

JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

TESTIMONY OF LAWRENCE D. KUMABE

To the Commission on Wartime Relocations and
Internment of Civilians

Seattle, Washington
September 9, 1981

Honorable Chairperson and Members of the Commission,

The wartime experiences of Japanese-Americans in Hawaii is the collective story of over 150,000 individuals, a substantial segment of Hawaii's population. It is the story, for the most part, of those who were free from camps, from eviction and internment. But, this story also has a darker chapter. It is also the often-forgotten story of 1500 of Hawaii's Japanese-Americans who were also summarily arrested and held captive during the war.

In reviewing this record, the Hawaii Chapter, JACL believes that certain fundamental and critical questions are now left for the Commission to review and ponder:

1. First, the question of military necessity for internment.

Hawaii's record stands in stark comparison to the experiences of Japanese-Americans on the mainland United States. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii's geographic position placed it squarely in the path of any Japanese invasion force of the mainland. Hawaii had already been attacked. It was far more vulnerable militarily than the mainland.

Nevertheless, only 1500 of 150,000 Japanese-Americans in Hawaii were interned. 120,000 were interned on the mainland.

Therefore, we now ask the Commission: how could military necessity have justified the forcible eviction, relocation and internment of the entire Japanese-American population of 120,000 on the mainland, but not in Hawaii?

2. Second, the question of economic necessity for internment.

In Hawaii, at the outbreak of war, the Japanese-American community formed the backbone of a plantation economy, providing one-third of the labor for the agricultural industries of sugar and pineapple. There is evidence that the economic leaders in Hawaii requested President Roosevelt to save their economic interests by stopping the internment of Japanese-Americans in Hawaii.

By contrast, on the mainland, Japanese-Americans had no such economic friends in Washington. If anything, they were perceived as an economic threat to agricultural and other interests.

We now ask the Commission, after examining Hawaii's experience, if economic influence alone should have determined whether an entire segment of a nation's population should have had their property confiscated and have been forcibly evicted and interned in camps.

3. Third, the question of internal security and loyalty.

In Hawaii, with its large Japanese-American population, there were no incidents of sabotage or collaboration. Yet, in spite of restrictions on geographic and economic movement, due to martial law, Japanese-Americans were largely free in Hawaii to pursue their normal duties. This situation prevailed throughout the war.

In addition, Hawaii's Japanese-Americans fought gallantly and with great distinction in the 100th Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the Military Intelligence Service.

By comparison, on the mainland, even after the loyalty and support of Hawaii's Japanese-Americans had become painfully clear, the Japanese-Americans there still remained in camps. They also fought gallantly and with great distinction with the 442nd and MIS, but, unlike their counterparts in Hawaii, their families remained hostage in camps throughout the war.

We now ask the Commission, after examining Hawaii's experience, how could internal security and loyalty have justified internment on the mainland, but not in Hawaii.

4. Fourth, the issue of reparations.

In assessing Hawaii's experience, it is clear that the camps had a profound and significant effect on the Japanese-American population on the mainland, not present in Hawaii.

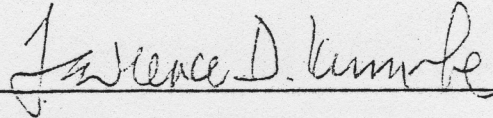
In Hawaii, many Japanese-Americans came back as war heroes. Their leaders were educated on the G.I. Bill of Rights. They achieved positions of prominence in politics, business, law and education.

By comparison, the war left Japanese-American internees on the mainland with deep feelings of guilt, anger, remorse and frustration. Guilt, because there was the feeling, due to internment, that they had done some wrong. Anger, because the internment was fundamentally unfair. Remorse and frustration, due to the severe economic loss and personal and emotional injury suffered.

In Hawaii, these same feelings struck the internees with compelling force. Not only were they interned, but in many cases interned, isolated and alone, thousands of miles from their families, and held like prisoners of war, without any hope of release.

We now leave the Commission with two final questions:

1. Shouldn't the internees in Hawaii be compensated as fully as their counterparts on the mainland?
2. Haven't the internees, whether on the mainland or in Hawaii, suffered in silence long enough without full and adequate redress and reparations?



Lawrence D. Kumabe

[REDACTED]
Honolulu, Hawaii 96825

[REDACTED] Business
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