people. Where is our liberty given to us by the first amendment? We should be allowed to talk to whom we want and when we want privately, away from government ears. Take an average teenager with a girlfriend/boyfriend. When they are talking to that special someone, do you think they want someone listening in on their conversation? Is there anything that is truly private? If the government has caught someone through wire tapping, I think that it could be good, but what would happen if someone got their hands on the files with all the tapped calls? Someone with that much information about certain people could also turn out to be a threat to the national security. That is even truer if other government officials talk about classified information over the phone. That brings me to another point: if the government officials are not to be wire tapped, then what does that make them? Are they truly better than we are and more trustworthy than the average person? What if terrorists are able to get one of their people into our government? How much power do you think they could have? In America all people are suppose to be equal; is that true anymore? What about the president, are his calls tapped?

Another major issue that has been circulating in the media is the allegation that the US military has used torture as a means of getting information. Is this truly civil? Beating a man to near death just to get information from him? What happens if he is innocent? What then, do we just say whoops, sorry we messed up; it will not happen again? All children are taught the golden rule; treat others the way you want to be treated. Has the president or the government ever thought about this? Have they ever been tortured, beaten? Innocent people could have been tortured and killed for acts they did not commit.

Darren Lee

Page 2

Another right that has made America special is the assumption that all people are innocent till proven guilty. Of the people that *have* been tortured, were any of them convicted of being guilty of a crime? If they were not, then the president has again overstepped his power, taking for granted the liberties that all Americans hold dear. Both torture and wire tapping have attracted much media attention.

Connecting the two crimes is not an easy thing. Yet there is one obvious connection. Both are acting against possibly innocent people. What gives anyone the right to commit an act of brutality on another person, or snoop on their conversations? We are supposed to count on our government to catch criminals, but what if it is not doing its job? What if the government is just using that as an excuse to spy on the average American citizen? The same could apply to the torture of people who might have been at the wrong place at the wrong time. Another similarity to the two acts is that they have not been used before George Bush took presidency. Do you think there is a link? Could he be using his powers beyond his limits to take our and our allies' liberties away? What will America become by the end of his presidency? Will we ever recover the status that we once held with pride? Will people feel proud to be Americans?

If these acts are continued, what does it mean for America? Are we still the land of the free and home of the brave? So afraid of innocent people that we have to listen to their conversations? Possibly innocent people who had their freedom taken away and were brutally interrogated. How does that make you feel? Would you still be proud to be a part of a country that has done these immoral acts? These are some of the topics that must be brought to light in terms of defining what America is.

Jeffrey Morimune

The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was a momentous piece of legislation for the Japanese Americans, providing each surviving internee with \$20,000 in order to compensate for the brutalities that were endured. Some may believe that no sum of money can justly compensate for the harsh experiences which lead to the death and emotional distress of thousands at these relocation centers. Until attending the Tule Lake Pilgrimage this year, I honestly heard very few stories of Japanese internment. Listening to actual experiences told by the internees gave me an impression of what life at Tule Lake was like while they were interned.

The lack of knowledge appears to be one of the today's major issues; my generation is learning less and less about the Japanese American culture, especially since it is omitted from grade school textbooks. Therefore, many Yonsei are looking to Japan in desperation to learn about their culture; however, Japanese American culture is not directly connected to life in Japan, instead it began with Japanese internment and redress.

The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was essentially America's way of apologizing and admitting it was wrong and thus provided reparation to those who survived an experience that can be comparable to that of the Holocaust. However, as we all know America didn't willingly walk out into the open and admit its wrongdoing; it took a long, forty-year effort spearheaded by the JACL, for the redress to be approved by President Ronald Reagan. Unfortunately, the act did not compensate those Japanese Americans who had passed on or those who had resided in South America and had been forced to relocate. Nevertheless, it was a significant occasion as a precedence was established that "the occurrence of similar injustices and violations in the future" were to be discouraged. Therefore, the goal of this legislation was to eliminate civil injustices and continue the process of establishing a 'land of the free.'

Many students ask, "Why do we even have to take history? It's not like we will ever need it in the future." And the generic response is, "so history doesn't repeat itself." Unfortunately, recent events have proved that Americans have not learned from their mistakes and thus they continue to pursue their faults. Following the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, Middle Easterners have endured racism similar to the treatment that the Japanese Americans were forced to deal with during World War II. Some may say that America has adapted to the situation and Middle Easterners were not placed in relocation centers. Nonetheless, many Nisei have described their experiences outside of the internment camps as more abusive due to the physical and verbal discrimination that they had to confront after the war was over. Therefore, America truly needs to learn from its mistakes; it needs to work not only to prevent relocation, but also show its support for the Middle Easterners and rally against these prevalent hate crimes. Such a change cannot be made over night; rather, it starts with each individual keeping an open-minded perspective on life and the people around us. An individual's ethnicity does not determine the type of person that he or she is; stereotypical walls need to be broken.

