

STATEMENT OF KIKU HORI FUNABIKI
To the Commission on Wartime Relocation
and Internment of Civilians

San Francisco, California
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Members of the Commission:

I am Kiku Hori Funabiki, a native of San Francisco.

A few weeks ago I had no intention of testifying. I am a private person. It is not my style to speak before a group and 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 hearings in Washington, D.C., however, I began to reconsider. Public officials were excusing away the evacuation 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 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.

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 freedoms, abrogation of 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.

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My father, Sojiro Hori, was a gentle man, a man of incredible fortitude. He arrived in the United States in 1901 and lived here until his death fifty years later. His first jobs were menial ones, the only type of work available. In 1906 he started an employment agency which he still operated forty five years later when he was stricken with a fatal disease. 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 next son to Japan for my grandmother to raise, for a few years only, it was understood. She gave birth to another boy while there and returned alone to America. Circumstances beyond my parents' control prevented the two boys from 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 sweeps at dawn routed our family out of bed, searched our house recklessly, then handcuffed my father and led him away. We were not to know where, for how long, or why, he was being

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taken 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.

At the moment I helplessly watched my father being led away in shackles by three burly 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 we assembled to go to our first camp. My bedridden mother was carried from her bed, which had to be left in the house, onto the bus. This was her first outing in two years.

We were not to learn until our arrival at our second detention center 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 the desert of Wyoming.

In December of 1944 we learned our exclusion from the West Coast was rescinded and camps were to close within a year. My brothers and I were already on the East Coast. With my older brother who came to assist, my father, now 66 years old, and my mother, now a victim of a stroke, returned with trepidation.

War hysteria had not abated; there was a climate of greater and open hostility. Our return was the signal to

unleash the racial hatred that had increased in our absence. After three years of investigations, re-investigations, clearance after clearance, my father faced the harshest test of all, the one imposed by the American public.

The dwelling which my father built twelve years before the war was now in shambles. Our once beautiful three-unit flat was occupied by at least a hundred people, Mare Island shipyard workers sleeping in shifts. The bank had not kept its word to rent only to a limited number of respectable tenants. Not one window was intact. Among the piles of trash, rats and fleas abounded. Our possessions, including my father's business records, which had been stored in a church building, were stolen or destroyed.

We went to the only shelter available to us, in buildings belonging to the Japanese churches. We lived in a room a fraction of the size of our camp quarters. We did not complain, because the less fortunate ones slept on the bare floors of church social halls. With single-minded perseverance and fortitude, my father challenged a hostile society and encroaching old age and once again began to build his life, his home and the employment agency.

I came west shortly after my older brother returned to his family in New York. My father and I first worked in domestic service. We had no choice. My father was back where he had begun when he got off the boat in 1901. The three of us slept on two army cots. We cooked our meals in a communal kitchen two flights down according to the dietary rules of the Seventh Day Adventists in whose hostel we lived. We ate in our small room. We lived this way for almost a year until my father's house was vacated.

After three back-breaking years when my father's business

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began to show a profit, he suffered a massive stroke. Within a year he was up again, dragging his half-paralyzed body to work everyday. He continued for two more years until a second stroke claimed his life. He was 72 years old. For a man who had had everything wrenched from him--his home, his business, his health, his basic human rights, his dignity, even the life of his first child, my father was never cynical. I am not as fortunate as he.

My father's story is not unique; nor is it extraordinary. Each of the tens of thousands of Japanese immigrants suffered. Collectively, their story is a heroic one of an invincible human spirit that survived cruel indignities, injustice and the final humiliation of mass exile behind barbed wire for the crime of being Japanese. Still they persevered.

As I was writing this testimony, enormous pride welled up in me that I am Japanese American. There is a Japanese word, gambaru, for which there is no English equivalent. It means to fight, to have courage, to persevere. Gambaru is what enabled my parents' generation to survive the hardships in a land that did not want them. Gambaru is our heritage which is rooted in America, not Japan. Gambaru is a legacy which my father and his peers, courageous men and women, left to me and you--to all of us. This quality is their contribution to America. We shall gambaru.

REDRESS AND REPARATIONS

It is demeaning to me to have to enumerate and ask reparations for all the things of which I was wrongfully deprived. I unequivocally support monetary restitution. As for disposition and administration, I refer to the five points cited by the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations in Washington, D.C.

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A conservative estimate of my father's tangible losses alone approaches \$90,000 at today's market value. I expect this to be paid in full. As for a fair sum to include damages along with tangible losses, I would have you, the members of the Commission, arrive at a figure based on my father's story. I cannot.

To the Senator from Hawaii who says that \$25,000 per evacuee is feasible but that three billion dollars collectively is unrealistic, I would respond with a question. When do we stop accommodating others? Ours is a question of justice--not feasibility or practicality. In a four-page, in-depth report on wasteful spending by the Defense Department from the April 27 issue of U.S. News and World Report which I have here, I quote: "A minimum estimate of the cost of military waste is put at fifteen billion dollars a year in a study issued by congressional Republicans..."

Beyond the wasteful spending, the President is escalating the overkill stockpile of nuclear warheads. The staggering amount this administration proposes to allocate for military purposes is 1.5 trillion dollars. That is fifteen hundred billion dollars. Is three billion dollars for unconscionable past wrongs too much?

EXHIBIT

Finally, for those who would deny the reality of internment, I have an exhibit. The prison uniform worn by my father, with his serial number on the back. At the risk of being sent to his sixth prison camp he brought this home as a souvenir for his children. For history's sake, he said. He told me that the trousers were of the same denim. On the seat in white paint were stenciled two large letters, "P W," Prisoner of War.

Respectfully submitted,

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