Day of Remembrance

The Day of Remembrance (DOR) was created as an annual observance of Executive Order #9066, signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, forcing all persons of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast to leave their homes for confinement in inland detention camps. During the period from 1942 to 1946, some 77,000 American-born citizens (Nisei) and 45,000 Japanese nationals, most of whom were permanent U.S. residents (Issei), were deprived of liberty and property without criminal charges or trial.

The first DOR was held on November 25, 1978, at the Puyallup Fairgrounds in Washington, one of twenty temporary government detention centers during the early months of World War II. An estimated 3,200 people attended, despite some opposition from the local American Legion.

The next year, on February 17, 1979, Oregon held its first DOR at the former Pacific International Livestock Exposition, where, in 1942, animal stables had been turned into living quarters for more than 3,500 Japanese Americans, the site of the Portland Assembly Center.

Thirty-seven years after the signing of the executive order and forty-six years after President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and apologized for the government's "mistake," some 1,000 Oregonians came together to receive this public recognition of a forgotten injustice. Mayor Neil Goldschmidt declared this a Day of Remembrance in Oregon; speakers included Oregonian Minoru Yasui, who had openly challenged the constitutionality of the government's curfew order. Exhibits of artwork and other objects handcrafted in the camps—bits of obsidian, walking sticks made of limbs of sagebrush, greasewood furniture—were displayed.

Portland and Eugene continue to hold annual DORs, broadening their advocacy for civil rights by speaking out for others, including Arab Americans and Native Americans. Hood River, which in 1945 achieved notoriety as a hotbed of anti-Japanese sentiment, also held a DOR in 2007, planned and organized by Joan Yasui Emerson, Min Yasui's niece. In 2008, Willamette University, in Salem, featured Oregon poet laureate Lawson Inada at its DOR. From 1978 to the present, the Day of Remembrance has become a forum for Oregonians—and citizens in many West Coast cities—to remember the past and renew their commitment for citizens' rights.

Written by Mitzi Loftus

Further Reading:

Azuma, Eiichiro. "A History of Oregon's *Issei*, 1880-1952." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 94, 1993-4: 315-67.

Tamura, Linda. *The Hood River Issei: An Oral History of Japanese Settlers in Oregon' Hood River Valley*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

http://www.dayofremembrance.org/

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