

Statement of Edgar C. McVoy, Chief, Analysis and Procedures Section

I got to know George Kuratomi pretty intimately. We had several lengthy discussions. There was certainly a meeting of minds in that we could discuss things and talk them over frankly. I don't mean meeting of the minds in that we agreed; we differed on most things, but we understood each other's point of view.

I sized George up as an intellectual with a rather strange type of personality. I am not sure just what it was. He had factors in his personality which were not just Japanese or which were characteristic of the group of the evacuees. He was a type who I think missed a normal family relationship in his early life. He was away from his parents and made his own way from a very early stage. He became very much interested in politics and social problems and that sort of thing out in Los Angeles. He was also active in the Buddhist church there. He told me that most of his contacts were with Caucasians prior to evacuation. He had become very much interested in the American form of Government; thought it was the best in the world and so on. And it was for that reason that he had been so disillusioned because of evacuation. Registration, he thought, was the last straw. That was not a major issue but it was the last straw in a long line of things. He objected to registration because it questioned something which he didn't think should be questioned. It questioned his loyalty and he thought there should have been no question of his loyalty on the basis of his past record. It was symbolic to him of the last step in his break with America, and to him it seemed that he must plan for the future not only of himself but of his descendants, and it seemed to him that they had no future in America.

Mr. Glick:

How old is he?

Mr. McVoy:

He is 27.

Mr. Glick:

How many children?

Mr. McVoy:

None. He is single; but he is anticipating having a family.

George was the executive secretary of the Daijo Buddhist Church at Jerome, of which Reverend Kai was the leading priest, and this group comprised about 300 of the repatriates and expatriates, along with a few others. They were a minority even among the repatriate groups. They were about 300 and the repatriate group amounted to about 1600. They tended to dominate the group, and in a large measure tended to represent them. They were looked upon as the spokesmen of the whole group.

Paul Taylor came to regard George as the person through whom to deal with the repatriate group at Jerome. Back in May and early June there was a plan to remove 6 people from Jerome to Leupp. They were known as the Committee of Six who organized the resistant group during registration. Reverend Kai and George were two of the committee. Three of them were sent to Leupp, I think early in June. At that time there developed what might have been a demonstration on the part of -- well, there was a demonstration, a peaceful demonstration, that might have become violent under certain conditions. They were heroes when they left, and a large group gathered to say goodbye - yelling "banzai".

After they left, this group began to wonder who would be next, and the logical persons to be next were George and Reverend Kai and Mitz Kimura, former chief of police at Jerome who was discharged when he applied for repatriation. Those were the three other committee members scheduled to go out next.

I talked with George and Reverend Kai shortly after these three had been removed, and I asked them what the feeling of the people was. I think there is a copy of that interview. From them I got something like this - which I regarded at the time as being fairly reliable. My feeling was that they were being reasonably honest and frank with me. They said things which could have incriminated them if they had been told. They said things about certain members of the staff which could have been very troublesome if they thought I was going to repeat them. I could have got them removed from the center any time by divulging any of the information given to me.7

Reverend Kai and George said that the people in the repatriate group considered this as the beginning of segregation when these three were moved and they expected the other leaders to go later; the list began to increase, first three, then 12, then 30, then almost everybody in the repatriate group would be sent to Leupp or some other similar center. They resented the discrimination of it. They thought they were being sent simply because of repatriation and because they were conspicuous.

Reverend Kai and George told me that there were some elements, particularly among the Hawaiian Kibei at the center, who wanted to single out certain of the loyal evacuee leaders who they suspected of telling tales to the administration, and give them a beating. They had done that before. Nobody knew who did it. There were some others they labeled as "inu" and whom they wanted to take care of in their own way. They told me, and I believe they are sincere, that they had restrained this group and told them to wait and they would go to see Mr. Taylor and try to find out why these three were sent and whether it was going to be based on repatriation or what.

They went to see Mr. Taylor. They asked him why these three people had been sent out. Paul Taylor told them, as nearly as I can piece it out (their statements and Paul Taylor's coincide) that it was a coincidence that these three men were expatriates (I am using "repatriates" as a collective term) they were expatriates. The reason was they were trouble-makers and had incited others to trouble. One of the men, a block manager, had been involved in several shady deals, I don't recall their nature, I think one had to do with bootlegging, one with illegal use of passes, several things in his record, that led to the removal.

They seemed reasonably satisfied with his explanation that there were special reasons why these three had been sent out. They told me that if there were several others from the repatriate group removed to Leupp after that, and that only the repatriate group were moved to Leupp, then the people would begin to jump to conclusions and they wouldn't be responsible for what happened.

