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***Remembering Executive Order 9066 in 2016***

In his unprecedented twelve years as President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed 3,721 Executive Orders (EO), more than twice as many as any other President. One of them, EO 9066, issued 74 years ago on February 19, 1942, forever changed the lives of over 120,000 U.S. citizens and residents and reshaped the fabric of Wyoming.

An Executive Order comes from the President and must be obeyed like a law. Every President has issued Executive Orders. John Adams issued only one. Woodrow Wilson and Calvin Coolidge each signed over a thousand. Some are relatively benign and obscure like the Executive Order Theodore Roosevelt created appointing a curator for the birds' eggs housed in the national museum. Others, like the Emancipation Proclamation, changed the face of our nation. This week we mark President's Day and remember the act of one president who, pressured during a time of war, made an order that led to the confinement of Japanese Americans in 10 camps across the United States.

EO 9066 had far-reaching impacts on the country, civil rights, and individual human lives. It authorized the Secretary of War to "prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent... from which any or all persons may be excluded" (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). While this language may seem vague to us today, in 1942 it was clear — the Japanese Americans living on the west coast of the United States needed to be moved. At the time Roosevelt was under pressure from the military establishment and Congress to find a way to remove Japanese Americans from California, and parts of Washington, Oregon, and Arizona. EO 9066 was the answer.

The Order gave sweeping power to the military to declare an area an exclusion zone and then remove people from it. It authorized, "the Secretary of War... to take such other steps as he... may deem advisable to enforce compliance..." (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration). As a direct result of this Order over 120,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly evacuated from their homes and their communities and placed in confinement sites, like the one at Heart Mountain.

Public Law 503, which enforced the President's Executive Order, was passed by Congress less than a month later. This law provided criminal penalties to anyone who refused to be evacuated. The passing of this law went largely uncontested by lawmakers. Despite the numerous checks and balances built into the U.S. legal system, war-time hysteria and racial prejudice created a political environment that led to incarceration of Japanese Americans — two-thirds of whom were U.S. citizens.

But one man, Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio noted, "I think this is probably the sloppiest criminal law I have ever read or seen anywhere... I have no doubt that in peacetime no man could ever be convicted under it, because the court would find that it was so indefinite and so uncertain that it could not be enforced under the Constitution" (Congressional Record, Vol. 90). It turns out that Taft was correct. Exactly 34 years after Roosevelt signed EO 9066, on February 19, 1976, President Ford terminated it with Proclamation 4417. Another 12 years after that Public Law 100-383 acknowledged that the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II was unjust. The bill provided a formal apology and a small amount of restitution. What has become known as the 'Civil Liberties Act of 1988' was signed on August 10 by President Reagan.

On this 74<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the signing of EO 9066 the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center invites visitors to explore the impact this historic event had on the physical and social landscape of northwest Wyoming. In addition to the award-winning museum, interpretive walking trail, war memorial, and original camp structures on the National Historic Landmark Site, a special exhibit is running now through February 26. The exhibit, titled *Dusted Off*, features new acquisitions to the Heart Mountain collection including original baggage tags, travel notices, household furnishings used by families at Heart Mountain, and government-issue dishware found on the site by a local family following the closure of the 'camp.'

"Objects and documents are the vehicles museums use to tell powerful stories," says Heart Mountain Archivist Nicole Blechynden. "The items currently on display now in the Ford Foundation Gallery give us a glimpse of the everyday lives of people who lived through an extraordinary event in U.S. history. Through the things they cherished, saved, and passed on, we learn a little something about who they were and why they should not be forgotten."

[images attached] Photo credit: Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation

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*The Heart Mountain Interpretive Center is located between Cody and Powell, WY, on Highway 14A. It is open in the winter Wednesday through Saturday from 10am to 5pm. Admission is \$7.00 for adults, \$5.00 for seniors and students, members and children under 12 are free. For more information please call (307) 754-8000 or visit [www.HeartMountain.org](http://www.HeartMountain.org).*