

Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians

August 21, 1981

My name is Hideo Hashimoto. I am Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. I am also a retired Methodist Minister. I am 70 years of age.

I was a 30 year old unmarried minister of the Fresno Japanese Methodist Church on May 15, 1942, when I was evacuated. I was appointed to the church in June, 1940, after my graduation from Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Much of my testimony⁴ based on articles and letters I wrote, mainly to outsiders, at the time of evacuation and relocation.

On April 18, 1942, I wrote to my friends scattered throughout the United States, practically all of them non-Japanese:

"In all these days, the heart warming and encouraging experiences in the midst of darkness have been your thoughtful letters and the sympathy and help of those Caucasian friends who have helped us unstintedly."

Since Pearl Harbor there had been little hostility expressed to the Japanese in Fresno area and a great deal of expression of friendship and support. Fair Play Committee was formed. Fellowship of Reconciliation was a moving core of the Committee. It was not until about February, 1942 when the professional anti-Japanese forces renewed their traditional activities and influenced politicians and military leaders to agitate for wholesale evacuation of persons of Japanese descent.

". . . But to the people whom I serve these months have been time of uncertainty, fear, and heartbreaking disappointment. . . . The impact has been especially hard one for the Nisei, the American citizens of Japanese parentage. They were born in this country, were educated as Americans . . . and were thoroughly indoctrinated with the ideals of democracy and fair play. . . They have prized and have been proud of their citizenship . . . especially because their parents were denied the privileges of

naturalization and were discriminated greatly on that account. Suddenly they awoke on March 3, and discovered to their utter bewilderment, that their own government had classified them as class 3 "enemy aliens" ahead of German and Italian aliens. Restrictions swiftly followed. . . This is not entirely unlike the evacuation of Polish Jews by the Nazi regime, only ours is tinged with palliative, a bit of hypocritical humanitarianism (and thank God for that!)"

"However, when a feeling of being unjustly discriminated against is combined with physical hardship, it is next to unbearable."

Part of this letter was quoted by Professor Reinhold Niebuhr of Union Theological Seminary in Christianity and Crisis. He was very active in anti-Neutrality and pro-Intervention forces and contributed to the changing of political climate in the U. S. He joined with others, including John Dewey, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Norman Thomas and Clarence Pickett in a letter to President Roosevelt, which read, in part:

"We have seen no adequate evidence to convince us that an order giving complete power to the Secretary of War . . . to exclude from designated areas all citizens, or restrict their actions in any he sees fit, is either constitutional or democratic.

"Our deep desire is for a rescinding of your order which is so at variance with democracy and the American tradition.

"The whole process, we believe, is of itself a blow to our democracy and will gravely affect our reputation for rac^{ial} fair play among the nationals of the world. It is the type of discrimination which, throughout most of Asia will greatly strengthen the hands of our enemies."

After almost three weeks in the Fresno Assembly Center, I wrote:

"It was a long twenty-day period, a great deal happened: tearing oneself away from home, friends, and long standing associations, going through all the red-taped 'processing' with the inevitable and seemingly endless waiting. The last minute rush of settling property holdings (at outrageous losses in spite of the sincere, but inevitably ineffective efforts of the Wartime Civil Control Administration of the Army), of packing and sorting had worn everyone to the last inch of energy. The

actual evacuation . . . to the Assembly Center situated in the Fair Graounds . . . just outside the city limits, the induction, the baggage inspection, carrying belongings to the respective 'apartments.'"

To this day, I remember very distinctly taking an empty mattress ticking to a huge mountain of hay and filling it up in the over 100 degree heat. We literally hit the hay every night. One of the most unpleasant experiences was that of very primitive latrines which lacked privacy.

"This Assembly Center has a capacity of 5200, . . . is divided into 10 sections, 20 barracks, each divided into five apartments. . . Speaking of confinement, there are at least six or seven guard towers at strategic points. In this closely guarded concentration camp surrounded by fences with 8 or 9 strands of barb wire within a high wire fence of the fair grounds. Besides the guard towers the M. P.'s with bayoneted shotguns are patrolling the area just outside the fence.

