



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE - JACL

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Muskego Norway School Board
S87 W18763 Woods Road
Muskego, WI 53150

To the Muskego Norway School Board,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), the nation's oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization with 8,000 members and 100 chapters across the country. It has come to our attention that Julie Otsuka's, "When the Emperor Was Divine," was rejected for use within your district's English courses, not because of its literary merit, which was why it was initially chosen, but because of the story told.

My understanding is that this decision was made as an effort to include the "opposing" viewpoint of the Japanese American incarceration for a "balanced" teaching of history. I understand that because Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's memoir, "Farewell to Manzanar," is already approved for use, there is the belief that there is no need for additional narratives surrounding the Japanese American incarceration from the perspective of the Japanese American incarcerated. The call for a "balanced" viewpoint in the context of the incarceration of Japanese Americans is deeply problematic, and racist, and plays into the same fallacies the United States Army used to justify the incarceration.

Over 33,000 Japanese American men and women served in the military during WWII even as many of them had family who continued to be incarcerated in the camps such as Manzanar. Approximately 800 men gave their lives in service for the very freedoms and rights denied their families. The "opposing view" of this story is an insult to the legacy of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Infantry Battalion as one of the most highly decorated units in the United States Army.

This situation is reminiscent of the incident that occurred in Texas last year when it was contended that there be a "balanced" viewpoint applied towards Holocaust education. In that case, and in this case, there is nothing controversial about these teachings. Society has come to a consensus that both of these events in history were truly horrific and that there is no "opposing" view that is not inherently racist and insensitive. In the case of the Japanese American incarceration, the United State government has formally apologized to the Japanese Americans who were incarcerated, admitting our actions as a nation were constitutionally and morally wrong. The Supreme Court has further repudiated its wrongful decision in the cases of Korematsu, Hirabayashi, and Yasui.

We urge you to reconsider your position on the book's use, understanding that while not every book and story can be told, to deny the use of one such as this under the pretenses you've given is wrong. The story of what

happened to the Japanese American community is an American story one that balances the challenges of injustice, but also the patriotic stories of service and resistance. If anything, these are stories that need to be told more in our schools. I would be happy to meet with representatives of the district to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Inoue". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being more prominent than the last name "Inoue".

David Inoue
Executive Director