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U. S. COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS

Seattle Hearings: September 9, 10, 11, 1981

Text: O R A L T E S T I M O N Y

Witness: Edward Masakiyo Yamamoto, (09/11/81 -- 10:45 am)
Past National Chairman, REPACAMP

INTRODUCTION

Honorable Madame/Mister Chairman and Members

of the U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC):

I thank you sincerely for the opportunity to submit my written brief (to follow) and to appear here today to present my oral testimony to help further the purposes of these hearings. Before presenting my testimony, I wish to make this disclaimer now, to prevent any misunderstandings. I appear here and present my testimony strictly as an individual, and not as a representative of any organization.

I am Edward Masakiyo Yamamoto, born February 10, 1918, at 417½ W. Trent Alley, a rooming house on skid row in the Oriental section of Spokane, WA. In 1941, I was just completing my education at Kinman Business University (K.B.U.) as a Certified Public Accountant. After 40 years of self-employment in business management and in public accounting practice, I am semi-retired now residing at 4502 Fairchild Loop, Moses Lake, WA.

In February 1942, I was called by my Draft Board to report for my preinduction physical. Prima facie, I was not fit for combat duty but I was treated skeptically by some examiners even after volunteering for limited service. Shortly, by mail, I received my 4-F classification. Many weeks later, I again received mail from the draft board. Eagerly, wondering whether I was accepted for limited duty, I opened the envelope only to receive (what to me was) the vilest and most repugnant reprimand imaginable! -- "You are hereby reclassified as 4-C: ENEMY ALIEN!!!"

Members of the Commission, let those words -- ENEMY ALIEN! -- reverberate in your heads as we go on a flash-back.

In the winter of 1939-40, we discussed the formation of a JACL Chapter in Spokane. Even prior to our official recognition in December 1940, as a sub-chapter

of the Yakima Valley JACL Chapter, the Spokane JACL actively participated (through my K.B.U. student involvement) in annual Community Chest and Red Cross drives for the Spokane area. During 1940, Spokane JACL volunteered registrar-interpreters for the Selective Service Registrations and the Alien Registration.

After December 7, 1941, we felt honor-bound to continue such activities we were already involved in, so we fully participated with ENEMY ALIEN Registration and the second Selective Service Registration in the face of considerable public ridicule, scorn, abuse, etc.

May I digress to note that for the most part the media was fair and helpful to us and the Chairman of the Draft Board publicly upheld our right to assist them. For the record, on behalf of the Nikkei Community, I wish to publicly thank the Nelson Studio who (at the request of the Spokane JACL) took official pictures for the ENEMY ALIEN Registration charging our parents only 50¢ to take the picture and only 5¢ for each additional print. In view of contemporary profiteering, this was a most benevolent act which I have wanted to acknowledge these many years. For their loyalty, I also thank Ashley Holden of the Spokesman-Review and Ernie Jorgenson of the Spokane Daily Chronicle and subsequently of Radio Station KXLY. Also, I would be remiss if did not personally express my profound appreciation and thanks to Ben Kizer, and about 20 (or more) other distinguished Americans who dared to be publicly identified as National Sponsors of the National JACL during the difficult and trying WWII years.

About 10:00 am, December 7, 1941, most of the Nikkei community began assembling at the Grant Street Methodist Church for the wedding of Sumiko Yoshida to Joe Okamoto. The Reverend Doctor John Cobb, officiating, surely had this wedding recorded for weeks or months among his appointments, which the authorities could have checked. The reception dinner and dance at the Roundup Room of the Desert Hotel was scheduled for about 3:00 pm. Suddenly about 4:00 pm, without warning, like GANGBUSTERS, a



large horde of uniformed police, sheriffs, plain-clothes men, FBI agents, etc., swooped down on us with great suspicion and held us incommunicado. After a few hours they let us go, so my brothers and I returned home to find our mother resting and our Father presumably on his job as a redcap at the Union Station. We worried since Dad did not come home on time. Grapevine had it that some Issei leaders had been picked-up and shipped-out.

We did not see him until breakfast time the next morning when he told us about his extensive grilling by the "FBI" at the Union Station last night.

