

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

REDRESS FOR JAPANESE PERUVIANS

by Grace Shimizu

A plan for the forced removal and confinement of persons of Japanese ancestry in the Western hemisphere (North, Central and South Americas) was set in consultations before World War II. By 1939, the United States government began to address the need to repatriate American citizens from war zones in Europe and the Far East should the United States be drawn into the war.

At first, permanent resident Japanese as well as Japanese Americans were considered as potential hostages. But this option

was not actively pursued due to concerns with the legal and international implications of forcibly exchanging American citizens of one race and ancestry for other U.S. citizens. The United States had to find some other solution. They needed bodies to exchange.

Since the United States had historically looked to Latin America as within its sphere of influence, its own back yard, it became quite convenient for the U.S. to find the needed hostages there. In fact, two months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government

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ART SHIBAYAMA

Art Shibayama was 13 when he, as one of a family of eight, entered the U.S. at New Orleans in 1944. His family was among the 1800 Japanese Peruvians the U.S. State Department forcibly brought to the U.S. to be used for hostage exchange with Japan. His grandparents, in fact, were sent to Japan as part of such an exchange program.

After the war, still declared an "illegal alien," Art joined the internees at Seabrook Farms in New Jersey. He was drafted into the U.S. Army and served in the Korean War, but still was denied U.S. citizenship because the government maintained that he entered the country as an "illegal alien" in 1944.

The U.S. government advised him in 1956 to go to Canada and reenter this country as a means of establishing a legal entry into the U.S. He did so. But because the government changed his entry date into the U.S. from 1944 to 1956, he is now declared ineligible for redress. ✧



A clothing store owned by Shibayama's grandparents in Callao, Peru, in the 1930's. Photo courtesy of Art Shibayama, NJAHS Archives.



Art Shibayama with his parents and siblings around the family car in Lima, Peru, c.1939. Photo courtesy of Art Shibayama, NJAHS Archives.

entered into an agreement with the Panamanian government regarding wartime internment of Japanese in Panama, with the U.S. assuming all expenses and responsibility. This agreement was implemented after the attack on Pearl Harbor and this program served as an example for other Latin American internment programs which were to follow.

Even though Peru did not officially enter the war until 1945, the Peruvian government actually had hoped to use the wartime situation as a pretext for deporting the entire Japanese community--perhaps another version of ethnic cleansing.

From 1942 to 1945 the U.S. government orchestrated the forcible deportation of over 2,260 persons of Japanese ancestry from 12 Latin American countries to be used as hostages in exchange for Americans held by Japan. The U.S. government financed their transportation over international borders and their incarceration in 6 of the 27 U.S. Department of Justice internment camps. Of these, about 1800 (80%) were Japanese Peruvians.

After the war ended, most Japanese

Peruvians wanted to return to Peru. Many had never been to Japan and did not speak the language. But Peru accepted only about 100 Japanese Peruvians back into Peru, even though many were Peruvian citizens

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or married to Peruvians. Feeling that they had no other option, over 900 Japanese Peruvians left for Japan between November 1945 and June 1946. This number included 66 babies born in camp and who were citizens of the U.S.

The U.S. government has acknowledged the wrong it had done to Japanese Americans by passing the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 which

gives a formal letter of apology and monetary compensation to those who were interned during World War II. However, the U.S. government has not yet acknowledged the wrong it had done to the Japanese Latin Americans.

According to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, only persons who were permanent residents or American citizens as the time of internment are eligible for an apology and monetary compensation. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Japanese Peruvians are not considered eligible. Most were deported to Japan and some managed to return to Peru. Some remained in the U.S. but not able to get their permanent residency made retroactive to the date they were initially brought to the U.S. So, there are cases where in the same family, some are eligible and some are not, even though their entry was under the same condition and on the same date.

Japanese Latin Americans are now organizing to be included in the redress bill passed by Congress for Japanese Americans. ✨

hot, humid day they had to dig a pit. The men had a terrible thought that the pit was to be their graves. Instead, they were made to carry buckets of human waste from the officers' building to the pit. The men retched from the stench. The guards, who kept a safe distance away, laughed and jeered at the men.

After three months of hard labor the Japanese Peruvians were taken by Army trucks to a ship, which brought them to San Francisco and to their first camp at *Sharpe Park*,

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just south of San Francisco.

After a series of different Justice Department camps Yabuki ended up in a Terminal Island jail in Southern California. The men were told they were to be shipped to Japan since Peru did not want them back. Then came attorney Wayne Collins from San Francisco to save them from deportation. The men cried out in joy.

Yabuki was moved to Crystal City camp, and jumped at a chance to be

"free" at Seabrook Farms. He met his wife-to-be at Seabrook Farms. He graduated from high school, and became an American citizen.

PAROLEES TO SEABROOK FARMS

In the summer and autumn of 1946, two contingents of 110 and 99 left Crystal City camp for Seabrook Farms. They represented two-third of all Japanese Peruvians in the United States. ✨