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## YESTERDAY AND TODAY

We are here to observe the Asian American Heritage Week, and, to me, the very term Asian American Heritage evokes many impressions. We speak of ourselves collectively as Asian Americans, but among us are included different national groups: the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, the Pacific Island peoples, and East Indian. We are multi-ethnic among ourselves, yet we are related by our Asian origins, by our being nonwhite and a minority group in this vast country.

This panel is addressing the exclusion and detention of the Japanese Americans during World War II. I, as a Nisei, second generation Japanese, was among the thousands who were removed from our homes on the Pacific Coast and held in internment camps for the duration of the war. The events of the war affected not just my people on the West Coast, but involved many others. This you may gain from our next speaker, Jean Sanford Lundstedt.

It has been said that the Americans of Asian and Pacific Island ancestry have been the least vocal of the minorities in this country. The silence resulted from a long history of racism and the fact that "the melting pot" was never a reality for the Asian immigrant generation. But the younger generations today are speaking out and making themselves heard and known.

For the Orientals, their role in this country began ten years before the American Civil War, with the coming of Asian immigrants to the West Coast. Japanese immigration began in 1890, and the Japanese immigrants first settled in Hawaii to work on the sugar and pineapple plantations. Then they began coming to the West Coast as agricultural laborers, and by the end of the 19th century, there were about 16,000. Before long they became the target of anti-Oriental discrimination.

A pattern of anti-Oriental hostility was already established, a carry-over from the earlier years when the Chinese people came to settle in the United States. The agitation against the Japanese started in 1919, three years after I was born. The anti-Oriental crusade dominated West Coast politics and affected the course of national affairs through three quarters of a century. This racism which continued in the stereotyping of Asians, in institutional neglect and barriers to opportunities, was a factor that militated against the Japanese after Pearl Harbor.

With this sketchy background, let me take you back in time to the Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, at 7:55 a.m. At that hour, I was giving my little son, not quite three months old, his morning feeding, and I had just turned on the radio. As I listened to the announcer presenting his grim news of the attack by enemy Japanese aircraft on Pearl Harbor, I was stunned. My immediate thought circled the question of how we Japanese living in this country would be affected. I soon learned. All Japanese funds were frozen; credit became difficult. By that night I found that I could not even buy milk at the corner grocery store where I had been going for months. Because of prohibitions against trading with the enemy, grocers refused to sell food.

In the panicky weeks after Pearl Harbor, the feeling against the Japanese ran high. A superpatriot chopped down four of the Japanese cherry trees along the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C. The Tennessee State Department of Purchasing declared "open season on Japs, no license required", and an elderly Japanese man and his wife were shot and killed in their beds in El Centro, California. The U.S. Attorney General reported 36 instances of crime and brutality against the

West Coast Japanese between December 8, 1941, and March 31, 1942. And my brother Roy enlisted in the United States Army.

Immediately with the beginning of the war, the Department of Justice, through the Federal Bureau of Investigation, had arrested enemy agents and persons known to have hostile intent. There were numerous repeated investigations and arrests wherever and whenever there were suspicions, and we were in constant fear of unexpected FBI raids.

It was when the Japanese problem was transferred to the War Department that the unprecedented abrogation of the civil rights of a racial minority occurred. Then there was no consideration of individuals, whether innocent or guilty, citizen or alien. They were all subject to the control of the Western Defense Command, established on December 11, 1941, when the West Coast was declared a theater of war, with General DeWitt as military commander.

By the end of January, 1942, public opinion identified the Japanese on the West Coast with the enemy. We were already under curfew and had to be off the streets between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. We found it increasingly hard to shop or market for our large family. Public temper became even more spiteful.

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order no. 9066, authorizing the War Department to set up military areas and to exclude any or all persons of Japanese descent from these areas, and this responsibility was delegated to General DeWitt.

None of us knew when our evacuation <sup>order</sup> would be issued. But by a series of 108 separate orders, DeWitt ordered all Japanese removed from the West Coast, which included all of Washington, Oregon and California, and a portion of Arizona. The explanation given at that time for the mass evacuation was that of military necessity. Since no preparation had been made for so huge a mass exodus, fairgrounds and race-tracks commandeered for use as temporary assembly centers, and there were 18 of these. In these places the Army Engineers constructed primitive barracks to house more than 110,000 people.

With others living around the San Francisco Bay region, my family was sent from Berkeley to the Tanforan Race Track in San Bruno, south of San Francisco. In Berkeley the larger families were moved out first, and with eleven in ours, we were among them. The morning of our departure, a sunny April morning, we gathered at a church, surrounded by military guards with drawn bayonets. We were taken by chartered buses from Berkeley to the Tanforan Race Track, where we were given the family identification number of 13423 and assigned housing in horse-stalls in one corner of the race-track grounds. Because of the size of our family we were permitted to have two horse-stalls.

Here at the race-track, we were introduced to communal living -- eating in a mess-hall, bathing in doorless bath stalls and shower cubicles, observing curfew, answering to a roll-call morning and evening, under surveillance by the Caucasian camp police. Privacy and civil liberties, <sup>with</sup> at a minimum. The entire assembly center was closely guarded, surrounded by watch-towers manned by armed sentries, and searchlights played around the camp at night.

Churches were established early to bolster the morale of the distressed and humiliated people, so there were Protestant, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist and Buddhist groups, the last the largest congregation. Another help to morale was the opportunity to work, and the physically able-bodied worked. The wages were set at eight dollars for the unskilled; twelve dollars for the skilled; and

sixteen dollars for the professionals (doctors, teachers, and those in administrative positions). Later in the permanent internment camp, the salary scale was increased to twelve, sixteen and nineteen dollars for the various levels. In addition, a clothing allowance of \$3.75 was issued to each worker.

