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Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks,
Recreation and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, may I thank you for allowing me to present testimony before the National Parks Subcommittee today on HR 1492. For the record, my name is Floyd Mori. I am the immediate past national president of the Japanese American Citizens League, also known as JACL. JACL is the oldest and largest Asian American human and civil rights organization in the nation. We have a membership of over 20,000 and are represented by 113 chapters throughout the country. For seventy-six years JACL has been committed to challenging discrimination against any citizen of this country and in protecting civil liberties of our community. We have also been committed to preserving the history and culture of the Japanese American community.

As you know, one of the most important historical events in the lives of Japanese Americans, and one of the most significant moments in the constitutional history of this nation, was the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. For over six decades now, constitutional scholars have noted that the World War II internment was one of the nation's most egregious violations of the United States Constitution against American citizens. The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, a federal commission authorized by legislation approved by the Congress and signed by the President, conducted a two-year investigation into the circumstances surrounding the decision to intern Japanese Americans. The commission concluded in its 1982 report, "Personal Justice Denied," that there was no factual or even reasonable basis for the internment and that the decision to intern was the result of "race prejudice, economic greed, and a lack of political leadership."

The initiative to seek the establishment of the commission, and the subsequent campaign to seek redress for the wrongful actions of the government was led by the organization which I represent, the Japanese American Citizens League. It was we who insisted that symbolic redress be paid to rectify the injustice of the internment, but more importantly, we wanted the record set straight that Japanese Americans were and have always been loyal to the nation of their birth, the United States.

Equally important, we felt it was critical that this nation have the courage to recognize its mistakes of the past and in so doing, serve a lesson to the future. In this regard, Mr. Chairman, I believe it is very important that we continue as a nation to learn from our past by maintaining the symbols of our history. Hallowed names like Gettysburg, Little Big Horn, Valley Forge, Sutter's Fort, and so many others serve as invaluable lessons from our past and speak of both the courage and tragedies of that past. History has little meaning if it does not teach us about ourselves and about those who have sacrificed for the greater good of the nation.

Although the existence of the ten World War II internment camps is not a proud part of our past, it is nevertheless an honest recognition of the events that have in part brought us to where we are today. We can equally be proud in telling that history to note that forty years after the existence of those camps, the Congress had the courage to acknowledge the injustice of that experience and to rectify the wrong by providing redress. Only a great nation would do so, and that's an important lesson as well.

If we obliterate the past, if we allow the World War II internment sites to be removed from our collective memory, we only do the future a disservice. There are Americans today who do not believe that the United States government could possibly have interned its own citizens, do not believe that concentration camps existed within the borders of the United States, and equally do not believe that an entire segment of our population, though innocent, could possibly have been imprisoned solely on the basis of race.

These internment sites, Manzanar, Topaz, Minidoka, Heart Mountain, Tule Lake, Gila River, Poston, Amache, Rohwer, Jerome and what is left of them today stand as an important and powerful lesson for this nation.

If we chose to remove all evidence of that experience from this land, it would be akin to denying it ever happened. We are better than that. We are greater than that as a nation.

The Japanese American Citizens League is in strong support of HR 1492 and we urge the members of this committee to consider the profound implications of this legislation. We urge your approval of this measure to ensure that this World War II internment camps stand forever as a lesson for our future.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.