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What's in a Word? An Explanation of Terminology

An introduction to diverse terminology and perspectives on the treatment of resident Japanese and Japanese Americans in the United States during World War II.

Many different words have been used and continue to be used to describe the U.S. government's wartime policy toward resident Japanese citizens and Japanese Americans, the events through which the policy was implemented, the facilities that provided for implementation and the impact on affected individuals, families and communities. Highly charged debates over words and terminology continue to reflect intense passions and diverse perspectives on whether or not the policy was appropriate and justifiable 60 years ago. To commemorate historic sites such

as the embarkation at Taylor Avenue on Bainbridge Island, Washington, and to fulfill its responsibilities to the public, the NPS acknowledges the diversity of perspectives and opinions on the meaning and significance of various words. Instead of selecting certain words or sets of terminology as either "acceptable" or "correct" the NPS encourages reflection, education, and discussion about this aspect of American history.

Those of us who prepared this document acknowledge certain words and terms have been used by various individuals, groups, and the government itself for diverse ideological purposes. Some purposes include denial of the negative results of policy implementation, minimizing the impacts, or exaggerating

its consequences. Among the words under consideration are evacuation, exclusion, detention, incarceration, internment, and relocation—words that have been used to describe the event of forcefully removing people from their homes and communities. The people themselves have been referred to with words such as evacuees, detainees, inmates, internees, non-alien, and prisoners. Finally, the facilities used to implement the policy have been called assembly centers, camps, concentration camps, incarceration camps, internment camps, prisons, relocation centers, and War Relocation Centers. This document uses many of these terms. Our choices have been based upon sources used or cited. We acknowledge that readers may not always agree with the use of certain words in specific contexts.