

July 23, 1981

Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians

Dear Commission Members,

My name is Ray Yamamoto. I am 67 years old. I was 28 years old when President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. I was born and raised in Fife in what was to have been the Puyallup Indian Reservation. I resided in California for four years while attending Stanford University, 1932-36. Vacation periods were spent working on the farms in Fife or Wapato, Yakima County.

I began to learn early the meaning of "second and third class citizenship" though I was seldom the victim of harsh treatment.

My benefactor had an Irish housekeeper named Miss Hayes who had two brothers. One brother was the manager of the Pantages Theatres of Seattle and Tacoma, considered the elite vaudeville showhouses in the two cities. The mentally injured brother, Hayes (World War I), lived part of the time in Fife with his housekeeper sister at the home of my benefactor. Hayes never paid for his admission nor mine at the theatre, because the ushers knew him. The first time I attended, the usher tried to send me upstairs to the balcony, Hayes said, "No !" He always sat in the last row of the main floor and the usher found me a seat closer to the front, but visible to Hayes. This is when I learned there was a "nigger heaven" for blacks, orientals and Indians in the elite theatres. I was 14 years old.

When the aircraft carrier U. S. S. Lexington was tied to a dock in Tacoma in 1928 to produce electricity for the city, the ship was open to few select visitors. My friend Gene Williams was a younger brother to the Williams Brothers who furnished much of the fresh food for Lexington crew mess. Gene invited me to go look at the Lexington with another friend. I was 15 years old at the time. When we climbed the gangplank to meet the Chief Petty Officer who knew Gene, the CPO told Gene "not Today", because you have a Jap boy with you. That was the day I learned the U. S. Navy was white; Filipinos were tolerated to work in the galley.

As high school years came on, My Indian neighbor-friend mentioned that he would be tribal chief if it were not for the presence of the whites, because his father was chief of the Puyallup tribe. No Puyallup tribal reservation existed, because Puyallup tribe members were assigned allotments on the Yakima Reservation, 150 miles away. My friend, Henry, was bare of heritage and even other rights which were denied Indians at that time.

It was my good fortune for my family to know well two doctors and their wives. Mrs. Robb had no children so she very much adopted us children as her family. She came on the bus weekly to teach us music for several years; kept house for us while my parents took a four-month trip to Japan.

Mrs. McCreery, a Stanford alumnus, got me admitted to Stanford though I was not a top scholar in a class of 30 graduating seniors at Fife High School. Thanks to a legacy from my Irish immigrant benefactor, I was not deprived and did not have to work in outside jobs while attending Stanford in spite of the economic depression. I managed to earn a bachelor's degree in economics. I was exposed to a wealth of activities, touching minorities, war, socio-economic problems, attended many institutes, seminars and conferences and was given access to numerous publications and pamphlets not generally available to the public. My academic work suffered neglect, but the realities I learned probably enabled me to sustain my mental equilibrium in spite of Executive Order 9066.

High points of my experiences:

a. A Japan-America student conference was held on the Stanford campus during the summer of 1935. It was requested by Waseda and Doshisha University students from Japan. We hosted the conference with the University of California students participating. My group session which I chaired came to the conclusion that eventually there would be war between the United States and Japan, because the growth of military-industrial complex in Japan and the inability of the United States to solve its internal socio-economic problems would increase barriers to trade.

Our faculty sponsor, Hobart Young, was very perturbed when we published a report of our conference.

I became involved in the study of World War I and involvement of the military-industrial groups in European politics as revealed by Senator Nye. The campus YWCA sponsored the study under the direction of Mrs. Lamson, the secretary. She was murdered in her home on campus, an unsolved crime. I always suspect a graduate student visitor from England via Columbia University. (a similar type of student appeared at the University of Minnesota during my employment there, 1943-45.

b. In 1938 I was a precinct committeeman and a delegate to the Pierce County Democratic convention. A delegate from the backwoods area of the county introduced a resolution recommending "deportation" of all persons of Japanese ancestry to Japan. It was seconded by another hinterland delegate. Bill Gallivan from Tacoma expounded an outstanding talk stating that we were all foreigners by origin except the native Indians. The motion was defeated. Head count vote defeated the resolution. Ruben Knoblock of Sumner who later became a state legislator urged those delegates representing the Puyallup Valley area to stand up and be counted when vote against the motion was asked.

c. I functioned entirely on the assumption that war between the United States and Japan was inevitable.

