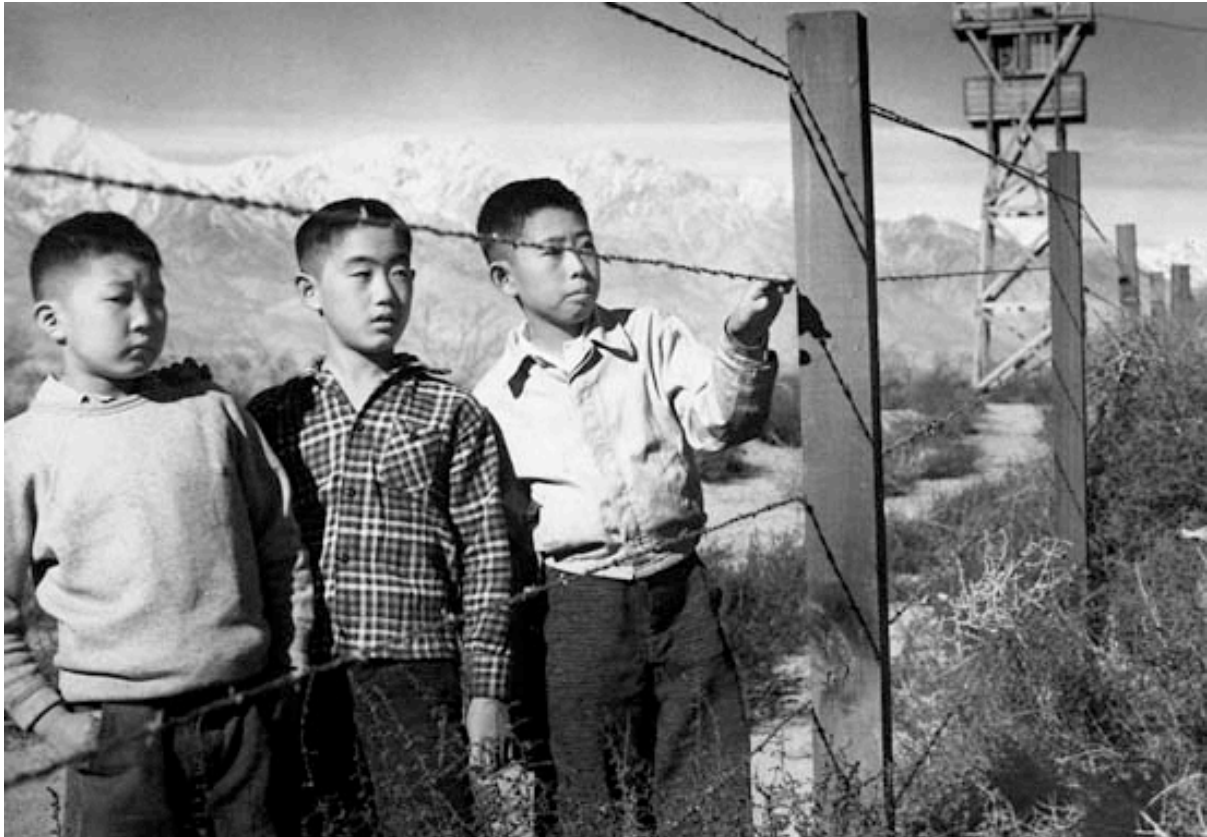


POWER OF WORDS HANDBOOK



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**Japanese American Citizens League
2011**



POWER OF WORDS HANDBOOK

“Whether as individuals or as civilizations, as we communicate, so shall we be.”

– Lee Thayer (1997)

Shortly after the attacks on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, the Federal Bureau of Investigation rounded up and arrested several thousand “suspected enemy aliens” of Japanese descent in the United States (Spickard, 1996). From Japanese language teachers and newspaper staff to Buddhist priests and leaders of Japanese organizations, the United States government began to question members of Japanese communities. Husbands and fathers were suddenly taken from their homes and families for interrogation; many were detained for months.

Prior this period, anti-Japanese sentiment was brewing especially on the West Coast. The bombing of Pearl Harbor escalated these sentiments. Thousands of American citizens became the targets of racial slurs and other acts of discrimination, simply because their ancestors came from Japan. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, “authorizing the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast” (Murray, 2000, p. 5). Moreover, the Executive Order gave the military the right to “exclude anyone from anywhere without trial or hearings” (Niiya, 1993, p. 55).

