TESTIMONY

of

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My name is Mitsuye Tono Kamada; birthplace; Mountain View, California. My father came to this country in 1903 and for about 25 years before the war he was a share-cropper because the law prevented him from owning or leasing land. Only American citizens could own property. He could not even become a naturalized American citizen until late 1952, at which time my parents immediately became naturalized citizens. The farm we lived on before the war was owned by an elderly spinster and her 95-year-old father. It was located halfway between San Jose and Morgan Hill.

I had just graduated from Morgan Hill High School. We took care of her 15-acre prune orchard and share-cropped on the other five acres of of her property. My oldest brother turned 21 years (legal age to own property) just before the war. Our family was finally able to start farming on our own in the Spring of 1941. When the evacuation order came, we had to sell our farm equipment and plants for pittance. We had a very good relationship with the owners of the land on which we lived. The woman vowed that she would take care of our household furnishings and the car until we returned, because she wanted us back. We boarded up the house and the garage.

Her father passed away while we were in Santa Anita Assembly Center, and her correspondence stopped while we were in the Heart Mountain, Wyoming, camp.

I am third in the line of 11 children and I was 17 years old when we were ordered into camp. To this day, I feel that we were kipnapped and held hostages for the duration of the war. We had no other recourse but to do as ordered because we were being herded into camps at gunppoint. If there was any hysteria or panic, it would have had to be us, for we, American citizens were too young to comprehend the reason for being treated like this. I did not commit any crime nor was I charged with any wrong-doing. My father who was in this country since 1903 and until the age of 97, did not even get a traffic violation summons.

What a desolate place Ht. Mountain camp was! In the winter the temperature dropped to 35 below zero, and the windows of the barracks would become thick with ice--on the inside. In California we had not needed heavy outer clothing, but my mother had the foresight to sew all our jackets and coats together in double thickness before leaving for camp.

Before we were able to settle down in Ht. Mountain, the men of draft age began to get notice to report for active duty. At the outset of the war, these same men had been classified 4-C and were refused when they volunteered. My oldest brother was one of those who resisted the draft, and was jailed in a federal prison in Cheyenne, Wyoming. I and few of the

sisters or wives of these men, many with small children, got permits to visit them during their trial in the federal court. The men argued that they would gladly fight for their country if only their families were freed from the imprisonment of the camp. I think this manifestation of the judicial system was called a "kangaroo court". It was heartbreaking to see the little children and the wives bid farewell to their fathers and husbands for the duration of the war. I had often wondered how these young wives, with their little children, managed to cope by themselves in the desolate confines of the camp, where a 24-hour day seemed like 48 hours. Most of us were incarcerated behind barb-wire fences for nearly 2,000 days. Those with no one to help them relocate spent more than 2,000 days.

Soon the families of the men who did serve in the army started to get letters notifying them that their sons, or brothers, or husbands, were killed in action. At first, one or two Gold Stars were hung in the bare barracks, but soon the whole camp started to look like Christmas-time. As you know, the all-Nisei 442 d Regiment suffered the most casualties and was the most decorated combat unit in the U.S. army during the war.

There were only three Buddhist ministers in the whole camp. The women members made floral arrangements out of crepe paper to add some sense of dignity to the memorial services held for the deceased and their families. Most of the Buddhist ministers were taken into custody overnight by the F.B.I. at the outset of the war and imprisoned for the duration.

Our churches were closed and we were prevented from attending the house of worship of our choice. While we were interned many of the Buddhist churches on the West Coast were vandalized, desecrated and burned--many never to be rebuilt. Some churches were occupied by the Navy Department, the military police, and army officers, who used it as their headquarters.[1]

Religious articles were stolen and places were left in shambles. The churches were used as storage places for evacuees who had to sell or leave their homes. These properties in the storage were looted and burglarized. The few churches that were intact were opened as hostels to the internees who chose to return, until they were able to find a suitable home, because their homes, too, were damaged.

