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Testimony of
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before the
COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION
AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS

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WAR RELOCATION

The wartime relocation of Japanese-Americans in 1942 can only be understood in the context of California history. As is well known, California has been the principal source of anti-Oriental propaganda in the United States for more than 100 years. During the Gold Rush days, by 1851, there were 25,000 Chinese in the state. It was a regular practice of miners, on a big Saturday night drunk, to raid the Chinese sections of mining towns to beat up or lynch a few Chinese just for the hell of it. Chinese were often the victims of mob violence. A mob of whites shot and hung 20 Chinese one night in Los Angeles in 1871.

When the first transcontinental railroad, the Central Pacific, was completed, great ceremonies were held in connection with the hammering in of the Golden Spike to celebrate the occasion. Eloquent speeches were given praising the magnificent contributions of Englishmen, Irishmen, Germans, Frenchmen, and others who had contributed to the completion of the railroad. But no Chinese were invited to this event, although they above all -- ten thousand of them -- had done the most dangerous and demanding labor to make the completion possible. The Chinese were dismissed when their work was done and set adrift without severance pay.

Anti-Chinese legislation and agitation were common throughout the latter half of the 19th century and well into the 20th. The workers discharged from the railroads drifted from town to town looking for work. In San Francisco they entered some of the skilled trades like hatmaking, cigar-making, tailoring and so on. It is an interesting fact that the first union

label was one placed on cigars to tell the customer that this cigar was made by white men and not by Chinese. That is the proud origin of the union label. In 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed after much agitation on the part of Californians, including the very influential and then-powerful Sons and Daughters of the Golden West.

The persecution of the Chinese persisted into the 20th century. Chinese-American friends of mine who are now older professional men in San Francisco remember the days when, if they left the Chinese area, they were beaten up by Irish and other toughs, so they had to stay within the limits of Chinatown. Throughout this period, pamphlets and books were published attacking Orientals as a menace to white society. The Hearst newspapers continued to lead a crusade against the "Yellow Peril." The Sacramento Bee, Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee -- all of the McClatchy chain-- were notorious for their anti-Oriental propaganda. I remember as a high school student in Winnipeg in the early 1920's writing a term paper on anti-Oriental agitation in California, and it was then that I learned of the McClatchy newspapers, long before I knew where Sacramento, Modesto and Fresno were. The Hearst newspapers were no better.

The attacks upon Orientals were not limited to the popular press or to labor unions and "patriotic" societies. It was highly endorsed by many of the leading intellectuals of the time. There were such books as Lothrop Stoddard's The Rising Tide of Color, Against White World Supremacy (1920). Other distinguished intellectuals who wrote warning books against the Orientals were people like Madison Grant, who wrote Passing of the Great Race, or Racial Basis of European History (1916). There was also the distinguished labor economist of the University of Wisconsin in the 1930's, Professor

E.A. Ross. When I was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin in the 1930's, I used to see Prof. Ross at the University Club. He never spoke to me nor did I ever speak to him. I did not know then what I learned much later, namely, that he was one of the leading intellectual advocates of exclusion of Orientals from the American labor force. He was regarded as a great liberal at the time.

There was also the widely accepted doctrine of what was later to be known as "Social Darwinism," to the effect that the white race was the highest point of human evolution, and that yellow, brown, and black people represented lower stages. Indeed, white people themselves were divided into the "higher" North European ("Nordic," "Aryan"), and the "lower" South Europeans -- Slavs, Greeks, and Italians. The fact that these ideas were widely believed to be scientific is all too evident in the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924, which gave high immigration quotas to British, Germans, and Scandinavians, lower quotas to Middle and South Europeans, and total exclusion to the Japanese. (The Chinese had already been excluded in 1882.)

Against this background of almost 100 years of successful anti-Oriental agitation throughout California, it is easy to understand that the attack on Pearl Harbor aroused in the people of California, as well as elsewhere, all the superstitious, racist fears that had been generated over the years, as well as the normal insanities of wartime. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor was called "a stab in the back" -- a typical Oriental form of behavior.

