

VOX POPULI

REDRESS TESTIMONY

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is testimony given by two more advocates for full funding of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which redresses the wrongs against those of Japanese ancestry who were incarcerated during World War II. William Kochiyama of New York City, a veteran of the 100th Infantry Battalion/442nd RCT, and Alan Nishio, the Southern California co-chair of the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations both spoke on Wednesday, April 5, before the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State, the Judiciary and Related Agencies. Here is their testimony.)

TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM KOCHIYAMA

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for granting me the opportunity to appear before you today in seeking your full support for the maximum funding (\$500 million) allowed under Public Law 100-383; and concurrently, to urge your support in meeting the budget needs requested by the Justice Department's Office of Redress Administration. I am testifying on behalf of concerned Japanese Americans of New York City, a chapter of the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations.

My name is William Kochiyama. At this point, I would like to interject a personal sketch of myself so that you may better understand "from whence I came."

I was born in 1921 right here in Washington D.C. One year later my family moved to New York City, where I have resided ever since, excluding 1940-1945 — a period which marked a bitter turning point in my life.

From 1928 through 1939, I was raised at the Sheltering Arms, an institution in Manhattan affiliated with the Protestant Episcopal Church, that cared for children of single parents. In 1940, I journeyed to California where the nightmare began with blurring swiftness. For the first time, I experienced the sting of the "Yellow Peril" and the pain of racism; then, December 7, 1941 and Japan's disastrous attack on Pearl Harbor; followed by President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, issued on February 19, 1942, which set in motion the mass incarceration of 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of whom were American citizens.

On May 6, 1942, four days before my twenty-first birthday, along with 8,000 Nikkei (Americans of Japanese ancestry) from the San Francisco Bay Area, I became an inmate of Tanforan Assembly Center, a former racetrack in San Bruno, California. There, we lived in horse stalls for four months. We were then shipped by train to Topaz, Utah, a permanent mass detention camp situated in the middle of the desert, surrounded by barbed wire fences, with searchlights and guardtowers at each corner, and patrolled by armed sentries of the United States Army.

From this prison setting, on January 7, 1943, I volunteered to serve with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Approximately 1,500 young men from the ten concentration camps signed up — a remarkable number considering the distressing circumstances we were in at the terrible irony of the situation that we had volunteered to fight and die for our country while our families were kept behind barbed wire under armed guards.

I had not intended to dwell on the military record of Japanese American soldiers during World War II. My mind was changed, however, when I learned that an organization calling itself the "American War Veterans Relief Association" was scheduled to submit oral testimony today to challenge the constitutionality of Public Law 100-383. I find their arguments outrageous and replete with racism. It seems that this little-known group will do anything and everything to discredit Japanese Americans — using innuendo, half-truths, and falsehoods. It is highly significant that major veterans groups in the United States such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, and AMVETS, have endorsed our efforts to secure redress.

Although the fighting record of the 100/442 Regimental Combat Team is well-known and documented, it bears repeating. This outfit composed of men equally from Hawaii and the mainland, became the most decorated unit in U.S. military history for its size and length of service. In seven major campaigns in Italy and France, the regiment won over 18,000 individual decorations for bravery, including the Congressional Medal of Honor; an unprecedented seven Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations; and 9,500 Purple Hearts, which translates into a 308 percent casualty rate. The total American casualties

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per Americans in uniform in World War II was 5.8 percent. Casualties per number of Nisei in uniform was 28.5 percent — almost five times greater than the national average of Americans in uniform.

The United States Senators from Hawaii are veterans of this "Go For Broke" unit. They are, of course, Daniel K. Inouye, who lost his right arm in combat and who was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism under fire; and Spark M. Matsunaga, who won the Silver Star and who was wounded twice in action.

The bloodiest single battle fought by the 100/442 was in the rescue of the "Lost Battalion" which was surrounded by enemy troops in the Vosges Mountains of northeastern France. In our effort to rescue the 211 men of the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment of the 36th (Texas) Division, we lost 1,800 men in casualties. My company, K Company, suffered greatly. Out of 200 men, only 17 riflemen remained among the survivors.

Halfway around the world, throughout the Pacific Theatre of Operations, some 6,000 Japanese Americans were engaged in intelligence gathering, translating captured Japanese documents, interpreting enemy communications, interrogating Japanese prisoners of war, and deciphering codes. They were the men assigned to the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). The MIS participated in every major invasion, including going in with the first wave of assault troops. The Japanese American "MIS-ers" were killed and wounded in action and the decorations they won were far out of proportion to their numbers. After V-J Day, hundreds more served in the occupation of Japan. General Charles Willoughby, G-2 intelligence chief, reported that the Nisei helped to shorten the war against Japan by at least two years — thereby saving over an estimated one million lives, both American and Japanese.

Altogether, about 33,000 Japanese Americans served in the United States military during World War II, including women in the WAC's and Army Nurse Corps.

Today, the surviving Nisei veterans of World War II are in their mid-60s and early 70s. Some are in their 80s. Many of them bear the scars of severe war wound as amputees, paraplegics, or blinded. To them, those who volunteered from concentration camps to serve their country, there should be redress while still alive.

In 1946, when President Harry Truman reviewed the returning troops of the 100/442 Regimental Combat Team in Washington D.C., he said: "You fought for the free nations of the world — you fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice — and you won. Keep up that fight — continue to win — make this great Republic stand for what the Constitution says it stands for: the welfare of all the people, all the time."

With that thought in mind, may I restate my plea that you unreservedly recommend to the full House Appropriations committee the maximum funding of \$500 million allowed under Public Law 100-383 for Fiscal Year 1990.

Thank you very much.

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