



Manzanar Committee

1566 Curran Street • Los Angeles, California • 90026-2036 • (323) 662-5102
E-Mail: info@manzanarcommittee.org • Web: <http://www.manzanarcommittee.org>
Blog: <http://blog.manzanarcommittee.org>
<http://www.facebook.com/ManzanarCommittee> [@manzanarcomm](https://twitter.com/manzanarcomm)

Contact: Manzanar Committee PR
Voice: (323) 662-5102
E-Mail: public-relations@manzanarcommittee.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Manzanar Committee Denounces Profiteering From Japanese American Concentration Camp Artifacts

LOS ANGELES — On April 12, the Manzanar Committee, sponsors of the annual Manzanar Pilgrimage since 1969, and the more recent Manzanar At Dusk program, denounced the April 17, 2015 auction by Rago Arts and Auction in which artifacts from the concentration camps in which over 110,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were unjustly incarcerated during World War II will be sold.

The auction, which will feature 450 prisoner craft objects, personal items, art works and heritage artifacts from the camps, were given to Allen H. Eaton, the original collector, under the assumption that they would be put on exhibit to educate people about the Japanese American Incarceration experience.

“They offered to give me things to the point of embarrassment, but not to sell them,” Eaton wrote in his book, *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire: The Arts of the Japanese In Our War Relocation Camps*, published in 1952.

“We denounce this auction, which re-ignites the anger, frustration and humiliation that our community, our families felt during the forced removal,” said Manzanar Committee Co-Chair Bruce Embrey. “With no time to store property or family treasures, and ordered to bring only what they could carry, our families had little choice but to destroy or sell personal belongings to opportunistic individuals seeking to profit from their misfortune; a misfortune forced upon them by an unjust, unconstitutional Executive Order.”

“The economic losses were tremendous,” added Embrey. “The personal losses were almost impossible to quantify. This is the context of an auction of this nature.”

Embrey also noted that this auction is more than reminiscent of past auctions in which artifacts from other shameful chapters of our nation’s past were sold for little more than profit.

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“These artifacts are an expression of our families and friends struggling to make life tolerable during an intolerable situation,” Embrey lamented. “Like those who defied the barbed wire at Manzanar to fish in the Eastern Sierras, those who fashioned jewelry or crafts while in camp were resisting the humiliation and dehumanization of the incarceration.”

“As the Ad Hoc Committee to Oppose the Sale of Japanese American Historical Artifacts points out, this is reminiscent of other auctions of belongings, whether they were relics from slavery, Native American cultural and religious artifacts, or items stolen during the Holocaust,” Embrey added. “The Manzanar Committee believes that important historical artifacts need to be preserved and made available to a wide audience in order to tell the stories of oppressed peoples rather than be used for profit or personal gain.”

Embrey urged Rago Arts and Auctions to respect, not only the wishes of those who gave the artifacts to Eaton, but the Japanese American community and our nation’s history.

“We call on Rago Arts and Auctions to immediately halt the sale of any items related to the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans, and to instead engage in dialogue with the Japanese American community on the disposition of the artifacts in question.”

“To attempt to profit from these precious, historic artifacts is no different than those farmers, fishing companies and others who sought to profit by buying our families’ possessions for pennies on the dollar as they left for camp. It is a stark reminder that many in the United States have yet to fully understand or redress the wrongs Executive Order 9066 wrought upon the Japanese American community. This auction only adds insult to injury.”

For more information, or to lend your voice to the opposition fighting to halt this auction, check out the **Japanese American History NOT FOR SALE** page on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/japaneseamericanhistorynotforsale>.

The Manzanar Committee is dedicated to educating and raising public awareness about the incarceration and violation of civil rights of persons of Japanese ancestry during World War II and to the continuing struggle of all peoples when Constitutional rights are in danger. A non-profit organization that has sponsored the annual Manzanar Pilgrimage since 1969, along with other educational programs, the Manzanar Committee has also played a key role in the establishment and continued development of the Manzanar National Historic Site. Check the Manzanar Committee’s official blog at <http://blog.manzanarcommittee.org>, call (323) 662-5102, or send e-mail to 46thpilgrimage@manzanarcommittee.org. You can also follow the Manzanar Committee on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/ManzanarCommittee>) and Twitter (<http://twitter.com/manzanarcomm>).