

TESTIMONY AT THE COMMISSION HEARINGS

In 1984, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), published its findings under the title of “Personal Justice Denied.” It supported virtually all of the allegations of the internees and recommended a monetary compensation of \$20,000. Their conclusions were drawn not only from an investigative study conducted by their own staff, but from the Hearings itself. These emotionally charged events allowed the internees and members of the Japanese American community a chance to speak for themselves.

The Hearings were chaired by Joan Z. Bernstein, a Washington D.C. Attorney with Daniel Lungren, a Congressman from Long Beach, California, serving as Vice Chairman. The “blue ribbon commission” as it was often referred to, included current and former governmental notables, such as former Justice of the Supreme Court, Arthur Goldberg, Arthur Fleming of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Father Robert F. Drinan of Georgetown University and Father I.V. Gromhoff of the Aleutian Islands. Other notables were Judge William Marutani of Philadelphia and former Senators Edward Brooke and Hugh Mitchell.

Some of the Hearings were chaired by Dan Lungren, who proved to be the only person on the Commission to vote against the recommendation for redress. He was to play a major role in opposing HR442, the bill that was subsequently introduced in Congress to implement redress. He did this by attempting to add amendments that would essentially

Hearings were conducted in most major cities across the nation that had a significant population of Japanese Americans. The hearings in Los Angeles proved to be one of the most emotionally charged as the “dam



[Mabel Ota testifying before the 1981 Hearings in Los Angeles](#)

“broke,” with formally reluctant internees speaking openly about their sorrow, fears and anger, publicly, for the world to see. The audience, composed heavily of Japanese Americans, often wept and cheered loudly to support and encourage those who had stepped forward to give testimony. The newspapers

witnessed the gasps from the crowd as an enraged redress critic, Lillian Baker, slipped up to snatch the notes from a spokesperson for the 442nd veterans. The next days news chronicled the tug of war that ensued and the glee of the audience as Lillian Baker was escorted out of the hearings by the guards.

It also featured interviews with Senator Samuel I. Hayakawa, who stubbornly contended that the internment was a step in the right direction to get Japanese Americans out of their ghetto like communities and force them to assimilate. The demand for redress “made his skin crawl,” as he was often quoted as saying and he dismissed the entire movement as that brought about wholly by the activities of the “college radicals.”

In this atmosphere, incredible stories were often brought to light, such as the search of Ewan Yoshida of Alaska, who appeared at the hearings still in search of his father, a fisherman, who had disappeared after the start of the war. He had no idea that his father had been taken and interned and had subsequently passed away. Left at an orphanage, whenever his father went on his fishing trips, he appeared some 40 years later in Los Angeles, wondering why his father had never returned to claim him.

Tales of inadequate medical care, some gruesome in detail! There were stories of the loss of a lifetimes' worth of accomplishments and of lost material possessions. Savings accounts that vanished into thin air through government confiscation! The mental anguish and fear that enveloped all the internees, along with a dying hope for any sort of future poured forward!