Noteworthy incidents during the period:

1. My mother and sister, Edith, visited Japan in 1940. I urged them to return due to eminence of war. My mother returned in July, 1940 bringing back with her a kibeï born on our farm in Fife 18 years earlier. His father begged my mother to bring him back to the United States, because he was soon to be drafted into the Japanese army. My sister returned in July, 1941.

2. I visited an adult Broadway High School evening class with Prof. Frank Williston of the College of Puget Sound faculty in late November, 1941. He was teaching a weekly class in Far Eastern studies. On the drive to Seattle, we discussed the eminence of war. Toward the end of his lecture at the class, he mentioned the definite possibility of military hostility between the United States and Japan soon. At least one person or more made decisions according to Prof. Williston's prediction; the earnestness of the questioning of Williston by the individuals after the lecture was very noticeable.

3. The Japanese Association of the Seattle community with the support of other issei around Puget Sound sponsored a farmers meeting for the nisei farmers on November 15, 1941. (Thanks to the Freedom of Information Act, I was able to get all the names of guests, place, etc. from the Justice Department file apparently because I was one of the arrangers for the conference.)

At the banquet after the entertainment provided by a prominent nisei vocalist, I thanked the County Extension Agents, the Washington State College agronomists, and men from the Western Washington Experiment Station, I urged fellow nisei farmers to do their best, using the expert information given us, because the burden of being in the community was going to be extreme due to war clouds hovering over us.

Discussion within the Yamamoto family about war was frequent.

I predicted arrest of my father and incarceration in Montana or near environs. (He was picked up early in the evening of December 7, 1941 few hours after he had come home from fishing for red snappers and cods. He was held incommunicado until I heard from him from Fort Missoula, Montana. Our pre-war discussions about citizenship and alien status must have helped him tolerate incarceration. He was no doubt impressed by his Fort Missoula inmates which included men like Michio Ito, world renowned ballet performer.

The conditions were terrible for them in Fort Missoula until the International Red Cross was requested to investigate. My father was a restaurant operator in Tacoma, so he organized the kitchen. Ito naturally taught the dance for recreation. A civilian tribunal of three caucasian men conducted hearings for all the hostages in Fort Missoula. My father was "freed" by the tribunal in late June, 1942 and joined the rest of us who were incarcerated in the W.C.C.A. Puyallup Assembly Center.

Many aliens who had no families in the United States chose to return to Japan on the Swedish S. S. Gripsholm.

(In the Justice Department file received under the Freedom of Information Act, my father's "freedom order" is recorded by the Justice Department stating the tribunal's judgment was in error, this individual should be watched.)

To function reasonably and not panic was very hectic. I found that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was listening to all conversations on my telephone line. My father was a volunteer ombudsman. He had helped a family friend start a restaurant business. Few days after December 7, 1941, this friend phoned and my mother answered the phone. He explained that he could not conduct any business, because federal executive order practically disabled conduct of business for aliens. The conversation was in the Japanese language; so the FBI agent immediately went or dispatched someone to the friend's restaurant. The wretched man was completely intimidated and phoned my mother after he had regained his shaky composure telling her what had happened. When I learned what had taken place, I phoned the FBI immediately and identified myself and asked "what the hell they were doing tapping my telephone and what the hell did they want to know!" The agent must have been completely non-plussed and flabbergasted; he mumbled and stuttered for several seconds and before he could regain his composure, I asked where my father was because I had not heard from him since December 7 when Agent Wilson and three deputies took him away. When the agent on the phone finally regained some of his composure, he explained it was his job to get information about Yamamoto and I told him Yamamoto was a very common name among Japanese and the most prominent locally in the Puget Sound area was a professional gambler. He is probably in Japan, because the ad hoc Japanese committee asked him to return to Japan, naturally with gratuities, in the best interests of the Japanese community.

I began to realize the authorities and much of the bureaucracy who deal with enemy aliens were infected with paranoia. The harassment of Japanese people in California was becoming much like the early treatment of the Jews in Germany and Poland during World War II prior to December 7, 1941.

The Puyallup Valley chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League of which I was a member generally held the meetings in the Fife Japanese Language School building. The early 1942 meeting was held in the study hall of the Fife High School building. The meeting was called to decide what procedure to follow, because our alien parents had to register under the hurried federal executive order requiring enemy alien registration. One member proposed that we open an office with a telephone to help with the alien registration and facilitate clearance of information. I earnestly opposed such expenditure of our resources, a few of our

fathers had already been picked up by the Justice Department, but there is a possibility that we would all be removed. There was mumbling among the members present that the federal government would not remove American citizens. My criticism prevailed without loud opposition.