"The rules and regulations and policies of this center are supposed to be determined by the Council elected by the citizens of this Center. But , of course, they are subject to Administration approval and the regulation established by the Army. But this does give some semblance of the democratic form of self-government. . . . I was elected as one of the five [members of the Council.]

"Already we had a severe case of food poisoning at one of the mess halls. 296 out of some 400 who ate at that certain mess hall "E" were affected. I was one of them."

"Initial stunning is wearing out and there is a slow realization of the injustice of this whole evacuation order. But it has not shaped itself into any sort of resentment or feeling of rebellion."

Shaping was taking place. By August 27, 1942, I wrote:

"Over three months have passed since coming into this assembly center, another name for a concentration camp. 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. Not to lead a normal life, which no one does these days, but to partake in the struggles for livelihood again, and to participate in the life and struggles of our nation at war. This impatience is increasing . . . In some cases, it is settling into a deep-seated but almost subconscious resentment and bitterness. Restlessness is ever present all over the camp. It is pathetic to note how the congestion and excessive attention is causing spoiled and nervous children. Already three persons were sent to the institutions for the mentally ill, just beyond the barb-wire fences are the green pastures. . . . Inside, the residents, 70% of whom are native-born American citizens of the State, are virtual prisoners. A limited number of visitors are allowed for fifty-minute periods. They are not to step outside the crowded Guest House supervised by the police (lest they see ACTUALITY and disseminate information?). . . There is no freedom of the press--every article or bit or news must go through triple (or more) censorship. . .

"On the other hand, there is a growing feeling of acceptance and adjustment, and a slow process of pauperization, the feeling that 'the government owes us a living' (which it does under these circumstances), 'What's the use?' 'Let's enjoy what we have.' Something has gone out of the heart of these people. . . . The paralyzing sense of easy-going indifference has overcome the great many of the inmates of the concentration camp."

Throughout our stay in Fresno Assembly Center, "outside" friends were very active and helpful to us. Rev. Melvin Wheatley, now the bishop of the Los Angeles Area of the United Methodist Church, then a young minister, served as one of our "messengers." On May 26, I wrote him asking him to bring me books, magazines, choir pieces, and a "10¢ tube of china cement."

National leaders were also active in protesting the evacuation and demanding

the release of evacuees. The parish paper of Fresno Japanese Methodist Church of September 1, 1942, "The Fresno Assembly Center Edition," contains a number of quotations, including the following:

"Blot on our Record"--Dr. Henry Leiper Smith, Christianity and Crisis.

"Every time a majority deprives a minority of the civil rights it undermines its own liberties, and the unity and world-wide influence of the nation. . . ." General Council of Congregational Christian Church, June 24, 1942.

"Since the Japanese evacuation and internment is a denial of Democracy and the Christian ethic, we believe that these interned Japanese should be given the opportunity for immediate release, with a cash indemnity and a guarantee of adequate protection. . ." Fellowship of Reconciliation, Northern California, June 6.

"The reason for evacuation considered most valid by many persons is that of 'protective custody' . . . But what a breakdown of Anglo-Saxon conception of justice in a democracy such thinking betokens! . . . The very words 'protective custody' (Schutzhaft) were 'made in Germany,' not here. . ." Professor Floyd Schmoie, University of Washington, in July Fellowship.

"The greatest victims of our procedure against the Japanese is not the Japanese themselves; it is our whole concept of liberty, our standard of justice, and the appeal which American democracy ought to be making to the oppressed peoples of the world." Norman Thomas, in Democracy and Japanese Americans.

Referring to his visits to Poston and Gila River Relocation Centers after visiting Fresno Assembly Center, Caleb Foote, later to become dean of the Law School University of California, wrote: ". . . Even in the WRA (War Relocation Authority) camps, the army is dominant; made it clear that the paramount need is to change our entire course. . . . If concentration camps continue, they will sink into the dry rot of cynicism and lack of concern, or harden with hatred and bitterness. . . . On the other hand, if we get them out, give them some hope, they can still flow in

another direction towards tolerance, sensitivity, love of truth. . . ." Caleb Foote, Northern California Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Toward the end of October, our camp was closed and the evacuees were shipped in overcrowded coaches all the way across the country to Jerome Relocation Center, Denson, Arkansas in the muddy Mississippi valley.

