

Testimony on S. 2116 before
The Subcommittee of the Committee on
Appropriations

Senator Ted Stevens, Chairman

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Let us look for a moment at the wartime relocation of Japanese-Americans from a strictly Japanese point of view, that is, the way it was seen by the Issei, or the immigrant generation.

Every Japanese is born into a system of obligations --- to his Emperor, to his feudal lord, to his parents. These are known as The on, or the obligations he must fulfill throughout his life. As an immigrant, he may or may not continue to revere the Emperor, but as long as he is here, he has on towards the President and Government of the United States.

President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 required that Japanese, both U.S. citizens and non-citizens, be removed from designated military zones, which were the three coastal states and a part of Northern Arizona. The Japanese hastened to comply with the order, despite tremendous difficulties of preparation for travel, disposition of businesses and property, arrangements for transportation, thus showing themselves to be, by Japanese standards of on, men and women of honor.

Of course, to be uprooted from one's home and business and moved to strange surroundings under military orders was a painful and humiliating experience, but another Japanese moral imperative, "giri to one's name," which means "self-respect" or what Germans call "die Ehre," comes into effect. Giri does not permit one, when deeply distressed, to weep, scream, make a scene or create a disturbance. One has to do what one has to do quietly and with dignity.

My wife and I were living in Chicago when all this was happening, following with intense interest what was happening to the Japanese in California. We read accounts in newspapers and pictorial

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weeklies; we saw newsreels. What was impressive to us was the dignity, grace and realism of Japanese behavior under these difficult and humiliating circumstances.

The gap between the Issei who went to camp and the Sansei (their grandchildren) who are now pressing for redress is revealed by the contempt shown by the latter for the former. A statement issued by the Seattle Chapter of the Japanese-American Citizens League says that the Issei went to camp without a struggle because they had been brainwashed by white racism into believing in their own racial inferiority. What incredible rubbish!

The younger Japanese-Americans, having learned to analyze the world in the trendy language of Black Panther ideology, have no idea what gave backbone and character to their parents and grandparents in times of stress.

Among those whose lives were seriously disrupted by the relocation order were the students attending colleges and universities in California, Washington and Oregon. John H. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, requested Clarence Pickett of the America Friends Service Committee in May 1942 to start planning a program of student relocation that would enable young people to continue their studies. Distinguished educators from West Coast and other institutions started meetings involving the Japanese America Citizens League, government agencies and church groups to form in a few short weeks, a National Student Relocation Council. The problem was not only to relocate students already in college, but to place students in college as they graduated from high schools in the centers. A further problem was to raise money to enable students to pay for their education.

The efforts of the Student Relocation Council, were supported by the staff of the War Relocation Authority as well as by the internees themselves. In 1941, according to a 1949 study by Robert O'Brian entitled The College Nisei, there were 271 Nisei studying in colleges and universities East of the Rockies. Because of the combined efforts of everyone concerned, including especially the America Friends Service Committee, almost 4,300 students were relocated in all parts of the U.S. outside the West Coast.

Among the many institutions that had never had Nisei students before but received them during the relocation were Illinois Institute of Technology, Bryn Mawr, Carleton, Kenyon, Louisiana State University, University of Texas, Rutgers, Antioch, Oberlin, Haverford, Mount Holyoke, and Purdue.

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In most places they went, Nisei were alone or virtually alone in a white society, but they soon found themselves among friends in their classmates and professors. Many Nisei distinguished themselves scholastically, others in sports, some in both. But all found themselves at home in a larger America than they had known before.

Their basic learning was summed up by a girl who attended an Eastern school, quoted by O'Brian: "I've always wanted to be looked upon as an American, and I have found it here. They treat me as an American... They do not treat me as a Japanese American."

Whatever the heart breaks and losses caused by the wartime relocation, there were unforeseen benefits. Through the adventure of relocation, almost all Nisei and many Issei were thrown out of their ghetto-ized Japantown existence into the mainstream of American life -- and learned to converse, joke, quarrel, bargain or pray with their fellow-Americans without racial self-consciousness. They learned to be at home in their own country.