After evacuation orders of the coastal areas of the western United States were issued by the Western Defense Command, I decided that my immediate family should move to Wapato in Yakima County in eastern Washington. The house on the Wapato farm was small but livable and had two large outbuildings in which relatives could stay until more permanent quarters could be found or established. In preparation for voluntary evacuation, I drove to Wapato several times. On the main highway through the Cascade Mountains, I saw voluntary evacuees heading east; some I recognized.

I gave up and stopped running when evacuation was announced for eastern Washington to the west shores of the Columbia: it included Wapato. When registration was announced, my brother George and I decided it would be stupid for both of us to go through evacuation so he did not register. He helped pack and store and left heirloom items with friends and buried silverware and Japanese chinaware in a steel barrel several feet in the ground. My brother voluntarily without legal permission drove back to reregister at Washington State College to complete his senior year; he took a pickup truck and drove to Pullman accompanied by a close caucasian friend who offered to go with him.

I had my sister, Edith, registered as the head of the family on the evacuation roster, because I had hoped to evacuate voluntarily even if I was registered. I was quite sure my father would be "freed." Using the excuse of "seeing the tenant come to the house", I remained at home waiting for the mail from Fort Missoula, Montana.

I rode to the W.C.C.A. Puyallup Assembly Center with my uncle's family on his truck driven by a caucasian neighbor. I was supposed to be housed in the main Western Washington Fair grounds with my mother and two sisters. I got off the truck at the main gate and my uncle's family went to another area where temporary shacks were built on the grass of the Fairground parking lots. It took the W.C.C.A. office thirty minutes to find that I was supposed to be there. I sat on my suitcase waiting those minutes outside the gate with the oddest, most indecisive feeling of my life.

My father's "freedom" came a few weeks later and he joined us. The caucasian family that "adopted" him when he was a schoolboy in Tacoma forty years earlier was granted permission by the Western Defense Command to drive into the Fairgrounds inside the main gate to visit my father for several hours, for which I am very grateful, because the elderly caucasian couple did not survive World War II and my father died in Washington, D.C. on January 25, 1945.

If my father was "freed" soon enough for me to voluntarily evacuate as planned, my life may have been a disaster. I learned through the Freedom of Information Act (August, 1979), that I was on a "blacklist" in the Office of the Provost Marshal General.

My ability to predict evacuation, incarceration and possible annihilation was a result of simple academic accident. There was a required freshman course at Stanford called History of Western Civilization. The Department heads or the most effective lecturer of history, sociology, political science, philosophy and economics gave a lecture on Monday mornings to the freshman class in Assembly hall and Wednesday and Friday classes were devoted to study and discussion led by ph. d. candidates and aspiring assistants. The study was full of war, social injustice, incarceration, segregation, separation and annihilation. Described were the imposition by the winner or the majority on the loser or the minority, all the indignities known to mankind. The most recent close or familiar events to us were the banishment of the French by the English in Canada, the creation of the American Indian reservations, and the long struggle of the black against slavery before the existence of the United States. Less publicized but a known recent event was the disposition of the Chinese "coolies" after they were no longer needed in the construction of the railroads across the nation.

The Japanese immigrants came as seekers; the wives followed and families came into being. The Japanese kept seeking more and more opportunities in a large, expansive country. They refused to "stay in their place" like the rest of the minorities. I recall travelling the small towns of the San Joaquin valley of California during my years at Stanford, 1932-36. The Mexicans, Japanese and the few Chinese lived on one side of the railroad track "in their place" and the caucasians lived on the other side of the

other side of the track. The Japanese youngsters were earning much more than their "fair share" of the academic honors and scholarships. In spite of English language handicap of the parents, the progress of the youngsters of Japanese ancestry was phenomenal. In the metropolitan areas of the coastal states, competition was more intense; the Japanese youngsters were extremely diligent in spite of handicaps.

The establishment (caucasian) lumped all non-whites in laws, covenants, regulations, social harrassment, etc. to "keep them in their place." The aggressive seekers among the Japanese made necessary for the establishment (caucasian) to pass special laws outlawing non-citizens ineligible to become naturalized United States citizens from participating in such activities as owning land, entering specific professions, etc.

By December, 1941, many of the citizens of Japanese ancestry were becoming adults eligible for full participation.

