

Testimony submitted by:

Mae Kanazawa
611 West 111 St
New York NY 10025
[212] 662-0940

Thank you for this opportunity to present my case against the U.S. Government for the irreparable, deep-seated psychological damage that I experienced as a direct result of my incarceration during World War II which deprived me so long of my right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Since I was only in my teens when I was incarcerated, my material loss is minimal, but I lost something infinitely more important since time is involved; once it is gone, it is gone forever.

Eventually a victim such as I will come around to realizing that I've been had and, for this reason, I am entitled to petition for redress. It has taken me a long time to come around to this realization, and I keep asking myself how come? One reason may be that precisely because of my Japanese background, certain values, customs, traits, along with behavior, were taught me by my parents which I had absorbed by osmosis. They expected their children to carry on in this tradition because they may have planned to return with their children to their homeland. However, this dream was not about to come to pass, and the years went by with myself experiencing two cultures in conflict, east and west. I could not reconcile what our parents were showing by their behavior at home and then going off to school and finding another reality there. I did not know how to balance the two in a way in which I could be true to myself, in a third place so to speak. I would have to block off a part of myself to fit into the American mold whose values and standards were based on western culture. Having no firsthand experience of the land of my ancestors, I was confused about who I was. I could not readily hide my background even if I had wanted to because my physical appearance gave me away.

Being a sensitive and thoughtful child, every incident of discrimination and other adverse conditions during my childhood and youth because of my

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background was not lost on me. I took them to heart and was terribly hurt and confused by them. At the same time, other forces were at work in insidious and overt ways to undermine my spirit. From this background, it is not too difficult to understand why I allowed the incarceration to happen without protest. It was just another overt act against me as a person, who had been socialized to believe that I was a second-class citizen in this society, and that I was not entitled to be a whole person in my own right. In fact, it was worse because it was my government that was telling me that they could take away my rights with impunity, not just society alone.

After hearing some of the testimony of those who made policy in those fateful years recently in Washington, I could come to no other conclusion than that it was racism with a capital R that was the prime consideration in the decisions that sealed our fate. Since they knew very little about the people from the Far East, they considered us an exotic and inscrutable people whose behavior could not be fathomed except in stereotypical terms. The most expedient measure would be to simply put us out of commission for the duration because we were at the same time becoming an economic threat, and this was the perfect solution.

Be that as it may, the incarceration and its repercussions would dog my footsteps and would color my behavior for the next 30-40 years. When I came out of camp, the change from a small town mentality to the big town was overwhelming. I would be so caught up trying to cope with big city life, which anyone who has had a "normal" life should be able to weather in time, that I had little strength or resources for other growing-up activities. No one bothered to seek me out and ask how I was doing. Picture this frightened and unworldly person finding herself trying to survive and at the same time try to visualize a situation which I will now reveal to you. About a couple of weeks ago, I happened to be in the National Archives doing some research on the

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camp experience, which has become declassified material, and as I looked through the WRA files, much to my surprise and distress I came across my name in a memo. The memo was addressed to the director of the regional office of the internal security division and the memo in part read as follows:

"2. The records of this office disclose sufficient derogatory information to indicate possible danger to the war effort by the employment of any of the following subjects in plants or facilities important to the war effort." (emphasis mine) My name was included along with 45 others. With the help of persons who know the ways of the government, I was able to locate these files and I have been informed that there are some 61 pages on me alone. I have sent for photocopies of this information which I have not yet received. What kinds of information could a person in her teens have accumulated against her that could possibly be considered derogatory before she has become a full fledged adult? I am eagerly awaiting these papers. I tried to recall those days in Chicago for possible consequences of this damning information. The only thing I could remember was that I had gone down to the recruiting office to apply for the WACs because I thought I should be doing something toward the war effort. I was told to pack a suitcase and that I would be picked up at my residence. But nobody showed up. This incident jogged my memory when I saw this letter stashed away in the Archives and I wondered if it had played a role in my not being accepted.

