

Written Testimony of Emi K. Fujii  
Commission on Wartime Relocation  
and Internment of Civilians  
September 25, 1981

Members of the Commission:

I am Emi K. Fujii, 7447 N. Artesian, Chicago, Illinois. I was evacuated from San Jose, Calif. to the Santa Anita Assembly Center on May 29, 1942 with my parents and 6 brothers and sisters, ages 4-18. We were transferred to Heart Mt. on September 13, 1942. I left as a student on June 19, 1943.

The Commission is here to determine whether a wrong was committed. I confess I don't know whether to laugh or cry. I respectfully submit that it is like showing you a skeleton and asking you if the person is dead.

Most of the testimony has come from the evacuees, which has been subjective and often repetitious. So after 2 weeks of testimony, I wonder what I am doing here. If you want the truth, the whole truth, let it come from the government archives and from expert witnesses under oath--like the military leaders, the law officers, the camp doctors and social workers, the social scientists, and more panels like the ones this afternoon and yesterday--as well as from the evacuees. Dr. Maynard Krueger brought his expertise and authority as an educator and political leader. Prof. Shirley Castelnuovo detailed in ways I never could the steps involved in the constitutional issues and monetary redress. As moving as the testimony was from the Peruvian Japanese, it was the testimony from Dr. C. Harvey Gardiner that absolutely cinched it.

But I am here, and the focus of my testimony is on the crushing impact of the evacuation and incarceration upon my father, Toshio Kimura. He came to this country alone at age 15, in the 1890's. He attended American schools in San Francisco and worked at various jobs. From about 1916 on, he worked as a life insurance agent. Because of the Alien Land Laws, he bought a house in San Jose in the name of an American citizen. Then in 1919, he met and married my mother. They had 7 children. He lived and worked there, was active in the Japanese community; and he looked after us and enriched our lives.

He took us as children on picnics, put on special fireworks on the Fourth of July in the country, took home movies of the

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family and friends. He took us to the circus, to the auto races. He took my brother and me and our cousins on camping trips. He cooked the turkeys on Thanksgiving and Christmas, and we had both a Japanese and American New Year. He brought music into our home when he arranged for a friend, Mrs. Earl Lamb, to teach piano there in the 1920's when other Nisei came for piano lessons. Somehow, he also had learned to play the violin. He also brought art to our family. He took me to school the first day of kindergarten, and later he sent me to Japanese school. My parents had encyclopedias and other reference books at home, English and American poetry, books on Japan in English.

There was absolutely nothing sinister, or cunning, or mysterious or inscrutable about him or other Issei, as the military wanted you to believe in 1942. The only hitch for him was that he had a Japanese face.

Culturally, he was both Japanese and American. Denied citizenship, he put his hopes and beliefs in this country by rearing us in American traditions and values, along with Japanese customs. Despite the years of anti-Japanese feeling and legislation, he had an abiding faith in the basic soundness of the United States government and its democratic principles. He gave much more than he ever got. We took all this for granted, not realizing how lucky we were.

The evacuation seriously challenged my father's faith and his identity as a husband and father. His livelihood was destroyed; his ability to provide for and protect his family was undermined. The education of the children was disrupted. We rented our house for a song, less than \$100 a year. We were uprooted. The whole thing was a shock from which he never recovered. Another blow was the internment of a close friend, Hisajiro Inouye, simply because he was an officer of the Japanese Association. What if my father had been an officer that year?

With anger and sorrow, he told a friend in camp what he and other Issei had decided in the early 1920's: "Our children are here, our jobs are here and our future is here, in spite of no future in this country." They were aliens ineligible

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to citizenship. These Issei formed the Eiju-doshi-kai, translated as "club of those sharing the idea of permanent residence" in the United States.

The Issei in many ways suffered the most from the evacuation. They were the most helpless and most vulnerable because they were aliens. They had lived longer to make the heaviest investment in time, money, and energy in this country.

From camp, my father was to write a series of 17 letters to Mrs. Nancy ~~Storn~~, a friend in California for over 25 years. Her father had been the medical examiner with him for many years till the doctor died. In 1942 my father wrote of the death of Suyetaro Araki, a farmer and resident of San Jose for 41 years, who died in Heart Mt. in September 1942 soon after his arrival there: "He was in good health when he left San Jose, but got sick in the Pomona Center. He was also moved from Pomona despite his critical condition. He had 4 sons, 2 being in the U.S. Army. When these 2 boys in uniform stood silently beside their father's coffin, all people who attended the funeral could not overlook to see some deep emotions were raised in their faces. These two boys, Nancy, are risking their lives to defend America while their aged father was forced to come this desert. . . . I dare not seek the responsible part to this tragedy. God only knows it."

Another time he wrote: "I never dreamed I would see my children behind barbed wire." . . . This is a terrible place to raise the children. We are not cattle, but 3 times a day in the morning, noon, and evening you hear the gong, gong, gong the bell. Then and there you will see men, women, and children come out of stable-like shelters. . . . Every time I see this sight I cannot help my heart aches."

Family life was thoroughly disrupted. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the breakdown of the family table. There was no family. Children ate with children of other families.

My parents were stunned over the insanity and stupidity of Question 28 in the Loyalty Questionnaire in 1943. They and other Issei were damned whether they answered yes or no. For the Nisei, the question was an insult. Further, how could

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I forswear allegiance to the Emperor? It assumed a prior allegiance which was never there.

