



# JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

Testimony of Seiyei Wakukawa

To the Commission on Wartime Relocation  
and Internment of Civilians

Seattle, Washington

September 9, 1981

My name is Seiyei Wakukawa. I am a naturalized citizen of the United States, having lived in Hawaii for more than 60 years. Since the age of 12, I was educated in the public schools and Japanese language schools there. Between 1906 and 1920, my entire family, consisting of a widowed mother, one daughter and five sons, had been transplanted to Hawaii from Japan.

After graduating from the University of Hawaii in 1931 and a year of post graduate study in Japan, I spent most of my life as a newspaper reporter, the last five years before retiring in 1975 as editor in chief of a daily bilingual paper in Honolulu, with an occasional fling at teaching language and serving as news commentator on ethnic television programs.

At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack I was engaged in a small private business of my own. Within a few weeks of the outbreak of the war, a number of my friends and acquaintances, including a couple of medical doctors, a number of Japanese language school principals and teachers, Buddhist minister, businessmen and about half a dozen newspaper editors and publishers were summarily taken into custody and held in detention to be later shipped to the mainland and interned for the duration of the war.

I was visited at my residence a few times by FBI agents, army or navy intelligence officers but each visit ended in a congenial exchange of views on the war with one exception of enigmatic note and that was an indirect suggestion from the officers that I was expected to cooperate with authorities in ferreting out possible subversive elements. But I knew no subversive elements nor did I think the situation warranted my being an unofficial informer.

As for myself, at no time since the outbreak of the war, did I have any fear of being even remotely suspected of being an enemy alien inimical to the best interest of the United States, far less to be apprehended and incarcerated as such. To my great disappointment, however, what to me was unthinkable did happen. One day in April, as the fall of the Philippines became imminent, I was "hauled in" along with a large number of young kibei Niseis. After being confined in the Honolulu immigration station for over a month and another month on Sand Island, with only one cursory hearing, I was shipped to stateside to be interned at Lourdsburg, New Mexico.

From Lourdsburg I dashed off a letter of protest and appeal to the White House, resulting in my being paroled in February, 1943, the first internee from Hawaii to be so treated. After parole I was invited to teach the Japanese language at the University of Chicago Civil Affairs Training School. In the spring of 1944 I was asked to join the staff of the Navy's Taiwan research unit at Columbia University. A few months later, an invitation from Harvard University took me there, where I spent the remaining months of the war teaching and doing research work on matters related to military government and civil administration. Part of this work was published by the Harvard Press in the book Japan's Prospects and used by Mac Arthur's headquarters in bringing about far-reaching changes in Japan's landownership and the farm tenancy system.

My wartime internment reflects the irony of the entire internment system. If I was such an enemy, deserving of internment, then why was I so easily released to serve in the wartime effort and ultimately to assist in the occupation of Japan. My experiences after the parole incident only serves to emphasize the misjudgement and error of those responsible for internment.

In a word, the whole internment show was a travesty of justice - short-sightedly, injudiciously and indiscreetly executed with malice aforethought under the pressure of wartime hysteria, greed, and racism.

It is never too late to admit and rectify wrongs committed. A mere admission of guilt and polite apology too often serves as a cosmetic cover for hypocrisy. Concrete implementation in the form of proper and adequate indemnity or reparation should be provided.

*Seiyei Wakukawa*

Seiyei Wakukawa

Honolulu, Hawaii 96817

Telephone: [REDACTED]