On May 31, 1943, I wrote:

"May 15 marked the anniversary of my entry into the Fresno Assembly Center. These last twelve months provided me with rich, unexpected opportunities for service and experience as well as heartaches in seeing the trampling down of civil liberties and a great deal of suffering on the part of American Japanese. . . I need not repeat the heat, dust, food, prison psychology of administration, and the humiliation of it all at the assembly center or the deadening and stagnating life in the relocation center. I find the War Relocation Authority (WRA) personnel and policy to be well-meaning and progressive, though not always efficient or wise in carrying out the policies. The present WRA plan of dispersal resettlement is a constructive and forward-looking one. However, we should not lose sight of the whole injustice of the evacuation especially for American citizens who comprise two-thirds of the total evacuated population.

"In all the different phases of the evacuation, a blot on our democracy, the basic issue is that of civil liberties--not so much what the American citizens of Japanese ancestry had to go through, for many in the nation and in the world are enduring immeasurably greater suffering, but how our Bill of Rights suffered a fundamental setback at the hands of small, organized prejudiced minorities. . .

"On January 28, Secretary Stimson announced the organization of a separate Japanese American combat team consisting of volunteers, and requested compulsory filling of special Selective Service questionnaire 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 explaining 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 questionnaires, and having to file leave clearance when they had no desire to leave. The atmosphere became very tense for the following six or seven weeks. The camp divided. Two persons were attacked on March 6. . . . Some extremists refused to register and later applied for expatriation or repatriation."

*The question read: "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic foes and forswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?" 78th Congress, 1st Session, House of Representatives, Report No. 717 Report and Minority Views of the Special Committee on Un-American Activities on Japanese War Relation Centers, p. 7.

I was serving as one of the pastors of the Community Christian Church.

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

" Sometimes it rains over 3" in an hour. . . . Then its like living in a Tuzkish bath.

"Life of the nisei in this man's army is by no chance an easy street nor a happy one. . . . 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? . . . Then I get to thinking that 'What are we fighting for?' Fight for the people who is against their own soldiers? Would a dog go back and lick a man's hand if he is continually kicking and hurting him? . . . [After five more pages, he writes:]

"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. I'd say that its a very hard thing to do but it was done. And every man in the service today is earning their worth of salt. . . .

"Your letters have been most welcomed and informative. I am very grateful to you and your like to working so hard when it looked like it was all in vain. But every indications in your last letter, I can see light in which you have been striving for. . . ."

"I sincerely remain,

s/ Toshi Teramoto"

Besides the volunteers to the Army, many young people and some middle aged, left the camp for school or employment. I felt my work in the camp was over. It was more important to work among those who were outside, some for the first time away from home and family, and also to help the people leave the camps where they were stagnating.

I wrote from Chicago on December 14, 1943:

"What I thought in June to be a three-month leave of absence from the Community Christian Church, Denson, Arkansas, has become an 'indefinite leave.' . . . [After and extended travel] I was appointed by our Annual Conference (Methodist) at Denver to the ministry to the resettlers of Japanese ancestry. . . . [under the auspices of] the Church Federation of Greater Chicago. . . ."

"And with all the vicious propaganda over the radio and in the press, many Chicagoans are going out of their way with natural and unaffected grace to make the new comers feel at home."

A year later, December 18, 1944, I wrote from Grand Junction, Colorado:

"For over a year, I served the people of Japanese descent who settled in Chicago. These newcomers faced problems even more perplexing than the ordinary newcomers to a large city. And the experiment of integrating a minority group into the community life was something quite new in the cities of the United States, where the pattern of racial and cultural segregation is set hard and fast, frequently with serious con-

sequences. . . "

"Rayko Mano and I were married on April 10, 1944. . . ."

"I was appointed by the Methodist conference to serve the people of Japanese descent on the Western slopes of Colorado. We moved out here in September. It was a welcome relief to be able to get away from the windy and sooty city, but it was not easy to leave the work in Chicago so far from really begun. The large majority of families here are evacuees and relocatees. . . .