It is difficult for people who did not live through that dreadful time to reconstruct the terror and the anxiety felt by people along the entire West Coast. Disaster followed upon disaster after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

On that same day Japanese forces landed on the Malay Peninsula and began their drive toward Singapore. Guam fell on December 10, Wake on December 23. On December 8 Japanese planes destroyed half the aircraft on the airfields near Manila. As enemy troops closed in, General MacArthur withdrew his forces from the Philippines and retired to Australia. On Christmas Day the British surrendered Hong Kong.

The West Coast of the United States, rich with naval bases, shipyards, oil fields, and aircraft factories, seemed especially vulnerable to attack. There was talk of evacuating the entire Pacific Coast. How frightening were the nightly blackouts during that bleak winter of defeat! Would Japanese carriers come to bomb the cities? Would their submarines sneak through the Golden Gate to shell San Francisco? Would they actually mount an invasion? Who could tell?

War of course breeds fear of enemies within -- spies, saboteurs. There were rumors that Japanese farmers in Hawaii had cut arrows in their fields to direct Japanese fighter pilots to Pearl Harbor, and that West Coast Japanese were equally organized to help the enemy. Such rumors were later found to be totally without foundation, but in the anxieties of the moment they were believed.

It was a field day for inflammatory journalists and newscasters: Westbrook Pegler, John B. Hughes -- even Damon Runyon. The columnist Henry Mc-
Lemore wrote, "Herd 'em up, pack 'em off and give 'em the inside room in the badlands... Let us have no patience with the enemy or with any whose veins carry his blood... Personally I hate the Japanese. That goes for all of them."

So both at the level of sensational journalism and at the level of the

social sciences into the 1930's, the idea of white supremacy was challenged by remarkably few. In California, white supremacy took the form of anti-Orientalism. The notion that the Oriental was shifty, mysterious, and untrustworthy was built into the culture in such books as the Sax Rohmer "Dr. Fu Manchu" novels.

Most Americans have always had the difficulty distinguishing between Chinese and Japanese, although the latter were treated far more leniently than the former. The Chinese, except for diplomats and merchants, were forbidden to bring women or wives to America, so that they were essentially a society of bachelors. You can still see many of these lonely old bachelors sunning themselves in Portsmouth Square in San Francisco. But the Japanese could bring their wives or send for picture brides (i.e., brides selected from photographs), so that they developed strong family ties and a place for themselves in American society, especially through their children who learned English in the public schools and helped to Americanize their parents.

Again the popular hue-and-cry was backed up by reputable intellectuals. Walter Lippmann, the dean of American social commentators then and for decades thereafter, joined in the demand for mass evacuation. The idea was also supported at the time by such liberal intellectual journals as The Nation, The New Republic, and the extra-liberal but short lived New York newspaper, PM.

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which set in motion the evacuation program. It applied to all Japanese, citizens and non-citizens alike, in the three Western states and a portion of Arizona. Altogether some 110,000 were relocated, of whom more than 70,000 were American citizens by birth; the remainder were not able to become citi-

zens under the laws then prevailing.

Of course the relocation was unjust. But under the stress of wartime anxieties and hysteria, and in the light of the long history of anti-Oriental agitation in California and the West, I find it difficult to imagine what else could have occurred that would not have been as many times worse. If things had continued to go badly for the American forces in the Pacific -- and they did -- what would Americans on the West Coast have done to their Japanese and Japanese-American neighbors as they learned of more American ships and planes being sunk and destroyed, more thousands of American fighting men were killed by the Japanese? Would they have beaten their Japanese neighbors in the streets? Would they have ostracized or persecuted Japanese-American schoolchildren? Would mobs have descended on Little Tokyo in Los Angeles and Japantown in San Francisco to burn down shops and homes? There was precedent for such behavior in California -- especially directed against the Chinese -- so that Chinese started lapel buttons saying, "I am Chinese." I recall a friend of mine, a Japanese-American now living in Marin County, who was 11 years old when the war broke out. She and her parents were vastly relieved when they learned of their evacuation from the West Coast. Most of her generation and her parents' generation welcomed the relocation as a guarantee of their personal safety.

