

U.S COMMISSION ON INTERNMENT HEARING

Oral Testimony of Hiro Nishimura

A. IDENTIFICATION

1. Birthplace: Seattle, Washington on August 8 1919
2. First son of Mr. & Mrs. Hisao Nishimura

B. MY REASONS FOR TESTIFYING

1. Restoration of the due process of law denied us in 1942.
2. Exercise of privilege and right of a citizen.
3. Fulfillment of evoking my views.

C. INTRODUCTION: My Perspectives are in Three Periods.

1. As a serviceman from 1942 to 1947
2. As a veteran from 1960 to present
3. As a citizen from 1970 to present

D. AS A SERVICEMAN

1. I was drafted in February 1942 just before the evacuation.
2. Two furloughs at Minidoka, Idaho.
 - a. I spent my two furloughs with my parents, brother and friends at Minidoka before going overseas.
 - b. Having had a little taste of Minidoka, I have definite feelings about internment which are mentioned in my written testimony.
3. U.S. ARMY VOLUNTEER PROGRAM & the THREE DILEMMA
 - a. I wish to comment specifically about this divisive issue.
 - b. This unfair, no alternative program caused much anguish and bitterness amongst the families and within the community:

thrusting upon the down, but not out people --- the "non-citizens" who were not good enough for the military draft, but, as "undesirables" were good enough to volunteer to serve the country which had forsaken them.

c. Issei Dilemma

The ISSEI, shocked by the up-rooting, had, more or less, resigned to an uncertain fate. But, as parents, they had to confront another fate: the dilemma of their children which became their dilemma also.

And, even under adversity, they were dutiful to remind them of their citizens' responsibilities even under duress.

d. MY DILEMMA

My dilemma was being caught between my uniform and the

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D. 3. d. MY DILEMMA, continued.

barbed wire fence of MINIDOKA. The dichotomy of my duty and responsibility to my country and my concern for and the fate of my parents, brother and friends was difficult to rationalize and resolve.

e. DUST, DEPRIVATION & DESOLATION

But, out from the dust, deprivation and desolation of MINIDOKA, rose the largest number of volunteers from all the centers.

f. NISEI 'PROOF' and ISSEI 'PROOF'

They did not have to prove anything. They were citizens. NEVERTHELESS, they "proved" or rather showed themselves ---- beyond the piece of paper, on the battlefields of Europe and Pacific.

THE ISSEI did not have to prove anything either. They were law-abiding resident aliens. NEVERTHELESS, they showed themselves equal to the crisis-----no less deserving of the piece of paper -----long denied them by racial discrimination.

E. AS A VETERAN

1. As veterans, we were exhorted by many speakers to lead in serving the community and others urged our involvement in the political system.
2. THE BICENTENNIAL YEAR: THOMAS JEFFERSON MEMORIAL

In 1976, at the National Nisei Veterans Re-Union in Washington D.C., on the dome of Thomas Jefferson Memorial, was an inscription which I feel is most fitting for this day. QUOTE:

"I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and Constitutions. But laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, INSTITUTIONS must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors".

F. AS A CITIZEN

1. At about mid-point of the veteran ego period, the smug and sleeping citizen CONSCIENCE started stirring and kept stirring.

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F. AS A CITIZEN, continued

2. CONGRESSMAN MINETA

At one of the Seattle JACL banquets, Congressman MINETA reproached the Nikkei that being a good, quiet citizen was not good enough and that we need to be good, ACTIVE citizen by getting involved in the political system.

2a (see below)

3. PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

~~Still~~, the ^{semi-}smug conscience kept stirring. I joined the party to become a better informed citizen and to better understand the political system.

I became a precinct committeeman and a voter registrar.

I attended the local and state conventions.

I had an opportunity to attend the national convention, but prior commitment prevented that.

I participated in 13 campaigns and 4 initiatives.

My personal involvement may not made a bit of difference to our community and our country, but for me, it made a big difference. For the first time since I was drafted, I felt like a CITIZEN. AGAIN, I felt like a citizen, not a Nisei, not a veteran, when I visited the WHITE HOUSE and met the PRESIDENT.

G. CONCLUSION

1. For my presence today, I owe it ^{mostly} to my citizen involvement.

2. For my citizen involvement, I owe it to my CONSCIENCE.

3. COMMISSIONERS' INVOLVEMENT

And I trust, in your involvement today, through your conscience, the government will fulfill its obligations and responsibilities with a proper and a dignified redress of the long overdue injustices and anguish imposed upon our people.

4. I wish to end with a comment on Thomas Jefferson's wise and cautious precognition that the institutions require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy, -----so should we wear still the coat which fitted us some 38 years ago when boys and girls "as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors" and of our past prejudiced, oblivious leaders and society?

5. This concludes my testimony and this day completes my citizen ego.

F. 2a DEMOCRACY; A TWO WAY STREET

Finally, my smug conscience awoke to the past messages that DEMOCRACY is a two-way street. The government to provide the protection and freedom for all the people and the people to fulfill their responsibilities and duties to their country.

11 August 1981

Respectfully yours
Hiro Nishimura