

# Jorge Shimabukuro

Your job is to read and talk about this role that you've been assigned, which is described on this sheet. Decide as a group whether you will read the role sheet out loud together or quietly to yourself as individuals. When you are all finished reading, discuss whether you think (staying in your role) that the Japanese Latin American abduction, internment, and displacement were just or unjust. Come up with specific reasons for why or why not. Then discuss whether the JLAs should receive redress. ("Redress" means to set something right or to repair something. "Reparations" means the repairing or restoring of something.) Why or why not? What specific redress is most appropriate? This can be a combination of options. The options are as follows:

1. *No redress/reparations at all*
2. *U.S. government apology only*
3. *Commitment to public education campaign*
4. *Monetary reparations*

*Be ready to say why you chose specific options if your group chose to give redress.*

You are 98 years old. Your Okinawan parents came from the Ryukyu Islands, south of mainland Japan. In 1879, the Japanese government had taken over the islands and put the people under Japanese control, but refused to give them rights as citizens. Your parents, hoping to start a new life, had migrated to Peru in 1900.

You were born in Peru in 1922. Peru was always your first home, but your parents also told you to always remember that you are Okinawan, native of your island, and that no one can tell you different.

You married your Okinawan Peruvian sweetheart in 1940, when you were 18 years old. You were happy together. You were a farmer and

worked hard every day in the field, cultivating land to produce cotton.

Then, as World War II began, racism against Japanese people increased. When Peruvians saw people of Japanese descent, they would often shout, "Chino macaco!" which was a derogatory term that meant "dirty Chinese." They didn't even know the difference between Okinawans and Japanese and Chinese people, you thought. To them, you were all crazy spies and couldn't be trusted.

On May 15, 1940, your home was destroyed in a race riot that lasted for two long days. People thought to be Japanese were targeted. Hundreds of people were injured and some died as a result, while 620 businesses and houses were destroyed. And wouldn't you know that more than 500 of those belonged to Okinawan people, not mainland Japanese? Yours was one of them. With the help of neighbors and friends, you and your wife rebuilt a home, while many others became homeless.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941 and the United States declared war against Japan, the United States sent out a list of Japanese people in Latin America that they said were dangerous. These people were to be arrested and deported to U.S. internment camps. You were not on that list. But you heard that, as a result of bribes taken from Japanese people, the Peruvian police had started to arrest many people not on the list who could not afford to pay off the local police and other corrupt Peruvian government officials. Many Okinawans were arrested because they were easy targets since they had not achieved high status in Peruvian society. Finally, in February of 1943, armed men came to arrest you at your home. Your wife was not home. There was no warning.

You were put aboard a ship with no explanation. You ended up at a detention camp in Texas called Camp Kennedy. It was fenced in with barbed wire and surrounded by armed U.S.

soldiers. Weeks after you got there, married men whose families had come to join them were sent out to another internment camp in Texas. But you were not. You had sent your wife a telegram to get on the deportation ship to join you. She was expecting your first child. You worried that she did not make it in time for the last deportation ship out of Peru. You remained in the detention camp with other men for two years.

Camp Kennedy closed when World War II ended in 1945. Even then, you still had not heard anything from your wife. The U.S. government now considered you an “illegal alien” because they said you had entered the country illegally in the first place. But how could you have entered “illegally”? You were kidnapped and forced to enter the United States. Thus, you were now subject to deportation. On top of this, the Peruvian government would not allow any of its Japanese descendents to return. This included you. With nowhere to go, you joined more than 900 Japanese Latin Americans who got on deportation ships again, this time to Japan. You hoped that your wife would do the same and find you there.

You landed in Japan in 1946. This was your first time there and you spoke broken Japanese. But you remembered your parents’ gentle stories of Okinawa and found your way all the way to the southern islands. The Ryukyu Islands were devastated from war, having been used by the Japanese government as a site of the bloodiest battle in the history of the Pacific. You found relatives in the village that your parents used to tell you about and settled there with their help.

You searched for your wife but never found her again. You heard years later that many Okinawan and Japanese Peruvians who were left behind in Peru emigrated to Argentina after the war, where racism against Japanese people was thought to be somewhat less.

For many years since then, you have lived in silence. You don’t know what happened to your wife and child. But you’ll go crazy if you start to think about that now. No one in Okinawa knows what happened to you. The truth is that you miss Peru even after all of these years. But there’s nothing that can bring back everything you lost. Everything is changed now.