Getting back to my early years after I was released from camp, I had the uneasy feeling that I would either sink or swim. Since I come from a proud stock, I never sank but I would remain stunted in my growth for many years to come. It never occurred to me that I could go for some sort of help or even that such help was forthcoming if I did request it. So I have paid my dues by suffering in silence. No one likes to admit to any shortcomings and I think I was further hindered by the admonition that I must not "monku," a concept difficult to translate precisely into American terms because it is a Japanese

experience. The closest words that I could come up with is "don't complain." Another concept, "gamman shinasai," is also difficult to translate; the closest would be "bear your lot." There are other concepts that I could relate ad infinitum, but I think you get the point. In other words, I come from a background of integrity, honesty, and hard work, but at the same time these very traits, if practiced too literally, would work against me.

The psychic damage soon manifested itself in neurological problems. I lost the ability to read efficiently, something which I did quite well in my childhood. I used to walk daily to the library, which was over a mile away, to pick up a batch of books which I would read in a day or two and then I would return them for another batch. I next found that my hands became unsteady and I could not carry a glass of water without spilling its contents. This became generalized to everything having to do with my hands such as writing. Much effort was expended in trying to hide this defect because the use of hands is a basic activity.

Through the next several years, when I could summon up my strength, I would try to do something, no matter what, and when I was discouraged, I would withdraw. When I tried, since it is in my nature to act, I would also stop short of the goal, another manifestation of psychic damage that I have tried to overcome. The differences that existed between the values and standards that my parents taught me by example and the values and standards that society imposed on me were in such conflict that they had a tendency to immobilize me in my behavior.

I then found myself at an impasse which I had to resolve in some manner so I took another tack. I turned my back against everything Japanese including its people. I was trying to turn myself into a banana!! In order for me to do this, I would try to convince myself that they were inferior beings and provincial in their behavior. By now, you should be able to recognize the terrible desolateness that was my existence and what a waste of human potential.

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After a while I became tired of my meaningless existence and I tried to go to junior college. I would work at night and go to school during the day. I did well until I quit precipitously one day when I was reprimanded by an instructor who scolded me in front of the whole class when he saw me look into a pocket dictionary that I carried around with me when he used a word that stumped me.

I eventually found myself in New York City, and for all the uncertainties and doubts that have assailed me throughout my life, the one doubt I never had was that New York City was where I wanted to live. It is here that the cosmopolitan atmosphere helped me to let my guard down so to speak. It is not a perfect society by any means but the heterogeneity of the populace allows for a more "free" expression of oneself which is the basis for self-fulfillment. I eventually got married, gave birth to three children, but with no clear image of who or what I was. I brought up my children as best I could and I am the first to admit that I made many mistakes in the process, many of which were due to the unmet needs of my previous years. At the age of 35, I found that I had reached the end of my rope and finally sought professional help after reading several books on human behavior. I continued in therapy for the next eight years.

In the early '70s, I entered an adult college program at Brooklyn College which I attended fulltime in the evening while holding down a fulltime job during the day. It took me over two hours to get there and back to my home 4 nights a week so that it was often after midnight when I got home. By this time I got the notion that my lack of credentials was holding me back and for several years I carried on this backbreaking schedule. I majored and minored in sociology and psychology, respectively, and eventually racked up 3 years of credits toward my degree. Having gotten this far, my years of neglecting my family took its toll and I had to quit when a family problem precluded my further participation in the program. But my being accepted into this program

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was the beginning of my road back to regaining my self-esteem because many adults had applied for the program and only a fraction could be admitted.

I am asking for a redress of my grievances and reparations in the sum of \$100,000 so that I can continue my quest for the education and training in the areas of my interest without financial worries to detract me from my course. As the Commission on Non-Traditional Study pointed out in their study in 1973:

"Full opportunity to learn cannot be limited to the young; it must be for everyone, in any walk of life, for whatever purposes are beneficial. It cannot be reserved to a single period of life, it must be a recurrent opportunity; an opportunity to update a skill, to broaden the possibilities of a career whether old or new, or to add intellectual zest and cultural enrichment throughout life. No longer can it be the single opportunity of a lifetime; now it must become the total opportunity for a lifetime."

Should it not be in the cards for the government to help me personally, I would not object too strenuously if the following alternative were to be offered: that an initial grant be allocated toward the full operation of a community center in New York City which is sorely lacking for our particular ethnic group. The main thrust will be toward giving all generations of Japanese Americans as well as present immigrants from Japan an opportunity to come together in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere to learn from each other about their rich culture and provide a setting in which they can "test their wings" in a variety of programs that will be offered to them. By my history, you can see why such a community center needs to exist.