FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 12, 2021

Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition Examines the Complex History of WWII Japanese American Incarceration Camps

Canton, Ohio... The McKinley Presidential Library & Museum announces the opening of the Smithsonian traveling exhibition “Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II” on March 25 in the Keller Gallery. The exhibition examines the complicated history and impact of Executive Order 9066 that led to the incarceration of Japanese Americans following the attack on Pearl Harbor. “Righting a Wrong” will remain on view through July 3. The exhibition will continue touring museums and other cultural organizations through November 2022.

Embracing themes that are as relevant today as they were 75 years ago, “Righting a Wrong” looks at immigration, prejudice, civil rights, heroism, and what it means to be an American. The exhibition explores the complex history through historical images, personal stories and objects from those incarcerated at the camps. A duffle bag used by the Imada family when they were relocated to the Gila River camp in Arizona reflects the restrictions to bring only what they could carry. Takeo Shirasawa’s 1943 high school diploma from the Poston camp in Arizona exemplifies the experience of thousands of other teens who had to complete their high school education in camps.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan on Dec. 7, 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which sent 75,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry and 45,000 Japanese nationals to incarceration camps. Ten large, barbed wire-enclosed incarceration camps and dozens of other installations were scattered west of the Mississippi, far from their homes from March 1942 to March 1946. Young and old lived crowded together in the hastily built camps, endured poor living conditions, and were under the constant watch of military guards for two and a half years. Meanwhile, brave Japanese American men risked their lives fighting for the United States.

Some 40 years later, members of the Japanese American community led the nation to confront the wrong it had done. The U.S. Congress formally recognized that the rights of the Japanese American community had been violated and President Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, providing an apology and restitution to the living Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during World War II.

“Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II” was developed by the National Museum of American History and adapted for travel by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. The national tour received Federal support from the Asian Pacific American Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, the Terasaki Family Foundation, and C. L. Ehn & Ginger Lew.

The exhibition is based on the exhibit of the same name that was on view February 17, 2017 through March 6, 2019 at the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC.

ABOUT SITES
SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, D.C., for more than 65 years. SITES connects Americans to their shared cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science, and history, which are shown wherever people live, work and play. For exhibition description and tour schedules, visit sites.si.edu.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM

The McKinley Presidential Library & Museum is located at 800 McKinley Monument Dr NW in Canton. The Keller Gallery is the Museum’s temporary exhibition space and features a variety of topics each year. The Museum also includes the McKinley National Memorial, McKinley Gallery, Street of Shops, The Stark County Story, Discover World, Ramsayer Research Library, and the Hoover-Price Planetarium. The Museum is open Tuesday – Saturday from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 1:00 to 4:00 PM. The Museum is closed Sunday and Monday.

The Mochida family, wearing identification tags, awaits a bus. They were forced to leave their two-acre nursery and greenhouse operation in Eden, California, May 1942.
Dorothea Lange, Courtesy of National Archives
Pledging allegiance to the flag at Raphael Weill Public School in San Francisco, 1942
Dorothea Lange, Courtesy of National Archives
Exclusion Order 69  
Courtesy of Robert Fuchigami  
Executive Order 9066 authorized the military to establish the War Relocation Authority. Military officers moved neighborhood by neighborhood to remove Japanese Americans and resident Japanese from the West Coast, acting on 108 different military “exclusion” orders.
Dust storm at Manzanar camp in California, 1942.
Dorothea Lange, Courtesy of Library of Congress

###