

## **JACL Statement on the Musical *Allegiance***

The Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) is the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States. JACL commends the producers and writers of *Allegiance*, a new American musical that premiered on September 19, for promoting an increased awareness and interest in the Japanese American experience during World War II.

The fictional story is roughly aligned with the treatment of Japanese Americans following the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Much like the 120,000 Americans and immigrants that were incarcerated by the United States government, the characters experience many of the emotional issues faced by the Japanese community after their forced removal from the West Coast and confinement in detention centers. The government's actions caused deep divisions in the community. As the confinement of the community lengthened with no access to due process, there was heated disagreement on the best response to the injustices perpetrated by the government.

The incarceration created deep psychological wounds that sadly, still persist today. Although veterans and resisters are represented in the musical by fictional characters, it is unfortunate that writers have used Mike Masaoka's name to represent those who promoted Americanism, and portray them in a negative light.

*Allegiance* portrays the experiences of a single family at Heart Mountain, and focuses on one perspective of JACL and Mike Masaoka. Concerns remain that the musical pieces together different elements of Masaoka's contributions during the period, and lacks the historical context to give audiences a broader sense of the external role of the government, press, politicians, military advisers, and others.

*Allegiance* is a reminder that Japanese Americans exhibited many forms of patriotism during World War II. There were patriots who volunteered and served in the U.S. armed forces with extraordinary courage and honor. There were patriots who challenged the government to provide the due process and civil rights promised every American. There were patriots who supported and contributed to the war effort that defeated the Axis powers. These Americans demonstrated loyalty in their own personal way. It is time to embrace the difficult choices each individual made to be a better American, and create a better America.

The lesson of World War II is a difficult pill for many Americans to swallow. JACL, as a national advocacy organization, has worked to ensure the lesson is not lost. JACL shares the conviction that is central to *Allegiance* -- that the circumvention of constitutional rights should never be repeated again.

JACL has pursued that conviction for the past 70 years. In 1946, JACL opened an office in Washington, D.C. to promote Japanese American civil rights. Shortly after, JACL led a campaign to defeat the California alien land laws, and obtained citizenship rights for immigrant Japanese. JACL led efforts to repeal anti-miscegenation laws and establish fair housing policies. JACL was the first civil rights

organization in the nation to support marriage equality, and was the first to defend the rights of Muslim Americans after 9/11. Today, JACL continues to fight measures that deprive Americans of their due process rights, and is working to oppose provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2012.

We encourage audiences that have seen *Allegiance*, or those who are interested in learning more about the Japanese American experience during WWII, to read or view some of the excellent books, documentaries and other materials that have been produced. JACL has placed a few documents and links on our website, <http://www.jacl.org>