



GEORGE  
TAKEI

(Japanese)  
American

## **Cash Reparations to Japanese Internees Helped Rebuild Autonomy and Dignity**

**by Morgan Ome**

In 1990, the U.S. government began mailing out envelopes, each containing a presidential letter of apology and a \$20,000 check from the Treasury, to more than 82,000 Japanese Americans who, during World War II, were robbed of their homes, jobs, and rights, and incarcerated in camps. This effort, which took a decade to complete, remains a rare attempt to make reparations to a group of Americans harmed by force of law. We know how some recipients used their payment: The actor George Takei donated his redress check to the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles. A former incarcerated named Mae Kanazawa Hara told an interviewer in 2004 that she bought an organ for her church in Madison, Wisconsin. Nikki Nojima Louis, a playwright, told me earlier this year that she used the money to pay for living expenses while pursuing her doctorate in creative writing at Florida State University. She was 65 when she decided to go back to school, and the money enabled her to move across the country from her Seattle home.

But many stories could be lost to history. My family received reparations. My grandfather, Melvin, was 6 when he was imprisoned in Tule Lake, California. As long as I've known about the redress effort, I've wondered how he felt about getting a check in the mail decades after the war. No one in my family knows how he used the money. Because he died shortly after I was born, I never had a chance to ask.

To my knowledge, no one has rigorously studied how families spent individual payments, each worth \$45,000 in current dollars.

<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/185832>



# SUCCESS STORY OF ONE MINORITY GROUP IN U.S.

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT

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At a time when Americans are awash in worry over the plight of racial minorities-- One such minority, the nation's 300,000 Chinese-Americans, is winning wealth and respect by dint of its own hard work.

In any Chinatown from San Francisco to New York, you discover youngsters at grips with their studies. Crime and delinquency are found to be rather minor in scope.

Still being taught in Chinatown is the old idea that people should depend on their own efforts--not a welfare check--in order to reach America's "promised land."

Visit "Chinatown U.S.A." and you find an important racial minority pulling itself up from hardship and discrimination to become a model of self-respect and achievement in today's America.

At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent to uplift Negroes and other minorities, the nation's 300,000 Chinese-Americans are moving ahead on their own--with no help from anyone else.

Low rate of crime. In crime-ridden cities, Chinese districts turn up as islands of peace and stability.

Of 4.7 million arrests reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1965, only 1,293 involved persons of Chinese ancestry. A Protestant pastor in New York City's Chinatown said:

"This is the safest place in the city."

Few Chinese-Americans are getting welfare handouts--or even want them. Within a tight network of family and clan loyalties, relatives continue to help each other. Mrs. Jean Ma, publisher of a Chinese-language newspaper in Los Angeles, explained:

"We're a big family. If someone has trouble, usually it can be solved within the family. There is no need to bother someone else. And nobody will respect any member of the family who does not work and who just plays around."

Today, Chinese-American parents are

worrying somewhat about their young people. Yet, in every city, delinquency in Chinatown is minor compared with what goes on around it.

Strict discipline. Even in the age of television and fast automobiles, Chinese-American children are expected to attend school faithfully, work hard at their studies--and stay out of trouble. Spanking is seldom used, but supervision and verbal discipline are strict.

A study of San Francisco's Chinatown noted that "if school performance is poor and the parents are told, there is an immediate improvement." And, in New York City, schoolteachers reportedly are competing for posts in schools with large numbers of Chinese-American children.

Recently Dr. Richard T. Sollenberger, professor of psychology at Mount Holyoke College, made a study of New York City's Chinatown and concluded:

"There's a strong incentive for young people to behave. As one informant said, 'When you walk around the streets of Chinatown, you have a hundred cousins watching you.'"

What you find, back of this remarkable group of Americans, is a story of adversity and prejudice that would shock those now complaining about the hardships endured by today's Negroes.

It was during California's gold rush that large numbers of Chinese began coming to America.

On the developing frontier, they worked in mines, on railroads and in other hard labor. Moving into cities, where the best occupations were closed to them, large numbers became laundrymen and cooks because of the shortage of women in the West.

Past handicaps. High value was placed on Chinese willingness to work long hours for low pay. Yet Congress, in 1882, passed an Exclusion Act denying naturalization to Chinese immigrants and forbidding further influx of laborers. A similar act in 1924, aimed primarily at the Japanese, pro-



Source: Interview with George Takei

**In 1943, two years before the end of World War II, Takei and his family were among the 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast who were taken to American incarceration camps during World War II.**

“This story has been underplayed throughout history,” Takei said, noting that there were approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast at the time.

*I was 5 years old, but I will never be able to forget that morning when my father came into the bedroom that I shared with my brother... and told us to wait in the living room while my parents did some last-minute packing.*

*Henry and I were at the front window just gazing out and suddenly we saw two soldiers marching up our driveway carrying rifles with shiny bayonets on them. They stomped up the front porch and started banging on the door. Henry and I were petrified. My father came out and answered the door and they pointed the bayonet at him and they said, “Get your family out of this house.” Our home.*

*I will never be able to forget that horrifying, terrifying morning.*

**Takei added that the attorney general of California at the time, Earl Warren, claimed that the Japanese were “inscrutable” and advised that they be locked away despite a lack of reports of spying or sabotage.**

Takei and his family were released in 1946, three years after they were imprisoned.

The “Star Trek” star also spoke about his experience, describing his curiosity about what he had endured years after he was released. He began to question, “How could the government that’s supposed to be a democracy treat innocent people that way?”

Shin, I. (2023, January 30). *George Takei recalls “horrifying, terrifying” morning his family was taken to an American concentration camp.* NextShark. <https://nextshark.com/george-takei-recalls-horrifying-terrifying-morning-his-family-was-taken-to-american-concentration-camp>

# George Takei's memoir

