

A shameful past

by The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

The nation just commemorated the 63rd anniversary of the D-Day invasion that helped bring World War II in the European theater to a close. That war, of course, was one fought to overcome unparalleled injustice.

There is at least one more task remaining from that fight. The nation must come to grips with the internment of hundreds of thousands of German-Americans and others of European descent here during the war. While the nation has acknowledged the injustice done to Japanese-Americans, it has yet to do so for others who suffered similarly.

This month, the Senate approved an amendment to immigration reform legislation that would set up a commission to study how some German-Americans, Italian-Americans and other Americans of European descent were treated. Another commission would study how this country treated Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany. We have our doubts about the immigration bill to which this amendment is attached. And we're no fans generally of amendments that are not germane to the larger bills to which they are added. But as Wisconsin Democratic Sen. Russ Feingold noted, he and Republican Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa have submitted the legislation four times before with little success.

These are commissions worth creating to probe how the United States might give some measure of justice to those who were interned and perhaps who were unjustly denied entry while fleeing persecution. Among those interned, some were suddenly arrested, some lost property and some spent time in camps even after the war ended.

The U.S. approved reparations for interned Japanese-Americans in 1988. But this amendment is not about reparations. It is about determining what happened and whether redress is warranted.

We hope Congress can pass an immigration bill this nation can unashamedly live with. The bill has a cloudy future, however. These commissions deserve to be created in any case.

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