It was still early and being restless, we brothers visited the Yonago's about 10 blocks away. We remained about an hour and started home about 10:30 pm. We saw a police car circle the block and approach us after turning the corner toward which we were walking. Upon passing us on the opposite side of the street, they quickly made a U-turn, pulled up to the curb beside us and ordered us over to the car. They questioned us quite thoroughly and at length finally informing us they had received a phone call from the neighborhood telling them a large number of "Japs" were meeting, so they were investigating. The driver said, addressing me in a belligerent tone, "Don't you know it's not healthy to be a Jap?!" (or words to that effect). Since we were on our way home, we were permitted to do so without further incident.

During the next few days, many rumors, actual incidents and developments occurred which were singularly and cumulatively devastating to the mind of this young American who had been instilled since the beginning of memory with our gloriously patriotic heroes in their achievements to protect and preserve human rights and civil liberties in accordance with the principles of American democracy which guarantees certain inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all men -- who are created equal -- as set forth in the founding documents of our country, the United States of America.

As these incidents (seemingly ad infinitum) kept piling atop each other:



- 01) the unlawful detention at the wedding reception;
- 02) the illegal questioning and harassment caused by "110% Super-patriotic" self-appointed vigilante-types, such as when the police stopped us on the wedding night; and others being stopped from time to time to be checked for travel permits or whatever;
- 03) rumors upon rumors the first few days (and for about 18 months) kept us all, most confused and apprehensive;
 - a) my Internal Revenue Service friend called to assure me that I could count on him for anything I needed regardless of whatever happened. Since he worked out of the Federal Building where the FBI and other government offices were located, he had heard of imminent orders to freeze our bank accounts and to prevent all Japanese from freely purchasing food stuffs and other necessities;
 - b) several voluntary evacuees from Zone #1 decided to pull up stakes and again relocate further East;
- 04) returning to work at the Union Station from the wedding, my father was intensively interrogated without benefit of counsel or interpreter, and was summarily fired within the next few days in spite of over 10 years' faithful service. Incidentally, most, if not all, of the redcap-porters at the three railroad stations in Spokane were Nikkei receiving about \$75 a month. Immediately after the Japanese were fired, the Blacks took over, became unionized, increasing the cost to the railroads by 500%7;
- 05) the City of Spokane would not issue any new business licenses to Nikkei other than for restaurants, issued by the Commissioner of Public Health;
- 06) all Nikkei section foremen on all railroads were summarily discharged and later rehired as common laborers but required to assume responsibilities of Foremen without commensurate authority or pay;
- 07) in Bonners Ferry, Idaho, just northeast of Spokane, several Nikkei families

resided, mostly operating businesses -- some with assets in excess of \$1,000,000 (many times that in today's market). These people, without exception, were harassed and boycotted out of existence and consequently were required to move out of town. Similar situations occurred at Potlatch, Idaho, but I am not personally familiar with it as I am with Bonners Ferry;

08) our Zone #2 "alert status" required us to turn-in "contraband", such as: radio with short wave; firearms; cameras; telescopes; binoculars; large knives; explosives; etc. We had to observe various regulations regarding curfews, travel restrictions, exclusion from certain prohibited areas or installations and utilities, etc. One example of such needless aggravation required us to walk 3 extra blocks in each direction to pass the Telephone Building in order to reach the Japanese Community hall or the Lewis & Clark High School from our home.

09) aware of the baggage restrictions required for Zone #1 evacuees, we reduced our belongings to only what we could carry. Also, due to panic conditions, we destroyed many valuable possessions including my father's prized record collection, heirlooms, antiques, historic pictures, and other irreplaceable objects that could be construed as impinging on our loyalty to the United States. An inventory of such items would fill many pages and total thousands of dollars.

10) to paraphrase "Just as you have done unto the least of my brethren, so you have done unto me!" Perhaps I am hypersensitive or paranoid, but the offenses perpetrated against other Nikkei affected me personally:

- a) JACL leaders like Mike Masaoka and George Inagaki, in their rounds for JACL on behalf of the Nikkei, being repeatedly incarcerated by the local police;
- b) Issei camp internees being shot by over-zealous army guards;
- c) be-ribboned, amputee, Nisei veterans being refused haircuts, etc, etc.
- d) Nisei/American Citizens being evacuated, interned, denied human and civil rights without due process - -;

- e) all male Nisei/Americans, on the mere whim of some official, being abruptly denied their legal birthrights and declared to be de facto ENEMY ALIENS;

a sudden revelation awakened me -- not only to the rape of Nikkei constitutional rights but also -- to the realization that American democracy was being endangered for all Americans, so I vowed to do my utmost to persuade and to work with all like-minded Americans to take specific and concrete measures to strengthen and preserve the principles of American democracy equally without reservation to all its citizens. Again, to paraphrase -- "Each generation, in its own time, must do its own share to preserve and strengthen democracy, lest it perish!"