In December 1943, my father wrote: "Our son, Lincoln, is visiting us now from Camp Shelby. . . . He said perhaps he will be sent over the sea before long. We hope this is not the last time we see him though we are prepared. He is only 19 years of age and has lots of future, but he says he is mighty glad to offer his life to his country. I, too, am glad to offer my son to the country where I have been brought up since youngster. But what is it a tragedy for us to hear that some of the Californians are proposing to shut its gate for the Japanese Americans and Japanese to re-enter, and not only so but to send all of us back to Japan after the war. I like to know what a Democracy and Americanism mean to them. Are they not praying as a Christian nation 'Glory to God in the highest, peace, goodwill to men?' They maybe hate us because we are enemy aliens. But what reason they hate these loyal Japanese Americans, some of them even do not hesitate to offer supreme sacrifice to their country? But I still believe and rely upon the majority who love the fundamental principles of Americanism, justice, liberty, and equality."

Linc's volunteering was a natural extension of his and my father's beliefs. I am still in awe of Linc's action and that of my three cousins, who also volunteered, and the support of our parents.

In early 1944, my father wrote to Nancy about relocation. He had discussed this with a WRA officer. But where was he to go at age 61 with a wife and three young children? The officer could not answer this. So he waited till the west coast was re-opened.

He had continued to subscribe to the hometown newspaper, the "San Jose Mercury Herald." In a letter he referred to an article on what was to be done with the Japanese after the war, along with the opinions of members of the San Jose Chamber of Commerce. Some were clearly racist; others were levelheaded. He wrote: "But thank God, among these people we have a true and real American friend, who is so dear and precious to us."

The last letter is dated October 8, 1944. My mother

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continued to write to Nancy, excusing my father because he was "resting." My brother had been transferred to Modesto, California and prepared the house for the family's return. June 1945. He wrote me about this, particularly about our father. When he saw Nancy who came to meet the family the day they returned, he embraced her and wept openly. In mid-June, I returned to help the family get settled. A month later, my father was dead at the age of 62, the result of a stroke.

"He moved heaven and earth to get the family back to San Jose," a friend observed. He had been crushed, angered and betrayed by this country which he believed in but which never believed in him. What haunts me still is I do not know whether he died only broken or whether he had hope. My greatest regret is that he did not live long enough to see some changes, some progress.

It has been almost 40 years since Executive Order 9066. We were evacuated and imprisoned without cause, without due process. Our rights as citizens and basic rights of the person, which extended to the Issei, were violated. The one and only thing against us was our race.

You have heard much testimony about the concentration camp features of the centers. These features only heightened the evil and basic wrongness of the evacuation and detention. Had we been housed in the Mark Hopkins, this would not have made the entire process one whit less wrong.

If the leaders of our country had succumbed only to West Coast pressure groups, that would have been bad enough. They went beyond that. They knowingly violated the laws of the land in the name of military necessity where none existed. They did this in the face of the Curtis B. Munson Report of early November 1941, stating there was no "Japanese problem." They did this knowing in the first weeks after Pearl Harbor that no sabotage had been committed by any Japanese or Japanese American. The military was even preparing plans for concentration camps as early as October 1940. The national leadership was racist. The Evacuation was nothing short of criminal.

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I submit these remedies for your consideration:

1. That the basic constitutional issues again be presented to the Supreme Court. It is an outrage that the Court validated the evacuation in 1944 and a shame that the ruling still stands. Eugene V. Rostow cautioned in 1945: "The case of the Japanese Americans is the worst blow our liberties have sustained in many years. Unless repudiated, it may support devastating and unforeseen political conflicts." Rostow's warning was confirmed when the Korematsu case was used to defend Nazi war criminals at Nuremburg.

I am not an expert in constitutional law and can only point to the need for the reversal of the ruling.

2. That an Executive Order 9066 Day be proclaimed to remind and again inform the nation of the Evacuation. It would be a reminder not to judge a whole group by race or national origin. It would be a reminder that Orientals, too, are American. I am weary of the provincialism of many Americans who to this day express surprise at my being American.

3. That funds be endowed to create multipurpose centers in key cities to commemorate the wartime tragedy of Japanese Americans and Aleuts and Japanese from South America. The centers would include libraries on the history of these groups. The centers would serve as resource centers for schools, the media, and public at large. In time, their scope would extend to other Asians and Asian Americans.

4. That individual monetary reparations be made. My anger is greater because of the Munson Report. I am not willing to settle for nothing and to be quietly patient with this country. I am cynical that reparations will be made, but I do make the attempt. The right to petition the government for redress of grievances is spelled out in the Bill of Rights. The claims of those opposing individual reparations because no amount of money will pay for the injustice is hogwash. Then all personal injury suits become silly.

Payments would also help compensate those who filed under the Evacuation Claims Act of 1948. That act was a farce.

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Further, the act made no room for physical or mental suffering, injury, hardship or death.

It is true that if reparations had been made years ago, it would have been much more meaningful. But when were reparations ever paid on time?

Over and beyond the suffering of individuals, the very basis of our nation has been diminished because of the evacuation. Every year that goes by in silent acquiescence further detracts from us as a country professing beliefs in civil rights and civil liberties. Admission by the government of wrong doing and making monetary restitution would go a long way in healing wounds and help restore our national image. Payments would state in the most concrete way that attempts were made to correct a grievous wrong.

Thank you.

Note: The letters of Toshio Kimura are in the Hoover Library at Stanford University.