Having experienced racism first hand, Japanese Americans are one of the first groups ready to help the Muslims in their battle against racism. The JACL plays an integral role in this fight for civil liberties. The San Jose JACL is doing an excellent job representing and recruiting people to become aware of this discrimination to its full extent and showing its support for the Middle Easterners, so that they do not have to face the same prejudice that many Japanese Americans have had to face.

Terence Nonato

Liberty: Then and Now

“When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?”

-Eleanor Roosevelt

Eleanor Roosevelt was the wife of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the President of the United States during one of the most important and gruesome times in history - World War II. But above all, Eleanor Roosevelt was a civil rights advocate who passionately defended human freedom and rights. While involvement in World War II would characterize Franklin D. Roosevelt's last term as president, his wife Eleanor would continue a fight of her own - a struggle for lasting peace and liberty, a notion which was, for some, including her husband, temporarily lost amidst the death and destruction of the deadliest war ever waged.

On December 8, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the United States of America concerning the Pearl Harbor attacks the day before. He stated famously, “Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.” The attack on Pearl Harbor, more than any other event, was the catalyst which justified America's further involvement in World War II. The strike on Pearl Harbor claimed around twenty-four hundred lives, constituting a small fraction of the seventy-million estimated deaths associated with World War II.

Just over two months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, on February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, ordering that those of Japanese ancestry be removed from the Pacific Coast and relocated to Internment Camps. Also called Relocation Centers, several were located in the Western and Mountain states, including California and Utah. War hysteria and paranoia, often mistaken as patriotism, led to a fear and often hate of Japanese. Having Japanese blood meant that you were a threat. This simple and unmistakable definition led to the incarceration of a hundred and twenty thousand people, many of whom were American citizens; a majority were Nisei and some were Issei Japanese, many

Terence Nonato

Page 2

knew the Pledge of Allegiance and went to schools, but they all had Japanese blood, so that was enough. Over sixty years ago, Jack Shinkawa and Fujiko Okuno were two of those one hundred and twenty thousand in the internment camps, held in Tule Lake and Topaz, respectively. Like many others they were nisei, Japanese Americans, and United States citizens, and certainly not a threat. I am proud to say that they are my grandparents.

And so, despite opposition from FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, and his own wife Eleanor, Roosevelt issued and adhered to Executive Order 9066, and thus like so many others, my grandparents were taken from friends and family, from their properties, isolated, herded and imprisoned behind barbed wire, watched over by men with guns, and for some, always, always followed by looks of fear and hatred. But soon they took the bus or the train home to a changed place, and began again to start anew. Many again took up their old occupations, like my grandparents, who both continued their passion for farming here in the Bay Area. But even after they returned home, there was a certain emptiness felt throughout the Japanese-American community.

Over four decades after the internment camps closed, some citizens and members of the government of the United States took steps toward righting the wrong done to the Japanese many years ago. Through the efforts of President Ronald Reagan and distinguished Japanese-American politician Norman Mineta, the Civil Liberties Act was signed in 1988. It included a twenty-thousand dollar payment to Japanese Americans who were interned during World War II and an apology on behalf of the American people and government. The money was appreciated, but it could never make up for the full economic loss many Japanese suffered, the social isolation, and discrimination they faced. However, there is something much more important about the Civil Liberties Act, a facet of it perhaps indefinitely more appreciated by all Americans; that is, it takes steps not only to apologize for past wrongdoings, but it takes steps to prevent future events like the internment camps from happening ever again. Thus, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 is important to all because it seeks to prevent social isolation of any group, despite what happens in the world around us.

Over a dozen years after it was signed, the very views the Civil Liberties Act held would be applied and tested. On September 11, 2001, America came under attack. Again, over two thousand people were killed in an event, which, like Pearl Harbor, caught the attention of the world.