There are many sects in the Buddhist religions, but Shinto-ism is not one of them. The bent cross sign used by the Buddhist originated in India and dates back to 250 A.D. The same sign was used by the Native American Indians who were in this country long before Christopher Columbus discovered America. For some misguided reason, the Nazis turned the sign around and created what became known to all of us as the swastika.

By this time, my second brother volunteered to join the all-Nisei battalion. He trained as a paratrooper, because he would get an extra $50 for "jump pay." He would send the family that extra pay, my father and I were getting $13 a month -- he, as a dishwasher in the camp hospital, and I, as a nurse's aide.

Finally, one day we were told that since we were loyal citizens we could start leaving camp. Our homes in California were off-limits, but a one-way bus fare would be granted to places anywhere on the East Coast. My sister, who was then 18 years old, and I, now 20, went to Chicago where I worked in a Babe Ruth candy factory for three months. I went to the WRA office to find a suitable place so as to get my parents and seven brothers and sisters out of the camp. Philadelphia seemed the best choice so with the few dollars my sister and I had saved, I came out to investigate the possibilities. After a number of discouraging and disgusting leads, I decided to relocate the family on a large farm owned by a Quaker. By this time my third and fourth brothers were drafted. One joined the Military Intelligence Language Service School in Minnesota and the other the paratroopers. My father had a cataract operation while in camp but his vision did not improve. He had his second operation after coming to Philadelphia. He was to have only 20% of his vision for the rest of his life..

How I wished at this time that the government would have had some compassion and given us a lump sum to relocate, because the next ten years were to be the most difficult for me and I was only 20.

One day, an FBI agent came to the farm to inform me that my oldest brother, who had been detained in a federal prison as a draft dodger, was given a full pardon by then-President Truman and that he would soon be released. When all my brothers finally came home from the war and the prison, I came to New York City in 1947 to study in the fashion field. I could only afford to go to school six weeks. I went to work for a dress-designer as a sample-maker.. I sent all my money home to help the family on the farm and also help send four younger sisters through college. Now after 40 years I am in my third semester as a full-time matriculating student at Hunter College, an education that was interrupted by the evacuation.

It was a great shock to me when I came to New York City and heard that the NY Buddhist church which was established in 1938 was without a minister because Rev. Seki was taken into custody at the outset of the war, and then sent to an internment camp for the duration of the war. Although the members of the Buddhist faith were without a resident minister, the church was open and welcomed the evacuees and assisted them in finding jobs and homes.

I am not a saint, but proud of being Japanese American and a Buddhist. I tell my son that we come from a cultural heritage of more than 2,000 years old and together with what we have acquired from American culture, we have much to offer this country.

I also ask myself would the atomic bomb have been dropped if the country had been an European one, instead of Japan -- and not one but two bombs at that period. I lost an uncle in the blast and an aunt who went their to look for him right after the blast was soon to lose her sight and die of anemia.

The tales that you hear from people who went to help the few surviving victims stagger the imagination. It was in this kind of atmosphere that the very document that made this country great -- the writ of habeas corpus -- was denied to us Japanese Americans because of our race. Millions of dollars were spent in incarcerating us, and millions of dollars were sacrificed by us who were incarcerated. (The psychological and emotional price we paid -- we, who were loyal citizens, innocent of any wrongdoings against this country -- is beyond any recompense.) But for our material losses we demand that the government make just reparation for the damages done to 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry.

The United States government took away from us as citizens of this country everything that Americans hold dear -- our property, our money, our homes, our dignity, our chance for education for a time; allowed our churches to be desecrated, and finally, our husbands, sons and brothers, while we were interned.

Our story does not appear in the history texts that American school children read. We have been denied the truth of what was done to us. The history of these United States since the Declaration of Independence is only a little more than 200 years old. It is not too late for this government to right the wrong perpetrated upon us so that the record can unmistakably show how shamefully we were treated without cause.

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[1] Buddhist Churches of America, a 75-year history: 1899-1974. Chicago, Ill.: c1974. Volume 1, pages 151, 271, 253, 298, 302-03, 381, 314, 338, 350.