



OREGON NIKKEI ENDOWMENT

Seventy-five years ago on February 19, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. This presidential action, which would remain unbalanced and unchecked for over 40 years, provided the American military the authority to use whatever means necessary to protect the west coast from enemy invasion. It was this order that allowed the military to forcibly remove 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry from the west coast to remote and barren incarceration camps without representation and without due process. The majority of these were American citizens.

The Oregon Nikkei Endowment (O.N.E.) preserves the legacy of this dark chapter in American history and therefore fully supports Oregon Senate Resolution 14 that calls upon our elected representatives to acknowledge the historical significance of February 19, 1942.

For the state of Oregon, this order affected almost 750 families of Japanese ancestry living in not just the Portland area, but the areas of Salem, Milwaukie, Hood River, Gresham, Banks, Hillsboro, Gaston and southwest Washington.

In the Portland area, there were 340 families that represented about 1,000 people in a city of 350,000. The Japanese American community operated 100 hotels and apartments, 64 grocery stores and fruit stands and other businesses such as tailors, laundries, produce dealers and professional services from doctors and dentists to accounting. The executive order not only created an instant socio-economic vacuum but made the Japanese culture a social pariah for generations to come. In Portland, what was once a vibrant *Nihonmachi* became Chinatown, and for future generations, the “Japanese” part of Japanese American was no longer a point of pride.

The actions allowed under Executive Order 9066 created a sense of shame of Japanese culture, and O.N.E. preserves the Japanese American story so that no culture, race or religion on American soil should ever face that sense of shame or subjected to such profiling. The fact that America is built on cultural diversity, yet chose to turn its back and shame one such culture is a historical lesson that SCR 14 will help highlight so that it never happens again. And the fact that Japanese culture has become so intertwined with today’s American culture to us represents the inevitable.

Furthermore, SCR 14 comes on the heels of the Congressional Gold Medal being awarded to the segregated Japanese American military units of the 100th Infantry Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the Military Intelligence Service (MIS), a rare award in thanks to these men who distinguished themselves both on and off the battlefield. To this day, they are the most decorated military unit in history for their size and length of service.

O.N.E. truly hopes that SCR 14 is adopted and that the state of Oregon continues to be a state that acknowledges, values and honors its diverse population. O.N.E. is proud to be a member of the community of the state of Oregon.

Respectfully submitted,
Board of Oregon Nikkei Endowment
Lynn Fuchigami Longfellow, Executive Director