

SUMMARY OF MR. GEORGE TAKEI'S
TESTIMONY TO
U.S. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
CIVIL SERVICE, POST OFFICE AND GENERAL SERVICES
August 16, 1984

Mr. George Takei will discuss his personal experience and recollections as a child confined during World War II and the multi-impact of that experience upon his family.

TESTIMONY OF MR. GEORGE TAKEI

Submitted to

U.S. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE

CIVIL SERVICE, POST OFFICE, & GENERAL SERVICES

I am George Takei and I come before you to testify on the evacuation and incarceration of American citizens of Japanese ancestry as one who lived through that experience as a child, and in all candor, I must say that I was really too young to understand what I had lived through.

I was too young to understand, but I do remember the barbed wire fence from which my parents warned me to stay away. I remember the sight of high guard towers. I remember soldiers carrying rifles, and I remember being afraid.

I could not understand, but I can recall the chaos and confusion surrounding the three moves that we had to make, first to the horse stables of Santa Anita Race Track, then to the swamps of lower Arkansas, and finally to the desert of Tule Lake, California.

I remember women weeping as our bundles were piled onto trucks. I remember armed guards herding us about, and I remember the fear that I felt.

I could not understand, but I remember waking up in the middle of some nights and hearing my parents and a few of their friends in hushed discussions; sometimes my mother would

be crying and my father always seemed deeply worried.

I was too young to understand what they were talking about, but I remember the tension and the anxiety.

I lived through those years of incarceration, too young to know the anguish that my parents and other internees had been enduring. Their suffering and their loss was something I came to understand only after the fact.

But my childhood memories of the fear, anxiety and tension are vivid and very real. After the war my growing understanding of those events, combined with my memories, produced in me a strange and gnawing sense of shame about my years spent behind barbed wire.

Indeed, I felt an uneasy sense of shame about being Japanese. On the first days of school when the teacher taking roll would inevitably mispronounce my Japanese name, I would not correct that mispronunciation. Instead, I myself assumed that mispronunciation, thinking that that made me that much less Japanese.

There was a teacher I remember who would casually refer to me as "that Jap boy." I remember the sting each time she called me that, but I bit my tongue and I didn't complain.

The shadow cast by the camp experience reached far into the post-war period of my boyhood and stayed in my head a long, long time.

In school we were taught glowingly of the tradition of

America, the heritage of individual dignity and liberty.

For us, however, our American heritage is, in fact, the loss of freedom and liberty. Ours is a story of indignity and incarceration. Ours is a case of the failure of the American ideals. Because of this history those ideas of individual dignity and freedom are that much more precious to me.

We appreciate the value of our American ideas as few Americans today can.

I have come to understand that as noble and as precious as our American ideals are, they can also be very fragile. Democracy can only be as good or as strong or as true as the people who make it so.

It is my belief that America today is strong enough and confident enough to recognize a grievous failure. I believe that it is honest enough to acknowledge that damage was done. And I would like to think that it is honorable enough to provide proper restitution for the injury done.

For in a larger sense, injury was done to those very ideals that we hold as fundamental to the American system. We, all of us as Americans, must strive to redeem those precepts that faltered years ago when I was a boy.

And in that role as an Americans, I urge restitution for the incarceration of American citizens of Japanese ancestry. I urge the United States Congress to adopt S.2116 as proper restitution. And in so doing, would move to strengthen the integrity of America.