

JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

Testimony of Mark Murakami

To the Commission on Wartime Relocation
and Internment of Civilians

Seattle, Washington
September 9, 1981

Honorable Chairperson and Members of the Commission,

In the fall of 1941, I, Mark Murakami, was a U. S. citizen, a Reserve Officer of the U. S. Army Infantry, a law-abiding 30-year old University of Washington first year law student with solid dreams to return with a law degree in hand to my home, family, and friends in Hawaii

But suddenly and without warning, from that fateful February 19, 1942, when Executive Order 9066 was signed, that young man was no more. Instead, I was Mark Murakami, a Japanese American, dutifully registering to be taken into protective custody, dutifully appearing on the appointed day of May 5th at the tightly-secured Pacific International Livestock Exposition grounds, dutifully becoming one of the 120,000 interned Japanese Americans.

It was in the barracks of this Assembly Center that I resided for about four miserable months. It was here that I had to stand by my bed at the 9 P.M. curfew every night for a bed check. It was here that I was watched by trigger-happy soldiers on the ground, plus more soldiers, armed with machine guns stationed in high towers. It was here that my bout with insomnia began. Being unable to sleep night after night, I was unfit to work during the day. However, I was finally forced to work because of boredom. I earned a paltry \$14 per month for my work keeping the accounts of the clothing allowances we were given. And, it was here that I had to begin accepting the censoring of my personal mail from home.

After four long months we were loaded onto a train, window shades pulled down to prevent us from seeing where we were. Our destination was the isolated desert of Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho. What a desolate place with severe sand and dust storms, snowstorms, high temperatures to freezing below zero temperatures.

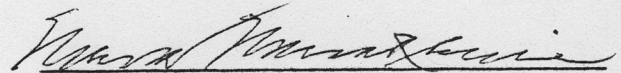
For another eight months or so, I was forced to live there in a barracks of Block 32. Such a bare room. We had to build our own furniture if we wanted more than a bed. For at least four or five months, we had only putrid outdoor latrines, and we had to stand in line to use it.

The mental anguish of having my freedom taken away from me, of having my career plans destroyed, the feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness tore at me. The emotional distress cannot be fully appreciated by critics who have never been unjustly imprisoned.

The racial discrimination I saw and experienced in the Seattle area was difficult to take, since I had come from Hawaii where discrimination was minimal. However, never were there any physical threats so great that it would justify the President of the United States sending me to some God-foresaken prison-like desert camp for protection.

With respect to my contribution to the war efforts, I am proud to say that I had instructed and trained the Nisei and Sansei soldiers, plus Caucasian Linguist Officers in translating, interpreting and interrogating. The Nisei and Sansei were sons and daughters of internees or had been interned themselves. Yet, they volunteered to serve in the Armed Services and rendered distinguished deeds in the Pacific war front. How ironic that on one hand the Japanese Americans were condemned for having the linguistic and cultural knowledge of Japanese, and on the other hand, the knowledge they had was capitalized on and used as a secret weapon by the Army and Naval intelligence to bring about not only victory in the Pacific but even shortened the war by two years.

Tell me, please, how would you requite the Japanese parents and those interned American of Japanese Ancestry for the wrong done to them? Just by saying we're sorry, borders on replacing an outrage with an insult.



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