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To: Commission on Wartime Relocation
and Internment of Civilians

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Subject: Written statement of testimony to be summarized at Hearing.

I have been a sociologist since 1936, employed mainly on the faculty of the University of Washington. I want to present for your consideration two sociological studies I have published which I believe are pertinent to these hearings. The first is Social Solidarity among the Japanese in Seattle, a monograph published in 1939, and the second is an article, "The Forced Evacuation of the Japanese Minority during World War II" (1973).

Social Solidarity was a study of Seattle's Japanese minority community as it was before World War II. It emphasized the unusual degree of organization and social cohesiveness that characterized the community at that time. The basis of its organization and solidarity lay in two traditions which the immigrant Japanese (the Issei) brought with them from Japan: (1) patterns of mutual aid and cooperation which were deeply embedded in the traditional relationship systems of the Japanese family and kinship groups, neighborhood and friendship groups, and territorial units; and (2) principles of obligation and duty which were driving forces underlying these patterns. Incidentally, I believe these same factors account substantially for the success of Japan's industries today.

The Issei also brought with them, as immigrants, a strong disposition toward entrepreneurship (individual ownership of farms and businesses). Because of competitive advantages gained from the above-mentioned background characteristics, they successfully established themselves in several lines of small business, particularly in such enterprises as hotels, groceries, dye work and cleaners, public market stands, produce houses, gardening, and restaurants, where they gained control of significant percentages of such businesses in Seattle. Others of their businesses catered to the needs of the ethnic community. Using data assembled by the Seattle Japanese Chamber of Commerce in 1935, I estimated that in this community of about 8,000 residents, 74 percent of the Japanese minority labor force in Seattle at that time was directly involved, either as employers or as employees, in these small businesses under Japanese minority proprietorship.

Although somewhat tangential to the main argument, it is worth pointing out that organization and cohesiveness extended into other institutions of the community as well. The several denominations of both the Christian and Buddhist churches were not only well organized and well supported, but they also significantly reinforced important social and even economic and political functions of the larger ethnic community. Businesses were organized into associations, and the associations into the Seattle Chamber of Commerce.

Social and interest clubs in great variety flourished. Nisei youths were organized in every major team sport into a great number of teams, and the teams into leagues at different levels. Two Japanese language newspapers and one in English kept the community informed regarding news and activities. That the Issei's central coordinating organization, the Seattle Japanese Association, was divided into five departments--finance, social welfare, commercial, educational, and young people's welfare--tells much regarding the kinds of concerns which dominated the community. The parallel Nisei organization, the Japanese American Citizens League, had similar concerns, but because of the youthfulness of the Nisei at the time and their consequent shortage of mature leaders, they were less effective in influencing the activities of the community.

It may not be surprising that in the days before World War II this community prided itself on its self-sufficiency, its unusually low rate even in the depression years of those on social welfare rolls, its notably low juvenile delinquency rate, its low rates of crime and other evidences of disorganization, and its capacity to lead other groups of the city in meeting Community Chest quotas. I hasten to add that the community was not without flaws and problems, but its dominant features were those I have sketched.

Because of the way in which the community was organized, however, the impact of the evacuation was in certain respects greatly accentuated. First, we noted above that a high percentage of the working population was self-employed or those employed in family enterprises. Because entrepreneurs generally had substantial capital investments which could not be readily liquidated, the requirement under the evacuation orders that evacuees terminate businesses quickly forced many to liquidate with considerable losses. Second, community organization and cohesiveness were mainly the result of Issei influences. At the end of the war when the communities attempted to re-establish themselves, however, the Issei whose average age now approached sixty years lacked the drive and energy to re-create the pre-war community. Socially this probably was not a critical loss, for by the outbreak of war the Issei's influence was already in decline as Nisei matured and increasingly assumed leadership. Economically, however, serious problems arose, for many who had been in private business previously found themselves unable to re-establish themselves, and others who had been employees in Japanese minority enterprises had to seek unfamiliar work opportunities. The number of Issei who took up menial work in the post-war period, such as janitorial services, reflected the economic disruption that occurred. Third, the Issei had organized themselves for self-sufficiency, but the evacuation substantially undermined the basis of their independence. Instead of being able to pass on the fruits of their labor to the Nisei, many Issei found themselves much more financially dependent on the Nisei than they had expected to be.

At this point some readers may ask whether the cohesiveness of the Japanese minority community, its self-sufficiency and aloofness from the larger society, were not themselves among the major contributing factors causing the evacuation. Distrust of the Japanese minority clearly was the most general reason for the evacuation, and it might be argued that the Japanese minority, by its cliquishness and unwillingness to deal openly with the majority group, brought the evacuation upon itself.

In my article, "The Forced Evacuation of the Japanese Minority during World War II," I attempted to summarize my thoughts, developed from twenty-five years of study, on the causes of the evacuation. The immediate cause unquestionably was distrust of the Japanese minority. The evidence is that General John L. DeWitt, Commanding Officer of the Western Defense Command in 1942 who had primary responsibility for ordering the evacuation of people from security areas, vacillated considerably during the critical month of January 1942 regarding the action to be taken with respect to the Japanese minority. He received facts and sober opinions--including a report by General Mark Clark regarding the very low probability of a Japanese military invasion of the Pacific Coast--which recommended against the evacuation; but ultimately General DeWitt was swayed by pressures arising from journalists, political leaders, pressure groups, officers in the War Department, and the general situation to a decision for evacuation. General DeWitt's claim that evacuation of the Japanese minority was a military necessity now appears totally unsupportable factually, but his conclusion is explainable in terms of the prejudice against the Japanese minority which surrounded him.

By prejudice I refer not to isolable and separate identifiable actions but to a climate of opinion that prevailed. Time does not permit a recounting of the long history of anti-Oriental attitudes which arose on the Pacific Coast during the past one hundred thirty years, dating back to the fierce attacks on the immigrant Chinese which occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and continuing against the Japanese immigrants and offsprings during the first four decades of the twentieth century. I assume I need not detail the long sequence of discriminatory restrictions which were imposed on the Japanese minority because of this climate of prejudice.

I also assume that it is not difficult to understand the connection between the history of prejudice against the Japanese minority and the distrust of the minority that was widely expressed, especially on the Pacific Coast, in the winter of 1941-42. Indeed, given the history of prejudice the Japanese minority, following the outbreak of war, stood a poor chance of escaping the imposition upon it of some drastic restrictions.

Finally, to fill out the picture of the pernicious effects of prejudice, it may be noted that the tendency of the Japanese minority toward self-segregation and self-sufficiency was principally the group's mode of adaptation to the majority group's exclusion of the minority from significant participation in the economic and social opportunities of the society. Unfortunately, the net effect of the minority's social independence was to heighten the barrier between the majority group and the Japanese minority and increase the likelihood of distrust of the minority in a crisis.

There are two dangers which every nation must seek to avoid, the dangers of (a) pursuing the wrong goals, and (b) of using erroneous facts and false assumptions to pursue its goals. I have never felt there was any reason to question the democratic goals which the United States pursues. On the other hand, I believe this nation has committed more than its share of mistakes because of its frequent inability or unwillingness to separate fact from fiction. The evacuation of the Japanese minority was, I believe, one of the nation's gravest mistakes, and it occurred because of a history of prejudice that yielded mistaken conclusions about the wartime danger to national security posed by this population. If from these hearings the Government learns something about how to discriminate between fact and fiction regarding its people, I believe a great advance will have been accomplished.