

Washington Civil Liberties Public Education Program Background

Purpose of WCLPEP Projects

The purpose of all Washington Civil Liberties Public Education Program (WCLPEP) projects is to educate the public about:

- The World War II mass incarceration of individuals of Japanese descent.
- Related knowledge concerning democratic institutions and processes.
- The fragile nature of our constitutional rights.

In 1980, Congress established the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians to investigate the World War II incarceration of mainland Japanese Americans and Alaskan Aleuts. After the testimony of over 750 witnesses and analysis of government documents, the Commission's findings challenged predominant narratives of the time, which stated that the mass incarceration of over 120,000 individuals of Japanese descent was done out of military necessity. Instead, the Commission found:

The promulgation of Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions which followed from it—detention, ending detention and exclusion—were not driven by analysis of military conditions. The broad historical causes which shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership. Widespread ignorance of Japanese Americans contributed to a policy conceived in haste and executed in an atmosphere of fear and anger at Japan. A grave injustice was done to American citizens and resident noncitizens of Japanese ancestry who, without individual review or any probative evidence against them, were excluded, removed and detained by the United States during World War II.

Among the Commission's recommendations was the establishment of a fund to "sponsor research and public education activities so that the events which were the subject of this inquiry will be remembered, and so that the causes and circumstances of this and similar events may be illuminated and understood. A nation which wishes to remain just to its citizens must not forget its lapses."

Based upon the federal Commission's findings and recommendations, the 56th Legislature, State of Washington, 2000 Regular Session passed [Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1572](#). The legislature [found](#) that a grave injustice had been done and that a public education program should be developed in the State of Washington that would teach about the past and develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to guard against similar injustices occurring again. The Washington Civil Liberties Public Education Act established a program to accomplish these goals.

i The term incarceration is now recognized as more accurate than the term internment. In addition to the language of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, the Oxford Companion to United States History recognizes incarceration as an accurate description. For a detailed discussion of the terminologies surrounding the WWII incarcerations, visit the [Densho](#) and [Civil Liberties Public Education Fund](#) websites.

ii United States. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (1997). *Personal justice denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians: Foreword by Tetsuden Kashima*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press and the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund, p. 18.

iii *Ibid.*, p. 463.