

The Ephemeral Record and Absent Dialogue

Without a published record, the hearings would be ephemeral. Commissioner Mitchell sensed this when he said, "I've been asked whether that record will ever be printed and available I can say that the proofs of the Washington hearings have been received, which should prove to you that they are being printed and will be printed." Ernest H. Weiner of the American Jewish Committee stated emphatically, "At the very least, these hearings can serve as a mechanism to indelibly impress on the minds and hearts of America that the evacuation and incarceration of Japanese Americans was not and cannot be flicked aside as a simple error of bureaucratic judgment." [emphasis added] Mitchell had been misled by his staff. The transcripts of the hearings will not be printed, even though the Commission's life extended until June 1983. The hearings will not be a mechanism to impress anything indelibly on the minds of Americans. A simple error of bureaucratic judgment has flicked aside this responsibility.

The hearings suffered from severe time limits on testimony, the sheer weight of many stories and analyses, and the attempts by organized groups to influence rather than enlighten. The hearings are an exercise in bureaucratic productivity of words and paper. Soon the Commission's public relations firm would tell the world about the more than 700 persons who testified and the hours consumed in listening and number of cities in which hearings were held. But there was no dialogue. There was little interplay of different ideas and interests and interpretations.

There was little learning or understanding or reconciliation or acceptance. If there had been a full-blown debate on the issues over a period of days, without time restrictions, if audio tapes and video tapes had been made and distributed, if transcripts and formal papers had been published, then some of these results might have been achieved. Tong, the psychologist, argued for the legitimation of heroes, ranging from dissenters who fought against detention to volunteers for the all-volunteer combat team. Collins, the attorney, placed the highest priority on redress for the renunciants and the Peruvian Japanese. Mike Masaoka of the JACL argued passionately against redress for renunciants and draft resisters. Military experts could have been brought in and addressed the issues of security in a hot war, brought up by Sumida. Members of Congress might discuss the "political realities" alluded to by Drinan. The issues that divided people during the war continued to divide people. Without dialogue -- and without a fair amount of confession, I suspect -- the persistent disputes among Americans on this issue will not be resolved.