When President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which formerly apologized for the injustices that the U.S. Government committed based on “wartime hysteria, race prejudice, and a failure of political leadership” as was determined by the Commission on the Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), a movement has begun to cease using those euphemistic words and to more accurately describe what actually took place during this tragic period in our country’s history.

This movement is an important one because it is part of a lesson that all Americans must learn, to be vigilant, not only to actions that the government may take toward a group of people, but to also to be alert to how a situation or circumstance is described. Consider how one’s perspective is influenced when one statement says the enemy massacred our troops and then reads that our troops were victorious in defeating the enemy.

This is not an attempt to rewrite our history but to more accurately describe what happened so it does not happen again.

EUPHEMISMS

Euphemisms are “the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). From government documents and propaganda to public discourse and newspapers, many euphemisms have been used to describe the experiences of Japanese Americans who were forced from their homes and communities during World War II. Words like “evacuation,” “relocation,” and “assembly centers” imply that the United States government was trying to rescue Japanese Americans from a disastrous environment on the West Coast and simply help them move to a new gathering place. These terms strategically mask the fact that thousands of Japanese Americans were denied

their rights as US citizens and forcibly ordered to live in poorly constructed barracks on sites that were surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers.

Although the use of euphemisms was commonplace during World War II and in many subsequent years, we realize that the continued use of these inaccurate terms is highly problematic. As members of the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States, JACL members are in a pivotal position to promote the adoption of more accurate terms that refer to the incarceration of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II.

THE POWER OF WORDS

Words have the power to shape the way we see the world and interact with others. Words can conceal truths, but they can also clarify, challenge assumptions, and correct inaccuracies. Using euphemisms and misnomers to describe and discuss the World War II experiences of Japanese Americans is highly problematic, because these terms fail to recognize the United States government's civil rights violations and the ensuing struggles of nearly 120,000 people to re-establish their lives after World War II. Therefore, we advocate for (a) the rejection of euphemistic terms like "evacuation" and "relocation" and (b) the use of more accurate words like "forced removal" and "incarceration." By changing the way we talk and write about this important point in history, we hope to foster a more precise and realistic understanding of what actually happened to Americans of Japanese ancestry and their immigrant parents in the United States during World War II.

OVERVIEW

The Power of Words Resolution, which was passed during the 2010 JACL National Convention in Chicago, aims to promote the use of more accurate words that relate to the unjust incarceration of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. This handbook was created to help JACL districts, chapters, and members assist in the implementation of the Power of Words Resolution. First, we provide some background information about the resolution. Second, we offer a list of more accurate terms that can be used instead of antiquated euphemisms and misnomers. Third, we identify strategies that chapters, districts, and individual members can pursue to support the Power of Words resolution. Finally, we identify a collection of useful resources for educators, activists, and civilians alike.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Power of Words emerged from a grassroots campaign in Pacific Northwest District of the JACL with the goals of "identifying euphemisms and misnomers and encouraging the use of more accurate terminology as it relates to the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II" (PNW, 2010). During 2010 JACL National Convention in Chicago, Illinois, the National Council considered the Power of Words Resolution. To see a copy of the resolution, please go to the Appendix.

THE POWER OF WORDS RESOLUTION

The resolution was amended and adopted by the 2010 JACL National Council; a total of 80 votes supported the resolution and 2 votes were against it. An ad hoc committee, consisting of National Education Committee (NEC) members, was created to determine how this resolution could be

implemented by the JACL and its members. One of the committee's tasks was to create a helpful handbook that could provide information about the resolution, its principles, and explain how JACL, its chapters, and its members could actively promote the use of more accurate terminology related to many Japanese Americans' experiences during World War II.

WHAT DOES THE RESOLUTION AIM TO ACCOMPLISH?

Because the words we elect to use play an instrumental role in shaping people's perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors, this resolution aims to promote the substitution of euphemistic words affiliated with Japanese Americans' experiences during World War II with more accurate terminology. By using more precise words, we hope to make others more aware of the actual experiences of the 110,000+ people who were forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated in illegal detention centers in the United States during World War II.