And amid the chaos stood Norman Mineta, at that point the United States Secretary of Transportation. As the smoke cleared from ground zero, he realized there was another mess to clean up, a confusion among the American people that could lead to the same social isolation Japanese-Americans like him endured after Pearl Harbor. Ten days after the twin towers fell, Norman Mineta sent a letter to all U.S. airlines, forbidding racial profiling of any kind, prohibiting the "subjecting [of] Middle Eastern or Muslim passengers to a heightened state of pre-flight scrutiny." Thus, the Civil Liberties Act is important because, through the actions of Norman Mineta, a victim of the internment camps himself, the social isolation of another group following a terrible event was deemed inappropriate.

Even though it did not completely atone for the suffering endured by thousands of Japanese, it did in part prevent the isolation of another group within American society. Hopefully the Civil Liberties Act will continue to give liberty to all.

Memories of hardship and torment cannot be erased very easily. For many, apologies and money are not enough to simply forget. No, memories will stay long after the camp barracks have decayed and the fences have blown down in the wind. But the feeling of freedom, that lasts far, far longer.

Kevin Onishi

A Bright Day

As the sun rises through our windows each morning, awaking us from our deep slumber, not only are we struck with the urge to pull the covers over our heads but we are brought into a new day, a day when anything, including the impossible, can happen. It could be a positive day, in which we might receive an 'A' on a test we should have studied for last night, or the day your dreams come true. Or it could be a horrible day, in which things did not come out as planned, or a day in which we lose a loved one. Though each day brings us unexpected and unplanned events, there is nothing we can do to plan for it. Unfortunately, for the thousands of Japanese American citizens waking up on the early morning of December 7, 1941, this would be one of those days they wished they could have planned for. The events that took place at Pearl Harbor that gloomy morning even shut the mouths of the loudest *bakatares* and left everyone speechless. However, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had these words to describe this day - "A day that will live in infamy."

Though the events that took place at Pearl Harbor occurred 67 years ago, the work and actions of hundreds who fought for the 1988 Civil Liberties Act are a constant reminder to us how the actions of individuals can benefit the community. Pursued by Congressman Norman Mineta and backed by thousands of supporters inside and outside of the Japanese American community, the 1988 Civil Liberties Act granted reparations to those who were interned in the various internment camps after Executive Order 9066 was passed in 1942. Surviving internees received a letter of apology, signed by President George Bush, stating that the actions of the government were based on racial prejudice and failure of political leadership, and a check for \$20,000. However, only about 82,000 people received these reparations because most of the elderly who were interned had died before 1988. But for those who did receive the check, the feeling of accomplishment and pride by the efforts of the Nisei and Sansei generations greatly outweighed the hefty check given to them. Sixty-seven years ago, Japanese immigrants and Japanese American citizens found themselves waking up to a horrible day; but in the end, they were able to go to bed at ease, finding themselves waking up to a much brighter day. It was finally a good day to be called Japanese American.

Kevin Onishi

Page 2

In 2007, Film Director Michael Bay released the summer mega blockbuster hit, "Transformers". Though fighting robots may seem irrelevant to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, the plot and the outcome of the film is parallel to the struggles that the Japanese Americans faced. In the beginning of the movie we witness a US base under a surprise attack by the Decepticons, a branch of Transformers who fight for evil. (In regards to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese dive-bombers would be the Decepticons and Pearl Harbor would be the US base.) However, there are still good types of Transformers, known as Autobots, who fight for the right thing (Japanese Americans and Japanese American activists). But because of the actions of the Decepticons, the US government viewed all Transformers as bad (similar to Executive Order 9066). Finally, the Autobots prove that they are indeed friendly and they help the US government turn back the Decepticons and they eventually win the war (similar to the 442nd Division.) In the end, the US government repays the Autobots for their heroic efforts by letting them remain on Earth (in 1988 the Civil Liberties Act granted redress to all surviving internees). Apparently, in Hollywood, the actions of social prejudice can be redeemed, so is there still hope for current, real-world social issues?

As we find ourselves waking up in the 21st Century, our morning curse has been passed on to other people of different backgrounds. Some gays and Muslim Americans find themselves in the same position that the US government placed us in 67 years ago, despite our recognition and title as citizens of the United States of America. The US government has been, until most recently, keeping away the title of marriage from the gay community. However, just like the actions of the Japanese American activists fighting for redress, the gay community has fought for and won the right to enter into marriage. But what other communities are fighting similar struggles? In October of 2001, President George W. Bush signed the Patriot Act, which allowed Homeland Security the privilege of revoking the rights of certain people if they are suspected of terrorism. Since its birth, the Patriot Act has sent more than 700 United States citizens, most of them Muslim American, to Guantanamo Bay. Just like in 1942 with the Japanese Americans, these select Muslim Americans are detained

Kevin Onishi

Page 3

against their will, but if found innocent they are free to go, just like we were 67 years ago. As members of the Japanese American Community, we must ask ourselves, "Should we let history repeat itself?"