* * * * *

In 1952, I moved to Moses Lake, where the Columbia Basin JACL Chapter was formed in 1953 as a "political base" to amplify my efforts to promote JACL work, especially the anticipated JACL National Reparations Campaign. I began mentally compiling information to prepare for the eventual day if/when the opportunity came for me to begin my campaign of persuasion within JACL to promote reparations. The resulting text consisted of my experiences and conditions in the Spokane area during WWII so it more properly should have been named the "Spokane Plan" instead of the Columbia Basin Plan.

Copy of the Plan -- together with my correspondence with Bill Hosokawa plus two cover memos (which I identify as the Hosokawa/Yamamoto papers) -- submitted to your Commission with the outline for my oral testimony, will not be read but by reference hereto are to be considered a part and parcel hereof.

The rationale to initiate the reparations movement presented itself when a banquet speaker at a JACL convention implied that such remedial actions were long overdue. So, beginning with the 1970 Chicago National JACL Convention, I started my own preliminary feasibility study research by questioning JACL leadership at all

levels as to their feelings regarding reparations. The next six years were utilized by "evangelizing" reparations at every opportunity possible.

In February 1976, at my first National Board Meeting as PNWDC Governor, the first JACL National Reparations Campaign Committee (REPACAMP) was authorized to which I was appointed Chairman. In forming the Committee, National President Shig Sugiyama had most emphatically declared, "I'll be dadamned if I'll place a price on my constitutional rights ... I don't want a dime ... "

Thereupon, he began to stipulate specific charges for guidelines qualifying the charter by which REPACAMP was to function, namely: No direct individual payments, and to establish a trust foundation to receive the entire award to be dispensed under proper equitable guidelines.

Indicating that my thinking for the most part was the same as his, however I asked him to give REPACAMP an "open charter" without any restrictions since I was aware to the diametrically opposed sentiment of certain groups and if JACL proposed such restrictive guidelines there was absolutely no chance to reach any kind of consensus. I assured President Sugiyama our mutual views on reparations would be committed to paper and submitted at the first REPACAMP meeting as one of the options for consideration.

Originally no monies were to be paid to any individual but realizing the need for some modification in order to reach any kind of consensus, we provided in the first written draft of the Columbia Basin Plan that once the entire award from the government was placed into the Trust Foundation, the Board of Trustees would be authorized to make direct individual awards to qualified persons.

Our REPACAMP report was submitted to the National Council at the 1976 Sacramento National JACL Convention and was enthusiastically and unanimously accepted and adopted by the National Council. The REPACAMP Report had indicated that by February 1977, a consensus Bill would be ready for introduction to the U.S. Congress. Due to circumstances, a four year delay ensued in the JACL National Redress/Reparations Program. In the majority opinion of REPACAMP Executive

Committee members, the only logical and pragmatic results we could have reached in February 1976, would have concluded in Bills similar, if not identical to S. 1647 and H.R. 5499 which were passed by Congress last year to become Public Law 96-317 -- July 31, 1980, establishing your CWRIG.

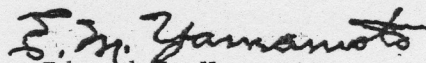
It has been my assumption that the the language of P.L. 96-317 can be interpreted broadly enough to include all Japanese Americans affected by E.O. 9066 even though they were neither interned nor evacuated. I assume further that all categories listed on my Testimony Outline under III. A. are, or can be, included within the Commission's responsibilities.

In my opinion, the exclusion (after the initial evacuation) of "all persons of Japanese ancestry" from Zone #1 of the Pacific Coast area without "martial law" is, in itself, a denial of Constitutional rights for freedom to travel and to seek employment, etc., to all Nikkei -- including residents of Hawaii -- thereby qualifying them for Redress/Reparations. I trust that your Commission's decisions will concur with my assumptions.

I am sure your Commission, upon due deliberation, will reach a just and equitable conclusion thereby enabling the Congress to prescribe a meaningful remedy for everyone concerned.

Thank you, very much!

Respectfully submitted,


Edward M. Yamamoto