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Oral Testimony of Hideo Hashimoto September 11, 1981

My name is Hideo Hashimoto. I am Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon, also a retired United Methodist minister. I am 70 years of age. My testimony is a brief summary of written testimony, which is largely based on articles and letters I wrote at the time.

I was a 31 year old minister of the Fresno Japanese Methodist Church on May 15, 1942, when I was evacuated to the Fresno Assembly Center with part of my congregation. Since Pearl Harbor there had been little hostility toward the Japanese in Fresno and a great deal of expressions of friendship in the larger community led by the Fair Play Committee. It was not until about February, 1942 that the professional anti-Japanese forces renewed their traditional activities and influenced politicians and military leaders for the wholesale evacuation of persons of Japanese descent. To this day, I remember very distinctly that one of the first things we did after arriving in the Assembly Center was to take an empty mattress ticking to a huge mound of hay and filling it up in the over 100 degree heat. Food preparation and toilet facilities were very primitive. Two hundred ninety-six persons, including me, out of 400 who ate at Mess Hall E became victims of food poisoning.

By August 27, 1942, I wrote: "The thing is beginning to crystalize in the feeling and mind of the internees. The poisoning effect of being torn away from home, concentrated into a small congested barb-wired enclosure is taking. . . . On the one hand, there is the impatient, nervous urge to be free again . . . In some cases, it is settling into a deep-seated but almost subconscious resentment and bitterness. . . On the other hand, there is a growing feeling of acceptance and adjustment, and a slow process of pauperization, . . . the feeling . . . 'What's the use.'"

Many opinion leaders were active in protesting the evacuation and demanding the release of evacuees.

Toward the end of October, our camp was closed and the evacuees were shipped in overcrowded train coaches all the way to Jerome Relocation Center, Denson, Arkansas. I served as a pastor of the Community Christian Church.

I wrote on May 31, 1943, "In all the different phases of the evacuation. . . . the basic issue is . . . how our Bill of Rights suffered a fundamental setback.

"On January 28, Secretary Stimson announced the organization of a separate Japanese American combat team consisting of volunteers, and requested compulsary filling of special Selective Service questionaire by all male citizens seventeen and above. At the same time, WRA required the registration of all residents for leave clearance. During the course of . . . this very confusing situation, the residents for the first time began to show outwardly the inner discontent which was brewing for nine months. People resented the segregation within the Army and unfair questions in the questionaire. . . The atmosphere became very tense for the following six or seven weeks. The camp divided. . . ."

The army recruiters came into the camp. Young men volunteered in significant numbers "to prove the loyalty of the Japanese Americans." One of my members wrote to me from somewhere in the southwest Pacific, dated 17 December 1943:

"There is one thing constantly on our minds here. What do we have to face when we get back from the war, weary, and poor? . . . Why you may ask. Well, the niseis they themselves had enough confidence and trust in the American way of life and they wouldn't be any thing else. How? That is a very easy question to answer. When the Army needed some nisei for some special work, the Army didn't draft them, but the dog who was kicked in the face once volunteered. . . . Toshi Teramoto."

I left the Relocation Center in June, 1943 to work in the Ministry to Resettlers under the sponsoreship of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago until June, 1944, when I was appointed to Grand Junction, Colorado. I returned to Fresno on March 19, 1945. On April 7, 1945, I wrote:

"The farmers who have returned to this area found their properties in various conditions, some in perfect order and some almost completely run-down, but most of them somewhere in between." The merchants and most city dwellers and farmers who were tenants or who sold their farms faced a very serious situation. Many started back

where they were 30 or 40 years before, but 30 or 40 years older as farm laborers or domestic workers.

Toshi Teramoto had written from the Pacific jungle, "Do we have to go back and fight second war which is harder to beat than Tojo's rats? . . . But still I say to myself. . . fight on till the end. And then we will have a strong and fool proof case to present to the people. Even to those in California and the cheap politicians."

Unfortunately, what he was so certin of, the thing which kept him going in the steaming jungle, vindication of the nisei, took a long time in coming. Who would have imagined that we would be presenting a testimony before a Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, in September, 1981, 38 years after he wrote those words!

About the time I returned to Fresno, there were incidents of shooting into the homes of returnees. I visited a member of my church, a widow, who had three sons in the U. S. Army, with three stars in the window, whose house was shot into at the waist level of the people inside the house. I served both as a pastor and hostel manager, using the church building for temporary housing for those returning.

After two years, I left for Pacific School of Religion for graduate work, where I received Th. D. degree in 1949. I taught in the Department of Religious Studies at Lewis and Clark College from 1949 until my retirement in 1976.

I like to emphasize that the greatest damage was done not to the evacuees, great as that was, but to the Constitution of the United States and to the American tradition of justice and fair play. I believe that a monetary redress, which while not adequate to compensate for the damages suffered, is essential to show the seriousness of the violation of human rights. That is the American way of redressing the wrongs done. It is important to show the serious resolve that no group will be the victims of such racial discrimination and injustice in the future.