

Testimony of Mas Odoi on S. 2116
before the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee
on Civil Service, Post Office, and General Services

SUMMARY

My testimony has two parts:

1. Oppose approval by the Senate of Personal Justice Denied, the report by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, that calls the World War II evacuation of Japanese Americans a "grave injustice" caused by "racial prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

Facts are presented to discredit unwarranted implications and conclusions which unfairly maligns America and the American people.

Instead of validating such a doctrinaire account by researchers who are totally unfamiliar with the complex circumstances of the chain of events, Senators are urged to read two books, written from personal experience: 1. Nisei, the Quiet Americans, by Bill Hosokawa, who was evacuated from Seattle, Washington to Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming. 2. Uprooted Americans, by Dillon S. Myers, director of the War Relocation Authority.

2. Restatement of a community benefit redress plan, which provides as follows:

(1) All former evacuees receive credit for \$10,000, to be paid in installments of \$1,000 a year for ten years, which can be donated to any established charitable, religious, or public service organizations of their choice.

(2) A token monetary award be given to each evacuee, the amount to be determined by Congress.

An official poll of all Japanese American evacuees should be taken to obtain a consensus of what type of redress plan they favor.

Because of intimidation by pro-redress extremists against moderate Japanese American evacuees, I am a lone voice amid a sea of embittered witnesses, who graphically detail the worst aspects of this unfortunate occurrence. Please give due weight to the fact that my brief statements may typify the feelings of countless other "Quiet Americans."

Note that as a Purple Heart veteran of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, who enlisted from a relocation center, I have devoted tens of thousands of hours in the past 40 years working for a better America. Some of my opponents seem to put personal interest above the welfare of their own country!

Mas Odoi

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Coercive tactics employed by a few extremists, demanding redress for the World War II mass removal of Japanese Americans from the Pacific coast, have been deplored by thousands of former evacuees. Yet, because their moderate voices were not heard, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians issues a report that the evacuation was a "grave injustice" caused by "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure in political leadership." (Personal Justice Denied, p. 18)

Granted, we were innocent victims of a cataclysmic chain of events and suffered in countless ways, psychological as well as financial. But the United States government must be given due credit for trying to make the best of an unpleasant situation.

As part of my testimony, may I submit copies of three articles I have written on this subject.

1. Printed March 19, 1976 in the Pacific Citizen, my letter, titled "E O. 9066 Rescinded," suggests a redress plan, which was adopted by the Japanese American Citizens League in its 1978 biennial convention in Salt Lake City. Because the award was changed from \$1,000 to \$25,000 per evacuee, I have opposed it.

2. The poll on a community benefit redress plan, printed February 1984 in the Gardena Valley News, received mixed response.

3. My article, printed July 15, 1983 in the United Methodist Reporter, tries to outline facts of the evacuation in its true perspective. The title is misleading, because it relates only to my opposition to William Hohri's lawsuit for \$25 billion.

The purpose of my testimony is two-fold:

- A. To point out intolerable distortions in the CWRIC report.
- B. To present a simple community benefit redress plan, which is fair and capable of implementation without undue administrative costs.

A. Critique of the CWRIC Report

Three major factors contributed to the one-sidedness of the CWRIC report:

1. None of the panel members had familiarity with the vast, far-reaching circumstances surrounding the evacuation, except Judge William M. Marutani, who was a small child at the time.

2. The commission was composed almost entirely of liberal intellectuals, who tend to favor ideals over the realities of a dog-eat-dog world.

3. Most importantly, views of moderate Japanese American evacuees were not heard! Ample proof of the intimidating tactics employed by redress extremists are the boos and catcalls to which everyone who opposed redress was subjected to in CWRIC hearings across the nation.

As a Purple Heart veteran of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, who has spoken out against unfair condemnations of our country's actions, I have been the target of verbal abuse and

painful recriminations for over twelve years. Many Japanese Americans, who have privately expressed support for me, admit they dare not state their views publicly.

As an exhaustive study of the details of the evacuation, Personal Justice Denied, the report by the CWRIC, has considerable merit. But its attempts to generalize fails abysmally, because the most vital elements are too broad and abstract to be reduced to factual statements.

The following will help to prove my point:

1. The well-intentioned conclusion that the evacuation was caused by "race prejudice" and "war hysteria" is almost comically false. It overlooks the most obvious fact that Japan launched a devastating surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, killing thousands of American soldiers and that it aroused a thunder storm of national outrage. It is a natural human reaction, unfair as it may seem, for anger to be directed against nationalities of countries that resort to such ruthless tactics, regardless of race!

2. The implication that the whole evacuation process was an unmitigated evil is patently untrue. Any group picture of people in relocation centers shows smiling, carefree faces.