Schools were eventually established also for the adults and children, and volunteer resident teachers were employed. To the young people who had grown in closely knit families, camp life meant the disruption of orderly living, and they needed the stabilizing influence of a regular school program. A group of us who were recent graduates from the universities in Berkeley and Palo Alto opened a "high school", so-called, and to our amazement, 500 students registered for our classes of their own accord. The curriculum was based on the core curriculum of the California school system. I taught English, because that had been one of my majors at the university.

In the August of that year, we began to hear rumors that we would be moved to a more permanent camp, a relocation center in Utah. Ten internment, or concentration, camps were built from California to Arkansas, and managed <sup>under</sup> a civilian agency, the War Relocation Authority, we commonly referred to as WRA. <sup>^</sup>None one knew until September when the relocation would begin. Again we went through the unrest of preparing, packing and crating. The first group that left from Tanforan was the advance work group of 244 people, all volunteers, to make way for the induction of those who were to follow. Among them was my brother Bill, a bacteriologist, on the sanitary engineering crew.

My family arrived at the Central Utah Relocation Center, after three days' travel on a rickety train, on October 3, 1942. The Utah camp, which we called Topaz, after a mountain in the distance, was situated out in the desert and was a mile square in size. The center contained 42 city blocks, but resembled nothing we had known of cities. Each block consisted of 14 resident barracks, 24 feet wide and 96 feet long, partitioned into rooms, with the smallest rooms at the ends of the barracks for a couple, and the larger rooms in the middle for family units. Here again we were permitted to have the two center rooms. The 14 barracks in a block were arranged in two rows with an alley in between. In this alley-way stood the mess-hall and the laundry-latrine buildings. The population of Topaz numbered approximately 8,000, with most of the residents from the San Francisco Bay area.

As the people settled in and adjusted to the rigors of bitterly cold winters, the ever prevalent dust storms, and the harshness of camp life, we tried to live as normally as possible. Schools, churches, and libraries were again established, and I taught English and Latin in the Topaz High School, as well as in the Basic English department of the Adult Education Division. Later I transferred to the Topaz Public Library, which influenced my career choice after I relocated to Cincinnati.

Many Nisei took advantage of the "indefinite leave" program, by which, after proper clearance by the government and assurance of a job "outside", they could leave camp and settle in cities in the Midwest and in the East. By their leaving before the camps closed, they enabled their Issei parents to join them. A number of the students I taught in the high school applied for admission to colleges and universities and continued their schooling. I am still in touch with some of them.

At the beginning of 1943, the Army decided to recruit a Japanese American combat team. This combat team, drawn from Hawaii and the camps, was the much-decor-

ated 442nd Regimental Combat Team, whose heroism and battle record gradually turned public opinion favorably towards us. I realized their sacrifice, when some years ago I visited their cemetery in Honolulu, where rows and rows of inscribed plaques are set in the ground, with names and regiment, in a peaceful setting. In our own camp we had a number of Bronze Star and Purple Heart mothers.

In December, 1944, the Supreme Court ruled that citizens whose loyalty had been found unquestionable could not be held in camps. The Army then decided to rescind the exclusion order. Protests against the return of the Japanese to the West Coast continued for a while, but after the surrender of Japan, our place in this country was restored. So the camps closed down. Members of my family had relocated to Cincinnati, so by the time our camp closed, my parents, my youngest brother Lee and my son and I were the only ones remaining, and we left for Cincinnati the end of October, 1945.

Years and years later the government saw fit to name a Commission on War-time Relocation and Internment of Civilians to record the evacuation and internment of the Japanese. The Commission held meetings in a number of cities to hear the testimonies of those who had been interned. I was a witness at the Chicago hearing of the Commission in September, 1981, and was made keenly aware that the burden of memories, many sad and heavy, is still kept in the minds of many. The Commission report, entitled Personal Justice Denied, has been published, but it does not refer to redress for the Japanese Americans.

A group, called the Japanese American Redress Committee, is now advocating redress as a movement towards enfranchisement. The members involved are campaigning for public awareness concerning the issue of the World War II incarceration of American citizens and legal residents of Japanese ancestry. So, you see, the silence we were known for is no longer taken for granted. A class action<sup>is</sup> being filed to provide restitution to all 120,000 victims. It will delineate 21 causes of action supported by allegations of fact. It will seek \$10,000 per cause of action, the maximum permitted by this type of action, or \$210,000 per displaced person.

It is said that a friend of mine, James Omura, whom I knew as a fellow-writer in the mid-1930's, may be the earliest source of the redress movement. In April, 1942, he attempted to initiate a movement to redress the injustices of the camps but received no support. Reparations were discussed at the 1970 national convention of the Japanese American Citizens League held in Chicago. As a result, the Seattle Redress Committee was formed in the early 70's. It was this committee that realized the issuance of "An American Promise", the presidential proclamation which terminated Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1976. Two years later this group launched a series of consciousness-raising events called Days of Remembrance in different communities and campaigned to rebut the anti-redress statements of Senator Hayakawa. The National Committee for Redress was formed within the JACL and met on March 3, 1979 to decide to support legislation for a federal fact-finding commission, and from this initial group developed the National Council for Japanese American Redress. While the Commission was conducting its hearings, the National Council for Japanese American Redress began its voluminous research and the raising of funds to battle against the statutes of limitations and sovereign immunity. The three attempts at Coram nobis in San Francisco, Portland and Seattle bear witness to the action being taken.

At the International Conference on Relocation and Redress: The Japanese American Experience held in Salt Lake City in March of this year, I heard the spokesman for the Japanese Council for Japanese American Redress conclude his presentation with; "Let the people judge. Let the people be judged."