The question is often asked why Germans and Italians were not interned and why the Japanese in Hawaii were left alone. The answer is simple. Germans and Italians were persecuted during World War I, when they were fairly recent immigrants, but there were too many of them to intern. However, "patriots" dumped garbage on the lawns of German homes, and in some East Coast cities all the German books in the public libraries were burned. By the time

of World War II, both Germans and Italians were a well-established and familiar part of American life. The same was true of the Japanese in Hawaii, who were more than 20% of the population there and well-known and trusted. Besides there weren't enough ships to transport the huge Japanese populations out of the major islands.

On the West Coast of the American mainland, the situation was different. The Japanese were a small fraction of the population of California, Washington, and Oregon. The immigration of Japanese was principally between the years 1900 to 1924; then it was stopped by law. Japanese males, who constituted the first immigrants, married late in life because they felt that they had to have a steady job before they could send for a bride from Japan. Hence the typical Japanese-American family consisted of a father twenty years older than the mother, and the average age of the Nisei (the American-born Japanese) at the time of Pearl Harbor was sixteen.

This last statistic is of great importance in accounting for the evacuation and internment. It means that the average white official in California knew little or nothing about the Japanese. He had not gone to school with Japanese children, nor visited their homes. He had not had Japanese friends in baseball or football or debate teams. Furthermore, the Japanese parent generation spoke little English or none at all. For most white Americans, especially those old enough to sit in positions of authority, the Japanese were a strange and foreign element -- so that almost anything could be believed about them.

For example, it was widely believed that Japanese children, going to Japanese language school after public school, were being taught reverence for the Emperor of Japan. This happened to be quite true--the teachers who

came from Japan to teach in these schools were products of the superheated nationalism that flourished in Japan in the 1930's. However, it was not possible at that time to predict that this indoctrination would prove to be totally ineffective. (Incidentally, Daniel Inouye, as a pupil in a Japanese language class in Hawaii before World War II, kicked up a strenuous protest against the use of these schools to preach Japanese nationalism. And everyone knows what eventually happened to him!)

The Relocation Centers in desert areas to which the Japanese were assigned were dreary places indeed. However, the governing body of the centers, the War Relocation Authority (WRA), was headed by the wise and humane Dillon Myer, a Midwesterner who before his appointment had known almost nothing about the Japanese. Being a firm believer in democracy and justice and knowing the people in the camps had done nothing to deserve their internment, Mr. Myer did everything possible to make life tolerable for the internees. He encouraged camp self-government, hired teachers from outside to continue the education of the children, sent WRA staff around the East and Middle West to seek college admittance for Nisei who had graduated from the camp high schools. One result was that many Nisei students who, without enforced evacuation from the West Coast, might have stopped with a high school education to work in their fathers' shops or farms, went on to college, including prestigious and private institutions such as Antioch, Oberlin, and Mount Holyoke, as well as to such great public institutions as Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin and Purdue.

The officials of the staff of WRA were, with few exceptions, deeply concerned about the injustice of the relocation program and eager to restore

the Japanese-Americans, especially the Nisei, to normal American lives. They fanned out over the United States East of the Rockies to seek employment for the internees. Everywhere the Japanese-Americans went, they impressed their employers by their industry and loyalty, so that more were summoned from the camps -- scientists, teachers, mechanics, food processors, agricultural workers. By the time the order excluding Japanese from the West Coast was rescinded on January 2, 1945, half the internees had found new jobs and homes in mid-America and the East.

I emphasize this last point, because the relocation centers were not "concentration camps." Unlike the Nazis, who made the term "concentration camp" a symbol of the ultimate in man's inhumanity to man, WRA officials worked hard to release their internees, not to be sent to gas chambers, but to freedom and useful jobs in the outside world. By 1945 there were almost 25,000 Issei and Nisei in Chicago -- a city that was most hospitable to the Japanese -- and I myself found relatives that I didn't know existed. Other Midwestern and Eastern cities acquired Japanese populations they had not known before the war: Minneapolis, Cleveland, Cincinnati, New York, Madison, Des Moines, St. Louis.

