

Dear Members of Congress,

Although the public is generally familiar with the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, they are less aware that, as well, the United States interned over 2,200 Japanese men, women, and children from Latin America. The U.S. government orchestrated their removal from thirteen Latin American countries, forcibly transported them to the United States, and interned them for an indeterminate time. The U.S. Immigration & Naturalization Service informed them that they were illegal aliens since it had confiscated all passports and none contained a valid entry visa into the United States. This, in essence, left them as persons with no backing from any country. During the war, the United States used many in a prisoner exchange program with Japan. At the end of the war, various Latin American countries denied most of them re-entry while the United States attempted to deport them to Japan. These events occurred even though the United States recognized that some internees were born in a Latin American country and had never been to Japan.

Previous efforts in Congress have neglected the Japanese internees from Latin America. The 1981 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians undertook only a minor investigation of the plight of these Latin American internees. They were not included in the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which provided an apology and redress to incarcerated Japanese Americans. Although a lawsuit settled in 1998 provided token reparations for 645 of the 2,200 internees, Congress has yet to examine comprehensively our nation's internment of Japanese Latin Americans in this country.

A bill currently before Congress, entitled the "Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act," would begin that much-needed examination. Introduced by Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31) and Senator Daniel Inouye (HI), this bill would establish a nine-member commission to investigate the World War II-era deportation, internment, and deprivations suffered by those Latin Americans of Japanese descent and recommend appropriate remedies.

We, the undersigned scholars, write to express our support for this bill. As scholars, we support a careful, comprehensive inquiry into this dark moment in our history. The capture and internment of civilians residing in other countries on the basis of ethnicity was not justified. Passage of the "Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Latin Americans of Japanese Descent Act" would make important information available to scholars, educators, government officials, and the public, which would help us avoid similarly wrongful and unwarranted actions being taken again. Your support of this legislation would demonstrate a national commitment to honoring human dignity and international human rights.

Signed,

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