

COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION  
AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS  
PUBLIC LAW 96-317

TESTIMONY OF

KINZO YAMAMOTO, PH. D.

Madame Chairperson, Members of the Commission:

My name is Kinzo Yamamoto. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Commission. I have earned a doctorate in the field of sociology at Penn State University. I am employed as the Director of a Division of Analysis and Evaluation within the Health Resources Administration, Public Health Service. I have served as President of the Kings Park Civic Association in nearby Springfield, Virginia. I helped to found the Parklawn Asian American and Pacific Island Community, a Federal Asian-American employee group, and served as its first chairperson. As a member of the American Public Health Association I currently served on its Program Development Board.

My remarks are divided into three parts: pre-evacuation, camp life, and post evacuation. As a supplement to my remarks I would like to submit for this Commission's review a compendium of newspaper and magazine clippings regarding my father's relocation attempt. Further, you should note that my perceptions are based on the remembrances of an 11 to 14 year old which spanned my internment years of April, 1942 through April, 1945.

### Pre-Evacuation

\*My father, who was a farmer, started a fish market and sporting goods store in 1939. The shot-guns, rifles, and pistols plus the ammunition were deemed to be contraband and my father was told they would be seized. He sold what he could, gave some away, others were seized. We were never paid for the contraband that was seized.

\*Radios, flashlights even lanterns were seized out of the store and home. We do not know what happened to them and we were never paid for them.

\*We were instructed to pack and label all of our household goods with the understanding that the government would store them for us. We saw very little of our belongings again.

### Evacuation

\*What we could carry is what we had. Those articles left behind were for the most part, not seen again.

\*We were placed in the Turlock Assembly Center, I remember our being frisked for weapons. When it came to my turn to be searched, I showed my pocket knife with Hop-a-long Cassidy's picture on it. I asked if I could keep it-- the man said yes. Most of the others had their knives confiscated. I guess those knives had blades that were too long.

\*The food was terrible. I remember the corn-beef, or whatever that meat was, which had a greenish-yellow glaze.

\*Our quarters were horse stalls with partial head-high plywood walls on two sides, a back wall and completely open in the front.

\*My older sister tells of the embarrassment and shock to have an old man, who can read English, sit down next to her in the multi-hole out-house for females.

\*One night a Red Cross bag with medicine in it was tossed into our room. We understood that they were not allowed into the camp. I believe in the Red Cross to this day.

\*We heard that a Nisei garbage truck driver was shot - maybe killed. Perhaps the Commission might check on this incidence in your California hearings.

\*On leaving Turlock, we queued up to get on the train. The line moved erratically. Presently, we discovered why. An old lady was dragging a large bag. She was hurt, with a bandage around her head, maybe she had fallen. A soldier was giving her hell for being so slow and was pushing her with the point of his rifle. At that moment I thought to myself why doesn't that S.O.B. help her! Then again none of us could help for we were all carrying our maximum burden.

#### Camp Life:

\*It was hot. This was the place at which it was 120° in the shade.

\*Most of the teachers were good, except for my shop teacher who neglected to tell me how to use a jointer plane; and I cut off my middle finger. My older sister vividly recollects a frustrated teacher shout at the class that "they were all monkeys."

\*We worked on the farm during the summer for \$2.50/month. That wasn't bad. After all the adults were making \$16.00/month, and \$19.00 if you were a foremen, block manager or a doctor.

\*One day a large box arrived. It was our belongings from California. The box was all but empty. However, another box which carried our fishing poles also arrived. Out of the 9 poles we had packed in it, only 2 arrived, and they were broken. I have them at home just to remind me to be more tolerant of people, and of those hard times.

\* I saw Nisei G.I.s in their uniforms. Some were disabled. I wondered why they were imprisoned. One Nisei G.I. apparently shell-shocked and without proper rehabilitation counselling committed ritualistic suicide, harakiri, in our block.

\*We kids used to throw rocks at the sound truck which broadcasted President Roosevelt's speech for Japanese Americans to step forward and not resist the draft. You know the speech. It starts, "My fellow Americans . . . etc."

\*My father, George Yamamoto, petitioned the War Relocation Authority (WRA) to leave camp in December, 1943 to establish a new life in the East. The story of his relocation experience is documented in these newspaper clippings and a Life magazine article which I now submit to this Commission for the record. Briefly, my father, through the WRA had contracted to share-crop with Mr. Edward Kowalick in Great Meadows, New Jersey. The townspeople became extremely disturbed and agitated. There were meetings, followed by threats of violence, and finally one of Kowalick's sheds containing 7 tons of fertilizer and 3 celery washing machines was set afire. Mr. Kowalick was forced to break his contract. My father and 4 other Isseis were asked to leave.

The WRA, though well intentioned, had struck out again. My father had previously been kicked out of Rehobeth, Delaware.

As a fitting ending to this document I have included a 1966 newspaper interview which summarized my father's views on America. By the way, he remains a patriot.

### Post Evacuation

\*The Yamamoto family received no help, except for travel tickets to go from the Gila Rivers Relocation Center to a farm owned by Mr. Herman Heston, a Quacker, in Newtown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

\*Because of our quasi-Federal status we boarded a troop train from Chicago to Philadelphia. And, were it not for some super G.I.s on the train our trip would have been disastrous, especially for my older sister who was being molested by one G.I. but saved by another.

\*Our new home was a barracks similar to Gila Rivers, except we felt the chicken house next door looked similar to ours.

\*We worked hard. Some of us kids on occasion did not go to school; we had to work.

\*We paid back personal loans on debts incurred while in camp.

### Compensation

1. I believe an injustice was done by the U.S. Government by the internment of the Japanese American people. In addition, there was perpetrated some very uncareful attention to human rights which should have been monitored more closely by the authorities. For these transgressions I request and I would accept a monetary compensation that is commensurate with the indignities suffered at the level set by the American conscience.

2. In addition, I recommend that an amount of \$200 million dollars be established in a public trust fund for educational purposes; to be used primarily to incorporate the Asian perspective into American history. Hopefully, part of the funds could be used to re-draft a broader view of the polyglot nature of our American heritage which can be introduced into our schools, and amend the parochial view that civilization and its amenities came only across the Atlantic.

3. Lastly, I recommend that any unclaimed or unassignable personal monetary compensations be placed in the public trust fund as described in recommendation no. 2.

4. Whatever the collective wisdom that should arise from these hearings, I implore this Commission to act in reasonable haste, least those who suffered the most go to their Maker without the certain knowledge that America cares.

I thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Kinzo Yamamoto*

Kinzo Yamamoto, Ph. D.

Springfield, Virginia 22151