Those who remained in camp in most cases did so voluntarily. These were mostly older people afraid of the outside world with the nation still at war with Japan.

I point out these facts to emphasize the point that to call the relocation centers "concentration camps", as is all too commonly done, is semantic inflation of the most dishonest kind -- an attempt to equate the actions of the U.S. Government with the genocidal actions of Nazis against the Jews

during the Hitler regime. As an American, I protest this calumny against the nation I am proud to have served as an educator and even prouder to serve as a legislator.

The relocation center at Tule Lake was different from the nine others. It was there that those who resisted the evacuation and internment, including a Japanese veteran of the U.S. Army in World War I, Nisei who renounced their American citizenship in protest against the relocation, and other angry people were sent so as to isolate them from those who patiently accepted their internment. There were frequent disturbances at Tule Lake, angrily described in "Years on Infamy" by Michi Weglyn, who appears not to know anything about the nine other camps.

The trouble-free and relatively happy lives at all the relocation centers other than Tule Lake can be attributed to a cultural trait of the Japanese, clearly seen in the Issei but almost unheard of in their American-born grandchildren, namely, the concept of gaman. Gaman is to endure with patience and dignity hardships, misfortunes or injustices -- especially those about which nothing can be done.

I am sure there are activists among my audience who will be enraged at the suggestion that anyone was happy in a relocation camp. But how else can one account for the fact that for the past many years graduates of the camp high schools -- for example Amache, Colorado; Minedoka, Idaho; Poston, Arizona -- have been holding tenth, twentieth, and thirtieth anniversary class reunions? How else can one account for the tremendous artistic output of those amateur artists who, having time on their hands, turned out little masterpieces of

sculpture, flower arrangement, ceramics and painting, later memorialized in a scholarly volume entitled, "Beauty Behind Barbed Wire" (Allen Hendershott Eaton, 1952). How else can one account for the elderly Japanese farmers and grocers who gathered around a bridge-table to go over the nagauta (traditional long narrative songs) and music from the kabuki drama? For many older Japanese, the relocation turned out to be a three-year vacation from long years of unremitting work on farms, in vegetable markets, and on fishing boats -- and they used this leisure to recover and re-live the glories of their traditional culture.

It was a great humiliation for the Nisei of the 100th Battalion of the Hawaii National Guard to be sent to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, where they were trained with wooden guns. Spark Matsunaga, now a U.S. Senator, who was in that unit, writes, "We wrote home of our great desire for combat duty to prove our loyalty to the United States. It was not known to us then that our letters were being censored by higher authority. We learned subsequently that because of the tenor of our letters, the War Department decided to give us our chance. Our guns were returned to us, and we were told that we were going to be prepared for combat duty Grown men leaped with joy."

On January 28, 1943, the War Department announced that Nisei would be accepted as a special combat unit. They volunteered in the thousands both from Hawaii and from the relocation camps. They were united with the 100th Battalion as the 442d Regimental Combat Team at Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

The 100th Battalion first saw action at Salerno, Italy, in September 1943, and took heavy casualties. The 442d landed in Italy in June 1944, at once gained a reputation as an assault force, and accomplished the famous

rescue of the "lost battalion" of the 36th (Texas) Division at an enormous cost in blood. Fighting in seven major campaigns, the men of the 442d suffered 9,486 casualties and won more than 18,000 individual decorations for valor.

Another 3,700 Nisei served in combat areas in the Pacific as translators and interpreters. The Japanese military, believing their language to be too difficult for foreigners to master, were careless about security. They did not count on Nisei on every battlefield reading captured documents and passing information on to Allied commanders. Kibei (Nisei born in America but educated in Japan and originally the object of special distrust) turned out to be especially helpful in this respect.

