



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

TESTIMONY OF PATSY S. SAIKI

To the Commission on Wartime Relocation
and Internment of Civilians

Seattle, Washington
Sept. 9, 1981

Honorable Chairperson and Members of the Commission:

My name is Patsy Saiki. During the past year I interviewed many of Hawaii's internees or their widows. I would like to relate just three incidents that caused humiliation and hardship.

Y. Soga was 66 and editor of a Japanese language newspaper when picked up on Dec. 7, 1941. He was returned Dec. 13, 1945.

At Sand Island Internment Camp, a whistle blew frantically one day. Soga and the other Japanese internees--including priests and bishops--were ordered to line up in the afternoon sun and strip. They and their piles of clothing were examined; their sleeping tents were overturned in a thorough search. What were the MP's looking for? TWO SPOONS---two spoons which could be converted, they were told, into contrahand weapons!

They stood naked in the hot sun until finally allowed by the captain to wear their clothes again. How much humiliation was needed to let the men know they were prisoners? This stripping was more than a physical one--it was a psychological stripping that implied, "All that belongs to you is your skin. We control what you can have!" It seems strange that only the Japanese were ordered to strip, not the German and Italian internees who watched from across the fence.

K. Furuya, another internee, was shipped to the Mainland with the first contingent of 172 men on the U.S.S. Grant on February 20, 1942. The men were locked in their rooms with 7-10 others. They could not use the latrine when they needed to. Instead, MP's unlocked the door every three hours, accompanied them to the latrine, then escorted them back to the room and re-locked the door. Pounding on the door did no good. Even for such bodily functions, the internees were told when they could or couldn't do what they needed to do. What further rules could be drawn to demean the internees?

George Hoshida came to Hawaii in 1912 at age 4, which still made him an alien. On Dec. 7 George attended church as usual, then went home to care for his blind, mute, partially paralyzed 8-year-old daughter Taeko. Taeko had been severely injured in a car accident when less than a year old.

Then George was interned. Why? Because he was a part-time judo instructor, and judo is an Asian martial art. George had to leave not only the paralyzed Taeko, but also a 6-year-old, a 2-year-old, a pregnant wife and a mortgaged home. Within a few months, Taeko had to be placed in Waimano Home for the Mentally Retarded, which is located on another island. Some months later Taeko died, without any familiar voice

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or touch to comfort her. The mortgaged home had to be sold, and the family shuttled from one residence to another until his wife and three children--by then on welfare--were relocated to Jerome, Arkansas.

No, there was no room for compassion, for charity or mercy, no individual consideration for those selected as POSSIBLE disloyal persons.

Is America an unkind nation in times of emergency?

No! Look at the Berlin Airlift, at the boat people of Vietnam, at the Cuban refugees. We have done more than our share for the needy people of foreign countries. We are a warm, compassionate people!

The United States is now at a threshold where emerging Third World nations are evaluating our system of government, our policies, our actions. They are assessing not what we were or say we are, but what we DO today. They are comparing oursystem with other systems.

Is this not an oportune time to show the world that we do not condone racism, we do not condone economic greed at the expense of a minority group, we do not condone injustices. We do right wrongs when it is possible to do so. Ourvery way of life is based on that premise.

Righting this wrong to the Japanese should burnish the image of America as a symbol of justice. Both on a worldwide scale, and in the heart of each internee, justice is the very essence of relationships, and what makes life precious. Thank you.

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