A crucial unanswered question is: Would Japanese Americans on the whole have suffered less if they had remained in hotbeds of anti-Orientalism instead of being moved to the safety and relative comfort of the centers? As pointed out in my article in the UMR, living in a convivial atmosphere with other Japanese American had many advantages over existing in a bitterly hostile environment for the duration of the war.

3. Little credit is given to the extraordinary effort by untold thousands of Caucasians to help Japanese Americans throughout this trying period. Uprooted Americans, a story of the evacuation by Dillon S. Myers, director of the War Relocation Authority, gives a truer picture of the Japanese American experience.

The question of monetary redress should be left to the good judgment of honorable members of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Undoubtedly, innocent evacuees had considerable financial losses and have suffered deeply from being branded "national security risks" and incarcerated in remote inland camps. Even a token payment would assuage the terrible hurt, which lingers in the subconscious, even 40 years afterwards.

But, as a combat veteran, I oppose such awards at the price of defamation of my country. And I am sure that the large majority of Japanese Americans feel the same!

I urge this committee to categorize the CWRIC report as a liberal point of view of the evacuation, prepared by researchers from hearsay evidence. Its doctrinaire findings should be balanced by two more authoritative books by men who wrote from personal experience: 1. Nisei, the Quiet Americans, by Bill Hosokawa,

who was evacuated to Heart Mountain Relocation Center from Seattle, Washington and 2. The aforementioned Uprooted American, by Dillon S. Myers, Director of the War Relocation Authority.

B. The Community Benefit Redress Plan

This redress plan, described in the enclosed letter to the Gardena Valley News, may be summarized as follows:

1. All former evacuees receive credit for \$10,000, paid in installments of \$1,000 a year for ten years, which can be donated to established charitable, religious, or public service organizations of their choice.

2. A token monetary award be given to each evacuee, the amount to be determined by Congress.

Most responsible Japanese Americans favor some type of community fund for redress. But it is almost impossible to fairly allocate the money to the hundreds of organizations around the country.

It is a simple matter to have evacuees determine where the money should go. The results can be computerized; and a single check can be sent to receiving institutions periodically.

It is only common sense that a mature group, like Japanese American evacuees, should be given an opportunity to help decide what kind of redress they should receive. It is doubtful if the statements of pro-redress leaders reflect the feelings of the majority, because they enjoy the most minimal support from the evacuees themselves!

It should not be difficult to send an official questionnaire to every evacuee to find a consensus of opinions. The Japanese American communities can be asked to inform the people of the pros and cons of various redress plans.

From the response, Congress can develop equitable legislation that is satisfactory to all persons concerned, including the American people.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to disprove the mountain of misinformation regarding the complex issue of evacuation in a few pages. The bottom line is: How do the majority of Japanese Americans feel about the evacuation and redress?

A simple, unsigned questionnaire, sent to all Japanese American evacuees would provide more valid answers than the millions of words, written and spoken, on this subject!

May I urgently request this committee to take such action; so that the issue which has sundered the Japanese American community can at long last be resolved!

Sincerely,

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Phone: [REDACTED]

of individuals from within the Asian American community—performers, musicians, technical advisers, administrative helpers, community organizations, etc. The making of this film has been an unforgettable experience, one we shall cherish, along with the many new friendships developed from the cooperative efforts of so many fine people.

We also wish to publicly express our continuing admiration for John Korty, who produced and directed the film. It was our belief from the beginning that his exceptional honesty and sensitivity made him the ideal director, and that belief has been strengthened during the past two years.

It is a great misfortune that he has been libeled in print, called a "white racist" and viciously linked with the Nazi party, and the Ku Klux Klan. This is an unjust assessment of a man with such high professional, moral and aesthetic standards. In addition to his years of film-making experience he brought a great deal of humanity and compassion to the difficult task of adopting our book into film.

My sisters and brothers and other relatives of the Wakatsuki family have also expressed their confidence that John Korty made every effort to do an honest film. If my parents were living, I know that they too would be proud of the result.

Like any film, of course, this one will be subject to criticism. We sincerely hope that each viewer will be the ultimate judge of its values and merits, keeping in mind that it is a drama, not a documentary, and that it is not intended to be the story of every Japanese American family. It is only the story of one family. Some of the experiences depicted will surely be familiar to many former internees; but in no way was it intended that the book or the screenplay be representative of all the families interned during those years.

Indeed, there are many more and many different kinds of stories to be told before the full meaning of the internment years is brought to light. It is our hope that this film will lead to other accounts from that crucial era of our common past.

JEANNE WAKATSUKI
HOUSTON

Santa Cruz, Calif.

'Concentration Camps'

Editor:

I can understand both viewpoints regarding application of the term, "concentration camps", to the so-called relocation centers of WW2.

