



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

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PRESS RELEASE

THE JACL SUPPORTS MARRIAGE EQUALITY

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SAN FRANCISCO, CA. - Because of Japanese Americans' internment experience and belief in the Constitution's guarantee that all citizens be protected equally under the law, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) in 1994 became the first non-gay national civil rights organization after the ACLU to support marriage equality for same-sex couples. Thousands of API Californians are in same-sex relationships, and as many as half of API same-sex couples are raising children. API couples are lead plaintiffs in marriage equality litigation here in California and across the country.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, groups such as the Asiatic Exclusion League formed for the purpose of minimizing immigration to the U.S. and keeping families separated. Popular anti-Japanese sentiment at that time resulted in denying Japanese Americans the ability to own or lease land, nor could they marry someone not of their own race. In 1922, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Japanese Americans were racially ineligible for citizenship despite maintaining an American lifestyle and professing loyalty to our nation. By 1930, with immigration bans firmly in place, the majority of the Japanese population here in the U.S. was American born. Denied the right to freely marry and facing widespread discrimination in housing and employment, these American citizens were segregated into ethnic enclaves and could not fully participate in mainstream society.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, in 1942 Japanese Americans were subjected to restricted civil liberties, which culminated in the internment of 120,000 people in concentration camps across the western United States. The rights of these Americans were not vindicated for decades. In 1982, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, established by Congress, unanimously concluded that the internment had been based upon race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership, rather than any true military necessity.

Last year, the Japanese American Citizens League was one of many organizations which submitted an amicus brief supporting same-sex couples in the Court of Appeal. Current laws deny same-sex couples the fundamental right to marry. We recognize the detrimental effect these exclusionary laws had on API Californians. Today, as a continuing advocate for civil and human rights for all Asian Americans and other minorities, the JACL is proud to support this new amicus brief being submitted to the Supreme Court of the State of California. The JACL urges the court to end the serious denial of rights that the state is now perpetrating against same-sex couples and their families.