"In the meantime, a large number of parents who are branded and treated as 'enemy aliens' are receiving telegrams from the War Department informing them that their sons are wounded, missing in action, or killed, mainly on the German-French front."

I wrote from Fresno, California, on April 7, 1945:

"We left Grand Junction, Colorado, on March 8, [after visiting Gila and Poston WRA centers, Evergreen Hostel in Los Angeles, and Bakersfield] arrived in Fresno (finally) on Monday night, March 19 . . . We stayed several nights with our friends the Ralph Mitchells, who are active members of the Fair Play Committee and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. There are several Caucasian families who are willing and glad to house returning persons for a few nights. Our house is still occupied, so at present we are 'camping out' in part of the church building -- that is, camping out without many of the WRA camp facilities. . . .

"The farmers who have returned to this area find 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 farmers who were tenants or sold their farms were in a very serious economic situation. Most of them stayed in camps as long as they could. Many of the returnees never regained their economic or social status. Many started back where they were 30 or 40 years before, but 30 or 40 years older, as farm laborers and common laborers.

In the middle of his 17 December 1943 letter, Teramoto had written:

"We all say that if the Japs don't get you, the jungle will. And it is very true. More than any thing in the world we want is to go home. What home did I say? To tell you the truth the people whom I am fighting for has deprived of that privilege. When I get back, I have no home nor a place to hang my hat. I feel so depressed when I get to think about this problem. And what is there in store for us that may survive this war? Do we have to go back and fight second war which is harder to beat than the Tojo's rats? What will the answers be, is constantly pounding in my mind and sometimes I get to thinking that it may be in vain. But still I say to myself that my feelings shouldn't get the best of me at present and 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 Toshi Teramoto was so certain of, the thing that kept him going in the jungle, vindication, took a long time in coming. Who would have imagined that we would be presenting a testimony before a Commission in September, 1981! When some soldiers returned "home" they were greeted with greater prejudice and hostility, enhanced by the fact of evacuation and detention. As I wrote on April 7, 1945, from Fresno, California,

"You have perhaps read about some of the recent shootings and other unfortunate incidents in this neighborhood. We are sorry to say that they are not all rumors. But that is not the total picture. We must keep in mind that we have some very good friends who are working very earnestly to change the atmosphere. So many of these incidents are directly or indirectly tied in with private economic relationships. Dangerous as these shootings are, they appear to us to be bluffs, aimed to scare the people into changing their minds about returning to their own farms and communities."

As it turned out I was a bit overly optimistic. Instead of being bluffs, they were much more serious. I visited a widow who had three sons in the U. S. Army, with three stars in the window, whose house shot into at the waist level or the level of

her head as she slept. And instead of "gradually fade away" as I predicted "as more people return," these incidents increased until the War Department sent a colonel to the Valley. Suddenly the shootings stopped. Besides economic considerations, politics were involved as usual. Evacuation accentuated the prejudice rather than abating it.

After a few weeks in the church building, we moved back into the parsonage and opened the church as a temporary hostel for those returning to the area. I was kept busy, not only as the pastor of both the Methodist and Congregational churches, but helping with the day-to-day activities of a hostel manager. I went around looking for housing, jobs, welfare, etc., as well as contacting the larger community. After two years, when people were becoming resettled, I left for Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley 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 to my retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1976. I have been active in Fellowship of Reconciliation and American Friends Service Committee. American Friends Service Committee endorses the redress.

The major emphasis of this testimony is to indicate through quotations from my writings at the time that evacuation and detention were the result of political activities of a small minority of professional anti-Japanese agitators and politicians who desired to benefit from the wartime situation. There were a great many non-Japanese citizens and organizations in these West Coast Communities and elsewhere that did everything in their power to try to stop the evacuation and to help work for the release and return of evacuees once they were removed from the area. In the meantime they did their utmost to try to make the situation bearable.

Again 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. However, I believe firmly that a monetary redress, while not adequate to compensate for the wrongs done, is essential to show the seriousness of the violation of human rights. Besides, it's the American way.