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Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks,
Recreation and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
US House Of Representatives

Hearing on HR 1492
April 14, 2005

My name is Gerald H. Yamada. I am submitting this statement on behalf of the Japanese American National Heritage Coalition (or "Heritage Coalition") in support of HR 1492. The Heritage Coalition members include the Go For Broke Educational Foundation, Go For Broke National Veterans Association, Japanese American Citizens League; Japanese American National Museum; Japanese American Veterans Association; National Asian Pacific American Bar Association; National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium; National Japanese American Historical Society; National Japanese American Memorial Foundation; National Japanese American Veterans Council; Organization of Chinese Americans; Amache Preservation Society; Committee to Change "Jap" Road, TX; Densho, WA; Denver Central Optimists; Colorado River Indian Tribes; Friends of California Civil Liberties Public Education Program; Gila Reunion Committee; Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation; Japanese American Service Committee, Chicago, IL; Japanese American Historical Society, San Diego, CA; Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i; Life Interrupted Program (Arkansas Camps); Nisei Farmers League, CA; Poston Restoration Project; Topaz Museum Board, UT; and Tule Lake Preservation Committee.

The Heritage Coalition applauds the work of this Subcommittee in holding this hearing so expeditiously after the introduction of HR 1492. We also commend the leadership of Congressman William Thomas in sponsoring HR 1492.

HR 1492 is important to the Japanese American community and American public because it would provide federal partnerships with public and private entities to preserve the historic significance of "confinement sites" used during World War II to imprison Japanese Americans. These "confinement sites" are individually unique but have one common thread. These sites were the results of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signing Executive Order 9066 in 1942. The federal government used EO 9066 as the authority to forcibly exclude and evacuate 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry from California, Alaska, Hawaii, and portions of Arizona, Oregon, and Washington to government-controlled assembly centers and later to "internment camps" and other secured locations. There were ten (10) "internment camps" and they are commonly referred to as Gila River, Granada (or Amache), Heart Mountain, Jerome, Manzanar, Minidoka, Poston, Rohwer, Topaz, and Tule Lake. Their locations are depicted respectively in Figures 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1, 8.4, 9.2, 10.6, 11.2, 12.2, and 13.2 in *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*, Publications in Anthropology 74 of the Western Archeological and Conservation Center, National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), 1999. In addition to these 10 internment camp sites, other confinement sites also are described in this publication.

We need not take the time here to establish that the actions taken under the authority of Executive Order 9066 were wrongful. The wrongfulness of those actions have already been established. The 1982 Report of the U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, created by legislation signed by President Jimmy Carter, concluded that "Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity" and that Executive Order 9066 decisions were shaped by "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

President Ronald Reagan stated "Here we admit a wrong. Here we affirm our commitment as a nation to equal justice under the law" when he signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 into law. The Civil Liberties Act provided the formal apology for the imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II. The Civil Liberties Act showed the strength of our system of government. By publicly admitting a wrong, the federal government reconfirmed its faith in the principles of democracy and the protection of rights provided by our Constitution.

HR 1492 would preserve this reaffirmation for the American public and for future generations of Americans. These sites provide physical venues to demonstrate that this Nation's commitment to the fundamental principles of due process and equal protection must not be compromised by prejudicial and discriminatory governmental actions. They teach that patriotism and citizenship founded in our constitutional system of government and tradition of justice will transcend prejudice and discrimination. These lessons must be preserved for the American public and for future generations of Americans.

The internment experience is still unknown to many Americans. That is why it is important to make available the framework of resources that would be authorized by HR 1492 to local community groups or organizations and local, State, and

Tribal Governments to preserve the confinement sites. Although we could look to the National Park Service to carry out this responsibility, the National Park Service has resources to designate only a limited number of the confinement sites as National Park Service units. To complement the National Park Service's efforts, HR 1492 would provide the resources to ensure that non-NPS confinement site units for which there is community group and local, State, or Tribal Government interest could be preserved.

The grant program that would be authorized by HR 1492 is needed because time is critical. The 1999 United States Department of Interior publication entitled "Confinement and Ethnicity" reported that the internment camp sites are, in varying degrees, deteriorating and in disrepair and must have federal support if their historic significances and lessons are to be preserved. Furthermore, the Japanese Americans who were inmates at these confinement sites are today in their 60's or older. Their personal recollections and first hand experiences are absolutely needed to ensure the accuracy of any preservation projects.

