

STATEMENT OF KIKU HORI FUNABIKI

To the House Subcommittee on
Administrative Law and Governmental Relations

Washington, D.C.

September 12, 1984

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Kiku Hori Funabiki, a native of San Francisco, California. I do not represent an organization. This is a personal testimony.

A few weeks before the Commission hearings were to be held in San Francisco in August of 1981, I had no intention of testifying. I am a private person. It is not my style to speak before a group, especially to divulge publicly deep personal feelings I have not shared with my closest associates. It is also intimidating for me to appear before a group who wields so much power over my life.

Since the Commission hearing first held in Washington, D.C. in June of that year, however, I began to reconsider. Public officials were excusing away the incarceration with phrases such as "honest mass hysteria" and "war brings on unconscionable acts." I could not allow these remarks to go unrefuted. I decided that I had to testify.

In reviewing the history of racism against the Japanese in America, my testimony has become a tribute to my deceased father, Sojiro Hori. The memory of his courage ultimately gave me the strength to face the challenge and come forward.

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This is the story of one man, a fighter. It is also a story of the Japanese in America and their struggle against racism since their arrival at the turn of the century. Unconstitutional acts committed against them and me, denial of basic freedoms, abrogation of our rights, did not erupt suddenly as a result of "honest hysteria" following Pearl Harbor. Succeeding generations also were not spared the ravages of racism, but that is another story.

My father, Sojiro Hori, was a gentle man, a man of incredible fortitude, and a man of peace. He arrived in the United States in 1901 and lived here until his death fifty years later. His first jobs were menial ones, domestic services, the only type of work available in a city. In 1906, he started an employment agency which he still operated forty-five years later when he was stricken with a fatal stroke. Unlike most Japantown businesses, his agency depended on white clients. He faced harrassment daily.

He saved enough to send for a picture bride in 1908. Their first child, a son, died at infancy after a hospital refused him admittance. My parents were told that no Japanese were served there. Devastated by this crushing experience, my mother, pregnant with her third child, took her second son to Japan for my grandmother to raise, for a few years only, it was understood. She gave birth to a third boy while there and returned alone to America. Circumstances beyond my parents' control prevented the

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two boys from ever joining us, their family, which consisted of our parents, two brothers and me.

My father early on sensed the consequences of being identified as the Yellow Peril. He constantly so informed the Japanese community. He felt harmonious relations through understanding between his native Japan and his adopted country were necessary if there was to be peace in the Pacific. He even spoke of his concern in his limited English before the Commonwealth Club of Northern California in the 1920's.

With Pearl Harbor, my father's world came crashing down. Soon after, the FBI in one of their ruthless pre-dawn sweeps, routed our family out of bed, searched our house recklessly, then handcuffed my father and led him away. He was an alien, yes, but only because the country in which he lived for forty years, raised a family and whose community he served well, forbade him by law from becoming a citizen. His only crime was being Japanese.

At the moment I helplessly watched my father being led away in shackles by three Federal agents, I received so deep a wound, it has never healed. Were we so undesirable? Were we so expendable? Was I Japanese? Was I American or wasn't I? My confused teenage mind reeled.

Left behind besides myself were my invalid mother, two brothers and a ruined business. Since our assets were frozen after Pearl Harbor, we barely managed to survive the next few months until our evacuation. I recall the pathetic moment when

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we assembled to go to our first camp. My bedridden mother was carried onto the camp-bound bus from her bed, which had to be left in the house. This was her first outing in two years. Her condition worsened with the constant anxiety especially for the uncertain future of her husband. She spent most of her internment in the camp hospital. I have a copy of a letter written by a camp doctor in 1943, addressed to Mr. Edward Ennis, then of the Enemy Alien Control Unit, appealing for my father's release because of the gravity of my mother's physical condition.

We were not to learn for almost a year, that my father had been moved from prison camp to prison camp along with German and Italian prisoners of war. After his fifth move in two years, he was finally released to join us in yet another barbed wire-enclosed compound in a desolate, wind-swept corner of a Wyoming desert, Heart Mountain.

In December of 1944, three years after our evacuation, we learned our exclusion from the West Coast was rescinded, and camps were to close within a year. My brothers were released after about 2 years in the camps and I after 3 years. We all went to the East Coast, the eldest to seek a position as a mechanical engineer, we younger ones to attend college. After their three and a half year imprisonment, my father, now 66 years old, and my mother, still in delicate health, returned to the West Coast with trepidation.

Mr. Chairman, you are probably aware by now, of the deplorable conditions in these detention camps which were

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practically built overnight - barbed wire-enclosed compounds with watch towers and armed guards; sloppily constructed barracks which allowed dust to blow readily through cracks in the scorching summers and icy winds in the 40-below winters (I can remember how I, a Californian, bundled myself in a G.I. pea coat, and fought those winds, racing from laundry room to laundry room for shelter, in order to visit my mother daily at the camp hospital a mile away); fuel shortages; families crowded into horse stalls, heavy with the stench of manure; food poisoning (I can also remember queuing up at the latrines, some of us doubled over with stomach cramps, others retching); epidemics of communicable diseases; and even some deaths of internees gunned down by overzealous guards.

However, I would like you to know that the hardships and sufferings extended beyond the period of incarceration. When the war ended, it seemed our problems had just begun.

War hysteria had not abated, there was a climate of greater and open hostility especially on the West Coast. We were completely on our own now, and we were vulnerable. Our return was the signal to unleash the racial hatred that had intensified in our absence. After three years of investigations, re-investigations, clearance after clearance, my father faced the harshest test of all, that imposed by the American public. He, and in fact, all of us including uniformed, highly-decorated Japanese American war heroes, were blatantly called Japs to our faces at some time. Physical attacks upon us were not uncommon.