



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE/JACL

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It was the day after Pearl Harbor when fathers were taken from their homes under FBI escort to places unknown to their families. These were law abiding citizens who happened to be Buddhist priests and Japanese language teachers who were obviously of Japanese ancestry. Families were not aware of the disposition of their fathers for months. There was no appearance before a magistrate of any kind. There was no ability to retain legal counsel. They were just carted away to federal detention centers and held as prisoners, and yet their only crime was that they were of a particular religion and a specific ethnicity. It was years, in some instances, until they were reunited with their families. Many families were torn apart, and much suffering was experienced.

The good part of this story is that the Federal government recognized the egregious error that was made and many years later apologized through Congressional legislation and a letter from the President of the United States. The Congress found, through congressionally sanctioned hearings, that this injustice happened because of war hysteria, poor political leadership, and racism. This recognition of error and Presidential apology were done in order that future generations would learn from this mistake and never repeat it again.

As we fast forward to 2010, another non-Christian religion is being singled out and the character and integrity of their teachings, much of which mirrors the teachings of Christ, is being questioned. Their basic right to construct a community center which houses a place of prayer is being opposed by those who declare that dying for a democracy, such as we have in this country, is a noble thing. The Muslim community in essence is being told that they do not belong among the rest of us doing the things, even worship, which we do each day, because the Constitution allows us that privilege. They are being denied the rights and privileges of the Constitution because of the very reasons found to be in error when Japanese Americans were denied their basic rights after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Why is there any debate regarding the location of a community center that is within a few blocks of "Ground Zero," but not even within view? Have we forgotten that two decades ago we apologized for such bigotry in order to stop it from happening again? So where is the lesson that was to be learned from the World War II experience of the Japanese Americans? Is this the same wartime hysteria that prevails and causes innocent citizens of this country to suffer and experience humiliation? Is this the same kind of poor political leadership that allows the demagogues to use this issue to propel their warped political agenda? Is this the same kind of bigotry that looks down upon that which they do not understand and hold guilty those whose culture is not the same as theirs?

Then lastly, aren't we, after all is said and done, citizens of the nation that has sent their sons to harm's way to protect and preserve the precious principles written into our Constitution? High on the list of our freedoms that many have died to protect is the freedom of religion.