Professor Thomas Sowell the economist, has accurately described what happened: "In short, the internment of the Japanese-Americans... eventually worked to their advantage. It gave the group greater occupational and residential mobility, released the young and ambitious native-born Japanese-Americans from the strict control of their elders, and decisively broke the back of the anti-Japanese prejudice and discrimination which had held them back for decades. Despite irreparable personal and financial damage to individuals, Japanese-Americans as a group prospered more after they returned from the internment camps than before.... The Japanese-Americans,... did not put their main emphasis on trying to get justice, but rather on trying to get ahead. This they did." (Race and Economics, 1975)

It was a great humiliation for the Nisei of the 100th Battalion of the Hawaii National Guard to be sent to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, where they were trained with wooden guns. But most seriously it was an affront. America was saying to them, "You are not to be trusted. We doubt your loyalty,"

Spark Matsunaga, now a U.S. Senator, who was in that unit, writes, "We wrote home of our great desire for combat duty to prove our loyalty to the United States. It was not known to us then that our letters were being censored by higher authority. We learned subsequently that because of the tenor of our letters, the War Department decided to give us our chance. Our guns were returned to us, and we were told that we were going to be prepared for combat duty Grown men leaped with joy."

On January 28, 1943, the War Department announced that Nisei would be accepted as a special combat unit. They volunteered in the thousands both from Hawaii and from the relocation camps. They were united with the 100th Battalion as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team at Camp Shelby, Mississippi.

The 100th Battalion first saw action at Salerno, Italy, in September 1943, and took heavy casualties. The 442nd landed in Italy in June 1944, at once gained a reputation as an assault force, and accomplished the famous rescue of the "lost ballalion" of the 36th (Texas) Division at an enormous cost in blood. Fighting in seven major campaigns, the men of the 442nd suffered 9,486 casualties and won more than 18,000 individual decorations for valor.

Another 3,700 Nisei served in combat areas in the Pacific as translators and interpreters. The Japanese military, believing their

language to be too difficult for foreigners to master, were careless about security. They did not count on Nisei on every battlefield reading captured documents and passing information on to Allied commanders. Kibei (Nisei born in America but educated in Japan and originally the object of special distrust) turned out to be especially helpful in this respect.

In short, the Nisei covered themselves with honor and made life in America better for themselves their parents (who a few years after the war won the right to be naturalized,) and their children. I remember vividly the returning Nisei veterans I saw in Chicago soon after V-E Day. Short of stature as they were, they walked proudly, infantry combat citations on their chests, conscious that they were home -- in their own country. Chicago, known throughout the war for its hospitality to servicemen, outdid itself when the Nisei returned. They had earned that welcome.

I do not believe that it suffices as an explanation to say that the Nisei troops were brave. What was driving them was a profoundly Japanese motivation, "giri to one's name." Since they had been suspected of disloyalty, giri required that they demonstrate their loyalty beyond all possibility of doubt.

This is a basic reason the Nisei volunteered in such numbers and fought so well. More than 33,000 Nisei served in the war -- a remarkable number out of a total Japanese-American population (Hawaii and mainland combined) of little more than 200,000. They had a fierce pride in their reputation as a group.

The Issei were also motivated by "giri to one's name." Those who found jobs outside the camps were exemplary workers, as if to prove something not only about themselves but about their entire

group. Japanese-Americans, young and old alike, accepted the mass relocation with dignity and maturity making the best of a humiliating situation. In so doing they exhibited the finest resources of their ancient background culture.

To me as a Japanese-American, I find myself both awed and humbled by Japanese-American behavior during World War II. First, I was deeply impressed by the ability of the Issei, the immigrant generation, to draw upon their moral resources and ethical traditions to accept the discomforts and agonies of relocation with stoicism and dignity. Thrown into ugly barracks in the desert, they made bearable the unbearable with patience and humor. To relieve the emptiness of camp life, they drew on the resources of their background culture -- sculpture, painting, flower arranging, Kabuki music and drama, the recitatives of nagauta.

The Nisei as service men both in the Pacific Theater and in the 442nd in Europe also make me proud to be a Japanese-American. Their determination to prove themselves, their sense of giri that led them to reckless deeds of heroism and record casualty rates -- proved over and over again their high sense of honor -- both as Americans and as Japanese.

Perhaps I have made clear why I object so profoundly to the idea of monetary redress for the anguish and the injustices of the relocation. The Japanese-Americans, both Issei and Nisei, acted like men and women of honor, fulfilling their obligations of on, protecting giri to their names, both as individuals and as a group -- and in the course of all this proving themselves to be good Americans, as well as Japanese.

Do we have to be paid for being men and women of honor?