Semanticist Hayakawa is correct in his statement to the effect that "concentration camps" in the minds of the vast majority of U.S. citizens is substantially different from

of individuals from within the Asian American community—performers, musicians, technical advisers, administrative helpers, community organizations, etc. The making of this film has been an unforgettable experience, one we shall cherish, along with the many new friendships developed from the cooperative efforts of so many fine people.

It wasn't the same, but that's still terrible! How could such a thing happen in this country." In my opinion and experience, to convey erroneous impressions intentionally to, perhaps, gain greater sympathy or shock effect will invariably cause a "backlash" or antagonism for having lied. I feel justified to consider an intentional misrepresentation as a lie.

Webster's dictionary as it stands now is a very poor source for defining the generally accepted vision of "concentration camp". Hayakawa is understandably concerned with semantics and does not deserve the heated attacks made by some JACL members. (The attack on him regarding the subject of reparations is another matter. We have embraced, contrary to Dr. Hayakawa, the good of American philosophy that enough money pay off soothes all conscience and hurt.)

How about all agreeing to the term, "detention camps"? Peace!

I would like to hear Shig Sugiyama break his silence on this issue of terminology. Right is right, regardless of the source.

RICHARD KAWANISHI,
CPA

St. Louis, Mo.

E.O. 9066 Rescinded

Editor:

Rescinding Executive Order 9066 is but the first step in correcting the injustice of the forced relocation of loyal Japanese Americans from the Pacific Coast states during World War II.

Now the JACL should move swiftly to obtain financial redress for the substantial losses that we suffered.

May I suggest that Congress should pass a law disbursing \$1,000 to all evacuees and to those who relocated voluntarily during this period, regardless of age or citizenship. If deceased, payment can be made to heirs.

There are many advantages to this plan, some of which are:

1—It can be easily implemented. Many congressmen and other public officials have favored such restitution; but they could not take action because we have not presented a workable plan which has the general approval of the evacuees.

2—The cost is not excessive, and almost all of the benefits will go directly to evacuees, with minimal administrative costs.

3—It will benefit the Japanese American community in many ways. Some funds could be donated to worthy public service organizations.

There are details to be ironed out; but little can be gained by temperizing any longer. Of what value is larger sums if we are dead and buried by the time we receive them?

MASARU ODOI

Gardena.

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Letters to the Editor

Redress plan

EDITOR—Four decades ago, Japanese Americans turned a crushing disaster into a crowning triumph!

Object of suspicion and hatred because of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan, we were moved en masse from the Pacific coast. We were dispossessed of home, property, and freedom without due process of law and placed behind barbed wire in isolated wastelands.

But we did not lose faith in America. Our young men enlisted in the army from the relocation centers and proved with their blood that "Americanism is a matter of heart and mind, not of race or ancestry!"

Today, we Niseis have another opportunity to demonstrate our devotion to the highest ideal of Americanism!

As bills for redress for our evacuation are being considered in Congress, let us put the welfare of our country above our own. Instead of demanding multibillion dollars of personal restitution, let us put our emphasis on benefiting our communities.

There have been favorable comments on the following redress proposal:

1. All Japanese Americans who were forced to move from the Pacific Coast states during World War II receive credit for \$10,000, which they can donate to any established religious, charitable, or public service institution. If granted in installments of \$1,000 a year for 10 years, it will be a minimal drain on our national budget, yet have maximum value for worthy causes we espouse.

2. In recognition of the injustice and the considerable losses suffered, each evacuee receives a token monetary award, the amount to be determined by Congress. This plan would help us demonstrate our love for our fellow Americans and set an example of selflessness to our litigation minded legal system.

Because the sufferer of injustice has the right to dispose of his claim as he sees fit, this plan can be implemented only if approved by the majority of Japanese American evacuees. The Gardena Valley News can perform

an invaluable service by sponsoring such a newspaper poll for its readers. Participation by non-Japanese Americans of our multiracial city would help us gauge the reaction of the country as a whole to the redress question.

Enclosed is a suggested poll, which offers alternatives to those who favor redress.

Making an effort to find equitable solutions to this matter would be a fitting tribute to our brothers, who gave their lives for their country — and for ourselves!

—MAS ODOI
Torrance

Redress poll

1. Do you favor monetary redress for Japanese American evacuees of World War II? Yes No.

Remarks: _____

2. Check squares below to indicate approval:

A. Personal monetary redress of \$.....

B. Community benefit plan.

1. Each evacuee receive credit for \$..... a year for ... years to be donated to any charitable, religious, or public service organization of his choice.

2. Token monetary compensation be awarded to each evacuee, the amount to be determined by Congress.

C. Other redress plans: _____

Remarks: _____

(Non-Japanese Americans are invited to register their opinions.)

Information about responder:

Japanese American ... Non-Japanese American ... Former evacuee

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