

TESTIMONY FOR
THE COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION
AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS

My name is ARTHUR JUN KAMITSUKA, an ordained clergyman since 1949 of the United Presbyterian Church. The years 1949-1979 were spent as a missionary in Japan. I am presently the national director for Men's Work of the United Presbyterian Church. I was interned in the Colorado River Relocation Center on July 14, 1942 at the age of 18.

I was born in Fresno, California and grew up in Pismo Beach, California in a home a hundred yards from the Pacific Ocean. My father operated the largest trucking company in the area, shipping vegetables and berries from the farms of San Luis Obispo and Santa Maria Valleys to the markets of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Though considered an "Enemy Alien" my father, with government clearance, was hauling foodstuffs into the military bases of Camp San Luis Obispo and Camp Roberts for several months after the outbreak of World War II.

We were a family of three brothers and a sister. On December 29, 1941, twenty-two days after Pearl Harbor, my oldest brother left Woodbury College of Los Angeles and at my father's urging, and at my brother's personal decision, he volunteered for the U.S. Army. He received basic training at Camp Roberts, about thirty miles from home. He was in the army for the duration of the war.

Our last meal together as a family was on January 1, 1942. Mother prepared the traditional Japanese New Year's meal and we enjoyed it together at Camp Roberts, unaware of the imminent, drastic, and rapid changes that we were to experience. My brother was soon to be transferred to Camp Robinson in Arkansas. Our "alien" parents were ordered to move inland a mile from the seacoast. Since my father's trucking company was in the one mile zone and as my brother was already in the army, I left college to run the business.

Our nation, where even the 120,000 of us who were in concentration camps sang "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" and pledged "allegiance to the flag of the United States of America," was being tested. The magnitude of the inconsistencies, the frailty of the democratic system, and the vulnerability of self-serving "leaders" is indisputably documented.

The church was no less vulnerable. To share a personal experience: On December 14, the Sunday following Pearl Harbor certain members of the dominantly Caucasian congregation, where I was a member and a candidate for the Christian ministry, no longer welcomed me for worship and fellowship. As an 18 year old, still new in the Christian faith, this experience was a blow that was difficult to comprehend, mentally and emotionally. The very community of believers that stood for brotherhood and the church being a haven for the congregation of all peoples, became, rather, a place of segregation. Only years later, through the help of specialists, was I to learn the full impact of this traumatic experience.

Finally, my parents decided we should move further inland, so home, business, farm, and education were abandoned when we voluntarily moved 130 miles inland to Clovis, California either in February or March of 1942.

After moving to Clovis, in order to complete my first year of college, I and two friends attended Reedley Junior College. Two of us slept on the back of my pickup truck and the third person slept next to the truck on a cot from Monday to Thursday nights, returning to Clovis for weekends. On rainy nights we sought shelter in garages. We knocked on doors of many churches and parsonages but were turned away. We were befriended eventually only by members of the Church of the Brethren.

This was my exposure to racism and the duplicity of church and nation. My church did not attempt to protect and support me against the flagrant violations of my inalienable rights as a citizen and a brother in Christ. I was to run into similar experiences many times in the succeeding months.

You may ask, "Why are you then a Christian?" Unknown to the three of us, a professor of Reedley Junior College had contacted Park College in Missouri and the Westport Presbyterian Church in Kansas City so that we could continue our education. A month after incarceration, I received a telegram from Dr. William Lindsey Young, President of Park College, which stated, "Would you like to study at Park College with all expenses paid?" Dr. Young knew that our assets had been frozen by the U.S. Government and therefore sent three train tickets for us to leave Arizona for Missouri. After arriving on the campus, our lives were threatened and time does not allow here for details of sledge hammers and being spat upon. The F.B.I. interceded. We were assigned to the first floor of a dormitory, but a few weeks later we were asked to move to the third floor. We learned months later students rotated standing guard through the night to protect us. Whenever we went into town several students always accompanied us. The acts of Dr. Young, the faculty, and the students who voluntarily exposed themselves to dangers restored and nurtured my faith. I was warmly accepted into the membership of the Westport Presbyterian Church and was eventually ordained there.

To share another experience, a few days before boarding the curtained train in Clovis for a destination then unknown to us, California State authorities came to take my sister, who was mentally handicapped from birth, away from our home. She was literally forced away from the clutch of my mother's arms. There was no communication with her for the duration of the war. It broke my mother's heart and contributed to her early death at age 49. We were never to have an earthly family reunion again as my sister would not have been allowed to come to the camp for our mother's funeral in 1944 in the concentration camp. My sister remained under state care until I conducted her very sad burial service a year ago. Her amputated finger was necessitated because gangrene had set in due to a human bite.

My father was an inmate in the U.S. concentration camp for the duration of the war even though two of his sons were in the Armed Forces. He helped the war effort by helping to raise 10,000 chickens for 3½ years at shameful and demeaning "wages." Milton Eisenhower, in a June 18, 1942 letter to President Roosevelt, wrote "... The employment of these Japanese nationals in the reclamation and cultivation of wild lands, with a meager salary of from \$50.00 to \$90.00 after they have been deprived of their means of subsistence is tantamount to compulsory labor since they have no choice but to engage in the prescribed work."

My father was 51 years old when he was forced into the Arizona concentration camp. My mother was 47. The U.S. government not only cheated them out of the best years of their lives, forcing them to lose their source of livelihood even after clearance as early as December, 1941, but treated them as prisoners while two of their sons were in the U.S. Army. Furthermore, the medical facilities were not adequate enough to care for my mother's illness .

In June, 1945 my father returned to California and for some months directed a hostel for returnees. Even in 1945 there were stores that would not sell food to returning families. In one food store, operated by a person known to our family for many years before the war, that person refused to sell to my father. My father yelled out, "As a Christian, if you don't sell me food to feed all who are returning to their homes, why don't you kill us?" My bother, who had returned for a visit dressed in U.S. Army uniform, went to get a haircut from a barber known to us since childhood. We had grown up with his children. The barber drew all the curtains, and when my brother asked why he was doing this, the barber said "I don't want anyone to know I am cutting your hair." Needless to say, my brother walked out.

To conclude this brief testimony, I would like to share the kind of legacy my parents left me and my children. As I was leaving the camp for college in Missouri in 1942, my father said to me, "Son, there are two ways we can try to understand the devastating experience we are going through in this nation founded and built on an egalitarian democracy inspired by the Judeo-Christian faith that is supposed to respect human, civil, and inalienable rights. A secular, cultural, or national understanding will only lead to cynicism at an early age."

"You can," my 'enemy alien' father continued, "seek to understand these same experiences from a biblical perspective for the good of both church and nation. If you do you can live with hope because God is working His purpose out. The liberation of people, like the American revolution, will continue."

This was invaluable counsel. Reflecting on it now after 39 years has led me to see that "man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." (Rheinhold Neibuhr). Racism is American democracy's malignant cancer. In 1966, 21 years after World War II, when I was a doctoral candidate at Indiana University, my third child (a fourth-grade) and my fourth child (a kindergartener) were called "Japs" by their counterparts. The parents of these children were poisoning their lives with racism.

I make a plea to my government to repent and wipe away the injustice done in stigmatizing with criminality 120,000 innocent people, by rectifying the wrong done with the simple and small price of redress through monetary compensation, and therefore help restore the mental and physical losses suffered not only by the first, second, and third generations, but for generations to come. After 40 years we are trying to remember the past so as not to be condemned to repeat it.

Thank you.

November 18, 1981