There are success stories resulting from the internment experience. The internment experience has inspired some Japanese Americans to attain high positions in government. Most notable are Members who have served or are serving in the House. Former Members Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui were in Heart Mountain and Tule Lake, respectively. Current Members Michael Honda and Doris Matsui were in Granada and Poston, respectively. Each of these Members have been strong public advocates to ensure that no minority group will have to experience what the Japanese Americans experienced during World War II. However, more is needed.

The internment experience for the vast majority of Japanese Americans took a tremendous toll in human sacrifices and hardships on families and individuals during and after World War II. Yet, the Japanese Americans remained law-abiding citizens, and families proudly sent more than 25,000 of their sons and daughters to serve in the US military during World War II while they remained behind, confined against their will, and imprisoned without due process.

Those soldiers served with legendary distinction and honor in the European and Pacific campaigns. Over 800 of these soldiers gave their lives defending America.

The ordeal suffered by Japanese Americans in confinement sites will not have been in vain if their sacrifices and hardships can be preserved in ways so that the lessons of the past will not be forgotten and can be used to benefit future generations.

There have been federal efforts to recognize the significance of the internment experience.

Congress authorized the building with private funding of a national memorial dedicated to the patriotism of Japanese Americans during World War II. That national memorial was dedicated in 2000 and is located in a triangular park not far from the Capitol. It is bounded by Louisiana Avenue, New Jersey Avenue, and D Street NW.

The National Park Service has also recognized the significance of preserving this history. Manzanar and Minidoka are designated as National Park Service units, and the National Park Service is considering two or three other internment sites for possible National Park Service unit status. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that all ten internment sites will become National Park Service units.

The lessons that must be preserved from the internment experience are too important to be limited to only some of the sites. The whole history must be preserved where the actual events took place. Preserving two or even five sites would not tell the entire history of what transpired because each of the "confinement sites" was different and has its own unique history and relationships within and outside of the site.

HR 1492 affords each of the internment camp committees the opportunity to preserve the sites' history in its own way. The internment camp committees may want to use funding provided by HR 1492 to restore, reconstruct, stabilize, or relocate camp site structures; upgrade site infrastructures; build a museum or interpretative center on or off site; acquire property; erect a monument, marker, or signage; sponsor educational programs, document oral histories, refurbish an on-site cemetery, etc. In other words, the Heritage Coalition envisions that HR 1492 would fund a wide range of preservation projects and the scope of those projects would depend upon the initiative of community groups or organizations working in partnership with local, State, and Tribal Governments and with the National Park Service and other federal agencies.

Under HR 1492, preservation projects at confinement sites, other than the ten internment camps, would be able to preserve their history. One example is the detention camps in Hawaii -- Sand Island and Honouliuli, Hawaii. Few people, even those living in Hawaii, know that Japanese Americans were held in detention camps in Hawaii following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Today, there are no historic markers at either location.

A second example is Fort Lincoln located in Bismarck, North Dakota. Fort Lincoln is a Department of Justice camp.

The Department of Justice camps initially were used to detain either Italian, German, and/or Japanese nationals who were labeled as enemy aliens. These Department of Justice camps were used later in the war to detain Japanese Americans.

A third example is Crystal City, Texas. Crystal City is another Department of Justice camp. It has a unique history because it was also used to detain Japanese Peruvians, who were forcibly transported to the United States from Peru and detained at Crystal City. The Peruvian Government did not want them returned after the war. They were forced to remain in the United States. Other Department of Justice camps were located at Kenedy, TX; Kooskia, ID; Fort Missoula, MT; Fort Stanton, NM; Santa FE, NW; and Seagoville, TX.

A final example is the Puyallup Assembly Center, Washington. Puyallup is an example of the assembly centers that were temporarily used to house Japanese Americans after they were evacuated from their homes, but before they were sent to Internment Camps. Similar assembly centers were located in California, Arizona, Oregon, and Washington. Puyallup was known as Camp Harmony and was used to house up to 7,628 Japanese American evacuees from Washington and Alaska between April to September 1942.

The four examples above are illustrative of other sites that are within the definition of “confinement sites” that would be eligible for funding under this legislation. HR 1492 would provide the framework that would afford the opportunity for community groups and organizations to work with the National Park Service to preserve these sites in ways that the experiences of those internees are not forgotten.

In sum, the Heritage Coalition supports HR 1492 because there is an urgent need to preserve the historic lesson that government action founded in prejudice and discrimination cannot be justified and is not part of our democratic way of governing.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present this testimony. If you have questions, I am prepared to respond to them.