Scores of escheat tragedies occurred during evacuation and incarceration under E. O. 9066. State and local laws provided that ineligible aliens could not buy or transact or conduct business in the name of their U. S. citizen children. The courts interpreted the procedure as bypassing the intent of the law which was to prevent Japanese aliens from becoming full participants in the community.

War hysteria provided the opportunity for the establishment to evacuate all the Japanese. Chapter V entitled "Japanese Evacuation From the West Coast" is very interesting reading. It is part of military history written by Conn, Engelman and Fairchild stating that "on 26 December 1941 Maj. General Allen W. Gullion, the Provost Marshal General, remarked to General DeWitt that he had just been visited by the representative of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, who asked for a roundup of all Japanese in the Los Angeles area." There was much vacillating and uneasiness by some of the military about total evacuation of Japanese by the military. The politicians won, helped by the jingoistic press and other media.

I lived in the W.C.C.A. and W.R.A. camps approximately 18 months in 1942 and 1943 working inside the guarded camps for twelve, sixteen or nineteen dollars per month.

When I relocated to Minneapolis, I had great difficulty getting employment, because I could not get "clearance." I still believe Miss Punderson, the employment officer at the University of Minnesota obtained the job for me in the Dean of Students office, because she happened to be a friend of my sister, Katherine. I believe Miss Punderson stretched the interpretation of "may not be employed in plants and facilities important to the war effort." Miss Punderson informed me she was having difficulty getting clearance for me when I was already working in the Dean of Students office.

When the Vietnam War led to the Congressional passage of the Freedom of Information Act, I started requesting information from the General Services Administration for my War Relocation Authority file. This file showed a copy from the Office of The Provost Marshal General stating:

The Office of the Provost Marshal General
does object to the employment of this individual at this
time in plants and facilities important to the war effort.

Pursuing further for information, I eventually received from the

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

U. S. ARMY INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMAND

FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND 20755

a sanitized copy of a confidential report issued by

Headquarter

Seattle Port of Embarkation

Office of the Port Commander

1519 South Alaskan Way

Seattle, Washington

SUBJECT: Report "Key" Japanese in Kent, Washington

(copy attached)

I found I was listed as one of the "King Pin Japs" with many of my friends who are living or deceased. I was followed by the Justice Department to Minneapolis, because a man indentifying himself as a security officer of the Minneapolis Police Department came to interview me as a "King Pin Jap." (I found a field office instruction

to ~~the~~ St. Paul in the files received from the Seattle office made available by the Freedom of Information Act.)

I know most of the persons listed as "King Pin Japs."

Allegations of the unidentified informer are totally false.

I am sure all are or were exemplarily loyal to the United States; seven are deceased.

I desire enabling legislation to rectify gross abrogation of my civil rights, blacklisting by the government without enabling me to face the accuser, deprived me of working privileges and travel.

Those older Americans of Japanese ancestry do not wish to be lumped with youngsters. My father was held hostage by the Justice Department from the evening of December 7, 1941 incommunicado for several weeks, until I received a censored letter from him incarcerated in Fort Missoula, Montana. He was "freed" and released from Fort Missoula in July, 1942 to ^{us} in incarceration at Puyallup, literally a stone's throw from my birthplace in Fife.

The Japanese people as a whole are achievers, therefore I would like to have enabling legislation making possible for the Japanese and other persons and families involved in E. O. 9066 to pay themselves for any redress program and incarceration, and saving Congress the legislative problem of appropriating funds.

List of possible plans:

Plan 1. Direct appropriation by Congress as a budgetary item; not wanted.

Plan 2, Direct deduction annually from federal income tax by evacuees; unacceptable and totally inequitable.

Plan 3, Voluntary tax deduction item contributed to a redress fund from which claims would be paid. Inefficacy of this plan would defeat the principal aim of the Commission.

Plan 4. Earmarking of income tax payment to the redress-reparation fund voluntarily by any federal income tax remitter to the Internal Revenue Service as is done now with one dollar per taxpayer annually for the major political parties. The taxpaying persons or corporations will be clearly informed of the purpose and to whom the reparations are being paid.

Congress will establish the guidelines and the procedures.

I favor this plan. Mechanics of the procedure are not difficult.

The nation would have been greater by using the talent of the achievers. To incarcerate them and then try to solicit their aid as specialists was stupid and should have never happened.

I am grateful to Justices Murphy, Jackson and Rutledge whose judgement could have reduced the pains. My sympathy go to the Justices who failed me and drastically reduced my trust in persons; they justified what was happening to me and was happening simultaneously to persons in Europe.

Submitted by:

Ray Yamamoto

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