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9.10.47
TESTIMONY

PETER K. OKADA

My name is Peter Okada. I am a second generation Japanese American. I am also an US Army Veteran having enlisted and served in the Pacific Theater. I am currently semi-retired and residing in Kirkland, in the State of Washington.

I appreciate the opportunity of appearing before this Commission and telling my story of the evacuation and how it affected me personally.

At the time of Pearl Harbor, I was 21 years old, head of my house-hold consisting of a widowed mother and 3 younger brothers.

We were living in the South West area of Los Angeles, in a home that my father had purchased prior to his demise.

I was working for the City of Los Angeles in the Parks and Recreation Department, when hostilities broke out between Japan and the USA.

In the interest of time, I shall omit the usual grievances considered common such as verbal abuses, ~~and~~ other harassment which were rampant following the war^{and camp experiences.}

I should, therefore, like to call your attention to and focus on 3 basic issues, which I consider to be worthy of redress, and not necessarily in the order of importance.

They are, first of all, the loss of educational opportunity; secondly, loss of Civil Service opportunity with seniority; and thirdly, economic losses.

Immediately following the war, I endeavored to enroll in several colleges and was denied admission on the grounds my race was at war with the USA. Since my father was graduated from Michigan State University, at the turn of the Century, denial was particularly painful. Opportunities which are ripe when rejected, often never return as subsequent situation and conditions are subject to change. Hence, I forever lost a chance of studying at an Institution where my father had completed his formal education. Quite apart from losing exposure to academic experience, prestige, and excellence of this University, the sentimental and emotional losses resulting from forfeiture of opportunity and the complex suffered has been irreparable through life.

As indicated earlier, I was working for the City of Los Angeles, and my immediate superior was a Mr. Frank Kenewell. He was responsible to a Mr. Skutt, who was head of the department and whose office was located the in the City Hall. My position was won after a series of competitive examinations in which about 500 persons participated for a dozen or so openings.

I was given to understand at the time of employment, that this was a Civil Service position, a life time service and a job which assured stability despite the risks and uncertainty of the economic cycle. They assured the position, once secured, would not be subject to forceful termination except for a moral charge.

Subsequent to about a year's service, war was declared and rumors of wholesale evacuation was in the air. At this time, I was summoned to the City Hall to Mr. Skutt's office, and requested to voluntarily resign my position. Mr. Skutt's reasons were because I was very visible and vulnerable in public.

Being the bread-winner in the family, I indicated I was accustomed and callous hence not afraid of verbal abuses and harassment and would prefer not to resign for economic reasons.

It was then, Mr. Skutt became very indignant and threatened that if I did not voluntarily resign that he would Black-list me where I could never again work for the City. With this threat, my resolve for continuing came to an abrupt end. I signed the papers releasing the City of their employment obligations. This bitter pill turned me off on Municipal Civil Service and to this day have not ever opted to serve again. It also prejudiced me against Los Angeles, while my home town, I have no desire to ever return to live.

Lastly, while my economic losses maybe nominal when compared to some other fellow Niseis, who lost farms, stores, large businesses, Tuna Clippers and the like none the less, when considering losses from vacancy and reduced rental income plus deterioration on our homes, selling our sedan and pick-up truck far below market value, and loss of 4 years wages, not to mention seniority, in my Civil-Service job, I would say this would have totaled in excess of \$6,000 in pre-war Dollars or at least \$60,000 when measured in today's Dollar value.

In retrospect, the forced evacuation brought about by E.O. 9066 was by any contemporary standards a black mark on U. S. history. It must not ever happen again. In order to provide impact on the American people and insure that never would there be another repetition of what happened to the Japanese on the West Coast, that a monetary recompense of minimum \$25,000 to each individual or their descendants be paid by the US Government. In terms of pre-war Dollars this would only amount to about \$2000 and in my opinion, everyone who was forced to undergo this experience, suffered much more than this sum in anguish and emotional scars alone not to mention pecuniary losses.



Peter K. Okada

8 August 1981