I happened to be talking with Paul Taylor about this matter one day shortly thereafter and I repeated this matter to him without quoting it precisely. But I did convey the idea. I told him that, in my opinion, he could look for this kind of trouble if there were more people removed, he could look for some meetings in the center. I told him one other thing: that I didn't believe removing these three men, for instance, would remove all the leaders. Some of the leaders I don't think we have ever identified. I think many of the leaders are issei who have stayed in the back and worked through these front men who are kibei. I don't think anyone at Jerome, except perhaps a few evacuees, knew who the leaders were. I told Paul Taylor that "If you are going to try to solve your problem here by getting rid of the leaders, you won't be sure you get the real leaders. You may be removing the most level-headed and restraining people, and you may have more trouble than you have now."

He thought that over and as a result of that thought, he recommended that these three men not be removed at that time.

All during the segregation program he worked through George Kuratomi as chairman of the committee of that group, and with the exception of some minor arguments and difficulties, the thing went along very smoothly. In fact they were on pretty good terms. I attended several meetings of the committee. There was a sort of a give and take between them and the staff, and a rather jovial atmosphere. I know that Paul Taylor and most of the other staff members breathed a big sigh of relief when they got George and some of the others out. They felt they were always on the verge of an incident at Jerome. They had two - these two beatings - they felt they were on the verge of a disturbance of a greater scope than that - a strike - or larger scale fight. In other words, they felt they were lucky they had got along as well as they had and had gotten along without violence in dealing with that group.

Ray Best inherited that situation, and here is the follow-up.

George Kuratomi is tall for Japanese. He is about 5 feet 8, I should say, or five feet 9 would be closer to it; slender; he wears fairly thick glasses and looks like a student. I have a statement in there that gives his personal history fairly complete. I think I can find a copy of it, if not, maybe Analysis has a copy I can get. He was born in this country. He had his high school education in Japan. He came back to this country alone after that because he felt he wanted to make his home here rather than in Japan. He has never had any formal college training and he's a person with a fairly keen mind and some facility in expressing himself in English, and probably more facility in Japanese than in English. I would say in some respects he has a negativistic personality, the kind of person that if you challenge or drive him will immediately react negatively. But he is not a person who obviously loses his temper or becomes demonstrative. He is very quiet, appears to be very reasonable. Ordinarily when he comes to make a statement or a request or a demand he does it in a diplomatic and logical way. His whole life at the center was wrapped up in this church and in some young children. He used to have flocks of them that he was interested in, kids of 3 to 6 -- about that age, and he enjoyed playing with them and teaching them, and general contacts with them. He didn't seem to have any girl friends, although he took a paternalistic interest in the wives and families of some of the internees. In my opinion, he is the type of person who likes to have a very clear-cut code of ethics and follow it to a tee, and if one code of ethics doesn't suit him, he wants to develop another one. That is, he wants to have a logical system by which he lives. He is a very complex person, but I think that in his activities he is seeking status and also seeking a substitute for his lack of family relationship. He very much wanted to be recognized as a good fellow and a leader among his group - it didn't matter much what the group was like if they looked to him as a leader.

After one discussion I had with him one night, his roommate, who is a loyal evacuee, remarked to me the next day that George had told him this. He said "You know, if I hang around with this McVoy very much longer, I may change my mind about going to Japan." I think he would have liked to be loyal to America but he had been so hurt and so blinded by the experience he had gone through, that he couldn't see. He couldn't really see clearly what was ahead of him, and in a way he was just spiting himself because I don't feel that he will be particularly happy in Japan, and he says he is sure he will get in everyone's hair.

He was more under the influence of Reverend Tsuha than Reverend Kai. Rev. Tsuha was sent to Leupp. He apparently got most of his viewpoint from Reverend Tsuha. He used to have a great deal of correspondence with him. He was not quite as close to Reverend Kai, although they worked together in the church, and I am sure Reverend Kai advised him after Tsuha left.

Reverend Kai is a man of general physique similar to George. He is tall for Japanese; also wears glasses; also looks studious; a somewhat older man; appears to be more mature and certain of himself than George. He doesn't speak English; he speaks only Japanese; he has a wife who does speak English very well, and a child 3 years old. I knew him and his wife and child.

After Tsuha left Reverend Kai became a leader in the Daijo group. That church, as you probably know, split off from the regular Buddhist church at the time of registration.

These people all emphasized the fact that they felt that Buddhism was greater than national loyalty and that a person's national allegiance shouldn't change his religious affiliations even in time of war, and they were greatly disappointed that they had been forced out of the other church.