In short, the Nisei covered themselves with honor and made life in America better for themselves, their parents (who a few years after the war won the right to be naturalized), and their children. I remember vividly the returning Nisei veterans I saw in Chicago soon after V-E Day. Short of stature as they were, they walked proudly, infantry combat citations on their chests, conscious that they were home -- in their own country. Chicago, known throughout the war for its hospitality to servicemen, outdid itself when the Nisei returned. They had earned that welcome.

The relocation was a heart-breaking experience for Japanese-Americans as well as a serious economic loss for those who had spent decades of labor on their farms and businesses. But most seriously it was an affront. America was saying to them, "You are not to be trusted. We doubt your loyalty."

The Nisei, although very much Americanized, are in some respects profoundly Japanese. An imputation of disloyalty, being an affront, was also a challenge. A powerful Japanese motivation is "giri to one's name" -- the

duty to keep one's reputation (and one's family's) unblemished. Giri is also duty to one's community, one's employers, to one's nation. The Nisei's nation was the United States. One accused of disloyalty is duty-bound to remove that disgrace by demonstrating himself to be loyal beyond all expectation.

This is a basic reason the Nisei volunteered in such numbers and fought so well. More than 33,000 Nisei served in the war -- a remarkable number out of a total Japanese-American population (Hawaii and mainland combined) of little more than 200,000. They had a fierce pride in their reputation as a group.

The Issei were also motivated by "giri to one's name." Those who found jobs outside the camps were exemplary workers, as if to prove something not only about themselves but about their entire group. Japanese-Americans, young and old alike, accepted the mass relocation with dignity and maturity making the best of a humiliating situation. In so doing they exhibited the finest resources of their ancient background culture.

The pre-war theory of "white supremacy" was completely discredited by the crushing defeat of Hitler and Hitlerism. The prejudice against Japanese in America was all but wiped out by the courage and the sacrifice of Nisei service men in Italy and the Pacific. Then in the 1960s came the Civil Rights Movement, which further discredited doctrines of racial superiority and inferiority. We live today in a totally different era, in which the prevailing racialist theories of the 1930s and earlier are seen as historical curiosities.

The Nisei with their courage and their parents by their industry have won for Japanese-Americans the admiration and respect of all Americans. Japanese-Americans have an average level of education higher than any other

ethnic group, including whites. They have a higher representation in the learned professions -- medicine, law, engineering, computer science -- than other ethnic groups -- and in this respect they are doing as well as another group famous for their respect for learning, namely, the Jews. The per capita income of Japanese-Americans is \$500 a year above the national average. And they have, with a population of less than half a million, three representatives in the United States Senate, while the Blacks, with a population approaching 23 million, have none. What more can Japanese-Americans want? We are living today at a time when Japanese-Americans are almost a privileged class, with their notorious scholastic aptitude, their industriousness, and their team spirit in whatever occupation they find themselves.

I am proud to be a Japanese-American. But when a small but vocal group of Japanese-Americans calling themselves a "Redress Committee" demand a cash indemnity of \$25,000 for all those who went to relocation camps during World War II, including those who were infants at the time and those who are now dead -- a total sum of some two and three-quarters of a billion dollars -- my flesh crawls with shame and embarrassment.

Let me remind the Japanese-American Redress Committee that we also live in a time when American industry is seriously threatened by Japanese competition -- in automobiles, steel, cameras, television and radio sets, tape-recorders and watches. I warn the Japanese-Americans who demand ^{almost} ~~about~~ three billion dollars of financial redress for events of 39 years ago from which nobody is suffering today, that their efforts can only result in a backlash against both Japanese-Americans and Japan. And to make such a demand at a time of the budget stringencies of the Reagan Administration

is unwise enough, but to make this demand against the background of their own record as America's most successful minority is simply to invite ridicule.

Let me remind Japanese-Americans that we are, as we say repeatedly in our Pledge of Allegiance, "one nation," striving to achieve "liberty and justice for all."

This means -- and I say this to Black Americans and Mexican-Americans and all other ethnic ~~political~~ groups -- let's stop playing ethnic politics to gain something for our own group at the expense of all others. Let us continue to think of America as "one nation, under God, indivisible" and let us act accordingly.