WHAT DOES THE RESOLUTION NOT AIM TO ACCOMPLISH?

It is important to note that this resolution does *not* advocate for the alteration or transformation of original historical texts (e.g., pictures, legal documents, original newspapers from the World War II era). We recognize the importance of preserving these artifacts for historical and educational purposes. Rather, we aim "to promote the substitution of the terminology of published documents in future publications and in teacher trainings" (Power of Words Resolution, 2010). In doing so, we hope to foster a more accurate understanding of this significant time period.

WHICH WORDS ARE PROBLEMATIC ...AND WHICH WORDS SHOULD WE PROMOTE

Based on the "Power of Words" Resolution the following euphemisms are identified below along with the recommended word to be used in lieu of the term. In some instances, when the euphemism cannot be replaced, it is recommended that the word be placed in quote marks. However, the preference is to replace the euphemism whenever possible.

1. EVACUATION:

This term refers to "the process of temporarily moving people away from an immediate and real danger, such as a fire, flood, shoot-out, or bomb threat" (Okamura, 1982, p. 97). In 1942, over 110,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes on the West Coast; they were not "evacuated" to protect them from a disastrous environment.

Recommendation: The word should be replaced with *forced removal*.

2. RELOCATION:

This euphemism suggests that people were moved from one location to another. It does not recognize the fact that the people were forced to leave their homes and many of their belongings behind.

Recommendation: The word should be replaced with *forced removal*

3. INTERNMENT:

This word literally refers to the confinement or impounding of enemy aliens during a war (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Although thousands of people of Japanese ancestry were incarcerated during World War II, they were not “enemy aliens.” Moreover, they were not simply “confined” in camps. [Please feel free to elaborate here!]

Recommendation: The word should be replaced with *incarceration*.

4. ASSEMBLY CENTER:

Before arriving at incarceration camps, many Japanese and Japanese Americans were forced to live temporarily in “assembly centers.” The euphemistic nature of this term hides the fact that many “assembly centers” were makeshift holding areas that included race tracks, horse stalls, and fairgrounds.

Recommendation: If the term Assembly Center is used it should be placed in quotation marks (“*Assembly Center*”) to indicate it is a government euphemism. Please see the paragraph below for suggested alternative terminology.

5. RELOCATION CAMP:

This euphemism suggests that Japanese and Japanese Americans moved to desolate locations and featured rough living conditions surrounded by barbed wire fences and with guard towers where the sentries pointed their weapons in toward those inside the barbed wire fences.

Recommendation: If the term Relocation Camp is used it should be placed in quotation marks (“*Relocation Camp*”) to indicate it is a government euphemism. Please see the paragraph below for suggested alternative terminology.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines concentration camp as a camp where civilians, enemy aliens, political prisoners, and sometimes prisoners of war are detained and confined, typically under harsh conditions.

The resolution states that “Assembly Centers” and “Relocation Camps” operated by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) could be referred to as “American concentration camps” as well as incarceration camps, illegal detention centers. It is recommended that should your chapter choose to use the term, it is recommended that the complete term “American concentration camp” be used to clearly reference the concentration camps in the United States and not the concentration camps in Europe.

WHAT THE JACL CHAPTERS, AND ITS MEMBERS DO TO IMPLEMENT THE POWER OF WORDS RESOLUTION

EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

Educational efforts will serve as one of the primary ways to implement the Power of Words Resolution. From the creation of new educational materials to teacher training workshops, there are a variety of things that JACL districts, chapters, and members can do to help! Here is a list of recommended actions.

1. Create and Disseminate More Accurate Educational Materials

- From handouts and books to curriculum guides and brochures, many World War II educational materials feature euphemisms, antiquated terminology, and misnomers. We recommend chapters to update their contemporary educational materials (and create new ones when appropriate) in an effort to promote the use of more accurate terminology.
- The JACL’s (2011) curriculum and resource guide entitled “The Japanese American Experience” (5th edition) has been updated to include a section on the Power of Words and features terminology consistent with the JACL’s resolution. We recommend sharing this curriculum guide with local history, social studies, and cultural studies teachers in your local area.
- In an attempt to educate JACL members and non-members alike, you can include a section on district and/or chapter websites that features the Power of Words resolution and its recommended terminology.