What kind of world will we be waking up to tomorrow? Are we prepared? Luckily for us, we have the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 to use as an example to show the world how uniting under a cause can be accomplished. Just as the Japanese American activists, the Autobots and the gay community have shown, there is still hope for the other communities found in the US who are faced with racial prejudice. No matter what it is, whether it is a racial slur, or being locked away based on stereotypes, we can join together and fight for the right cause, because, just as Optimus Prime says, "There is more than meets the eye." Now, even though as we fall asleep tonight, we are helpless to the fate of tomorrow, we can fall asleep more comfortably knowing that if the activists could do it in 1988, then surely we can unite under the same cause in the future.

Michael Pearce

In the Name of National Security

Throughout American history, the issue of civil liberties has been at the forefront of the challenges faced by this nation, and has played an integral role in shaping our history. The Founding Fathers of this country created the Bill of Rights to defend these civil liberties, and yet many of them were slaveholders who sought to deny others the same freedoms they had fought for and cherished. The next two centuries would see a myriad of abuses of the civil liberties and rights of women, Native Americans, African Americans, Japanese Americans, and immigrants from all manner of national and cultural backgrounds. Although there has no doubt been substantial progress since the days of slavery and internment in many regards, blatant violations of our civil liberties still exist in this nation, particularly under our current administration. The most critical issue concerning our civil liberties today is much the same as it was in the 1940s: the question of when civil liberties may be taken away in the name of national security. As can be seen time and time again throughout our history, the taking of civil liberties because of a perceived threat has never been justified, and is certainly not justified in the United States today.

To begin with, this nation has had a long and disturbing history of revoking civil rights in the name of national security. Only seven years after the passing of the Bill of Rights which he had supported, John Adams became our first president to decide that it did not suit him. With the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, he effectively banned the free press, in order to prevent his critics from expressing their views. He passed these acts during a period in which tensions with France ran high, and the United States was in fact in an undeclared naval war against France. Adams used the hostilities as an excuse to pass these acts in the name of national security. Thus began a shameful American tradition.

The next president to suspend civil liberties in the name of national security was a man that we Americans don't really like to think of as having done so: Abraham Lincoln. Although almost any American would probably rank him our greatest president, we are quick to forget that during the Civil War, Lincoln suspended *habeas corpus*, and did his best to limit freedom of the press. Lincoln was concerned with one thing: saving the Union. He was not as concerned with what was

ethically correct. Lincoln deserves to be remembered as the man who saved a broken country from remaining so, but that does not mean that he was infallible, or that any crimes he committed should just be automatically forgotten. Many would use the example of Lincoln as evidence that it is acceptable to suspend civil liberties in the name of national security. There are several problems with this argument. First, the Union may have won the Civil War in spite of Lincoln's dictatorial tactics, not necessarily because of them. Additionally, Lincoln's tactics added validity to the famous words of John Wilkes Booth ("Death to tyrants!"). Like Booth, much of the South viewed Lincoln as a tyrant. His suspension of civil liberties added to this perception and, perhaps inevitably, to his assassination. His assassination would lead in turn to the failure of Reconstruction in the South. This, in turn, would lead to another century of civil rights abuses in the South. Thus, Lincoln was by no means perfect; and his decision to suspend civil liberties was an excellent example of this imperfection. It is also an excellent example to us that even the best of governments can commit civil liberties abuses.

Notorious civil liberties abuses in the name of national security would continue into the next century, with the Red Scares and a variety of suspensions of civil liberties during the two World Wars, most notably the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. During the Red Scares of the early 1920s and 1950s, thousands of Americans were unjustifiably blacklisted, and many deported because they were perceived as threats to our national security. During the First World War, the freedom of the press was suspended as it was during the Civil War. The United States government during the Second World War, went a step farther in the name of national security by effectively imprisoning over 100,000 of the nation's residents.