2. Host Teacher Training Workshops

- Teachers play a central role in the facilitation of accurate information to students and those in their communities. Therefore, it is important to reach out to local teachers—especially those who are likely to teach students about the World War II era or Japanese Americans’ incarcerated experiences.
- By hosting teacher workshops, we can inform a strong and hardworking target audience about the power of words and recommended terminology.

STAYING CONNECTED

JACL districts, chapters, and members may wish to promote the use of more accurate World War II terminology through grassroots work and outreach efforts. Here is a list of ideas that we may wish to pursue:

THE MEDIA

In today’s Digital Age, there are a variety of media outlets that may facilitate the dissemination of information about the Power of Words Resolution and its recommended terminology. From Facebook and Twitter to local news stations and newspapers, the media is a powerful way to reach the public. However, there are certainly better and worse ways to contact the media. In this section, we provide some tips, a list of common questions and answers about the resolution, and press kits.

- ✓ Updating District and Chapter Websites
- ✓ Future District and Chapter Newsletters
- ✓ Submitting Materials to the *Pacific Citizen* and other News Media
- ✓ Press Releases (see the National JACL’s policy on press releases)

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Daniels, R. (2005). Words do matter: A note on inappropriate terminology and the incarceration of the Japanese Americans. In L. Fisnet & G. Nomura (Eds.), *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the twentieth century* (pp. 183-207). Seattle: University of Washington Press.
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**APPENDIX
POWER OF WORDS RESOLUTION**

A RESOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE TO SUPPORT THE “POWER OF WORDS” PROPOSAL WHICH RELATES TO EUPHEMISMS AND MISNOMERS IN REFERENCE TO THE WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCE OF JAPANESE AMERICANS

WHEREAS, in the United States of America, nearly 120,000 men, women and children of Japanese ancestry—two thirds of whom were United States citizens were deprived of their rights guaranteed under the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution; and

WHEREAS, historical accuracy as it relates to the Japanese American experience during World War II is an ongoing priority for the organization; and

WHEREAS, an examination of the historic experience of Japanese Americans provides a basis for understanding contemporary civic and human rights issues; and

WHEREAS, the use of euphemistic terms and perpetuation of misnomers to describe the World War II experience of the Issei and Nisei misrepresents and diminishes the traumatic event in American history; and

WHEREAS, words, such as “*evacuation*,” “*relocation*,” and “*internment camp*” do not accurately portray the conditions under which Japanese Americans were denied their civil rights during World War II, and

WHEREAS, such words as “*evacuation*” and “*relocation*” denote the movement and placement of people to keep them from harm’s way; and

WHEREAS, the term “*internment*” does not correctly describe the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans; and

WHEREAS, the preferred terminology should be “*forced removal*” instead of “*evacuation*” and “*incarceration*” instead of “*internment*,” and

WHEREAS, the preferred and more accurate reference to the confinement sites administered by the War Relocation Authority could include “*American concentration camps*,” incarceration camps, illegal detention centers, or other appropriate descriptors rather than terms like “relocation centers, assembly centers or internment camps,” and

WHEREAS, the use of these preferred terms should be consistently articulated by JACL leaders so that such words would become ingrained in the vernacular describing the World War II experience of Japanese Americans; and

WHEREAS, the proposal “*The Power of Words*” outlines the National JACL and its chapters, proper and accurate terminology to describe the World War II experience of Japanese Americans; and

WHEREAS, implementation of a plan to carry out the proposal is necessary in order to ensure the success and effectiveness of this policy; and

WHEREAS, the forced removal and incarceration was racially motivated;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the National Council of the Japanese American Citizens League shall adopt this resolution and authorize an ad hoc committee of the national organization to develop and implement a plan to promote and support the use of correct terminology as it relates to the World War II experience of Japanese Americans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that adoption of this resolution shall empower the ad hoc committee to take appropriate steps to assist in efforts to promote the substitution of the new terminology of all published documents in future publications and in teacher trainings; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, WHEREAS, that the ad hoc committee develop an implementation plan and report on its progress to the National Board and provide a summary report to the National Council in 2011.