Once more in our nation's history, over the course of the last seven years, our civil liberties have again come under attack under the guise of national security. As we look upon our past, we must conclude that these violations of our rights are simply not justified. Bill of Rights violations have affected thousands of citizens and residents in the form of unwarranted wiretaps, and our torturing of detainees (if sleep deprivation, or convincing someone they are dying through waterboarding" may be considered torture) certainly count as a violation of civil liberties, as well as of the Geneva Conventions. Some argue that such actions are

Michael Pearce

Page 3

justified, especially since the torture does not take place on U.S. soil, and the prisoners are not U.S. citizens. One is reminded of the old saying, "the Constitution does not follow the flag". This shameful philosophy from the imperial days is a blatant attempt to reduce people not having the good fortune of being U.S. citizens to the level of sub-humans, not deserving of the basic rights that we award our own citizens. We must learn from the pattern of history that, by revoking civil liberties in the name of national defense, we destroy the very freedoms that we value above all else, and are trying to protect. No nation that does not respect the rights of its people, and of people around the world, can hope to ever be secure; and that is why the restoration of our civil liberties, for the sake of national security, is the most critical civil liberties issue facing America today.

Matisse Yoshihara

Moving Forward From Prejudice

Maya Angelou, the famed poet, playwright, producer, and civil rights activist once said, "Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future, and renders the present inaccessible." We are all guilty of some sort of prejudice. It is a vicious quality that puts our *own* hands in front of our eyes and perhaps prevents us from seeing many beautiful things. Prejudice comes forth as a malicious part of human nature. Oftentimes, it is within us to have prejudice to protect ourselves, whether or not that means placing false blame and accusation. The beloved United States of America is known for its democratic opportunities and infinite prospects of freedom. However, in 1942, through Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 which authorized Japanese-American internment, Japanese-Americans were now not to be trusted, not to be believed, and, for many, not even to be associated with. The internment of Japanese-Americans in the 1940s was an American failure - a glitch in the democratic system that we hold in such high esteem. Four decades later, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. He stepped forward with an apology and admission that Japanese internment was an act of "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership" (Civil Liberties Act of 1988). This legislation was the first step in restitution and reinstalling lost American faith in America's political system.

Although the Civil Liberties Act allowed for monetary restitution, which assisted many Japanese-Americans in their recovery from their economic hardship, this act was also created to apologize and assure that this American failure would never happen again. According to the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, other than to merely provide monetary amends, the Act was passed for four other main reasons, two of which are "To acknowledge the fundamental injustice of the evacuation, relocation and internment" and "To apologize on behalf of the people of the United States." By acknowledging the "fundamental injustice," the American government did not simply cover in excuses for its fallacies. This acknowledgment illustrates how prejudice is *not* okay. The government honorably admitted guilt and proceeded to apologize for its wrong-doing. Today we know it is wrong to discriminate, and we have learned from our actions and continue to move forward as an open-minded society. Furthermore, the decision to acknowledge and to apologize for misconduct was not enough. The American government declared it was necessary "To provide for a public education fund to finance efforts to inform the public about the internment

Matisse Yoshihara

Page 2

so as to prevent the recurrence of any similar event." A few decades later, today, American citizens understand this piece of history and recognize the injustice. From elementary school to middle school to high school, students learn of the hardships and terrors Japanese-American citizens faced during WWII. In any classroom teaching American history, education of this event is imperative. By teaching this piece of American history and all of its horrors, educated young adults learn of the injustices that shall never be repeated in American history. We must learn from our mistakes and move forward into the future as a brighter, more open-minded, and understanding people. Lastly, the Civil Liberties Act included the statement "To make more credible and sincere any declaration of concern by the United States over violations of human rights committed by other nations." The significance of this declaration was to legitimize the American concern for civil rights around the world. By acknowledging its mistake, the government would not seem hypocritical later for criticizing other nations' prejudices. In this age, Americans are activists for human rights and the betterment of human beings around the world. If the government had never apologized for its wrong-doing, other nations would likely not take the United States seriously for the injustices committed against its own people. (Civil Liberties Act of 1988). The Civil Liberties Act allowed for amends and restitution for tens of thousands of American victims and took steps to better the recovering nation.

As Japanese-Americans were stereotyped as figures of terrorists and traitors, the American people would make one of the biggest mistakes it would ever commit. Today, we take away from this public apology and reconciliation the recognition of the danger in stereotypes. However easy it is for one to look at a person and judge him from his appearance or perhaps general stereotypical statements, the validity in these perceptions are most often completely wrong. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was but a declaration. It was the responsibility of the people and the government to see it through. Fortunately, throughout time we have moved forward as a nation. We are constantly evolving and changing. We must learn from our mistakes. Each individual must take it upon himself/herself to leave his/her prejudices behind and be open to learn and open to accept. The brilliant Maya Angelou also once said, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again."