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Preserving History, Honoring Legacy: Judge Johnny Cepeda Gogo's National Flag Project

For Superior Court Judge Johnny Cepeda Gogo, community outreach extends beyond the courtroom. Through a remarkable multi-year project, Judge Gogo has traveled across the United States collecting signatures on historic 48-star American flags from Japanese Americans who experienced incarceration during World War II, as well as veterans who served the nation despite the discrimination they and their families faced.

What began as a local effort to honor surviving members of the Japanese American community has grown into a national preservation initiative. Since launching the project in 2021, Judge Gogo has visited communities across California, Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, and other states, inviting former incarcerated, their descendants, and military veterans to add their signatures and personal stories to the historic flags. The project has resulted in thousands of signatures and several flags being donated to museums and educational institutions dedicated to preserving Japanese American history.

The project serves as a powerful reminder of a difficult chapter in American history. Following Executive Order 9066 during World War II, more than 120,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated in camps across the United States. Despite these injustices, thousands of Japanese Americans volunteered or were drafted into military service, including members of the famed 442nd Regimental Combat Team, one of the most highly decorated units in U.S. military history.

Judge Gogo's work helps ensure that these stories are not forgotten. By personally meeting survivors and families, he has collected not only signatures but also firsthand accounts of resilience, patriotism, sacrifice, and perseverance. The flags have become living historical documents that connect generations and encourage meaningful conversations about civil liberties, citizenship, and justice.

Several of the completed flags have been donated to organizations including the Japanese American Museum of San Jose, the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, and the Fred T. Korematsu Institute. Others have been incorporated into educational exhibits and community programs designed to teach future generations about the wartime experiences of Japanese Americans.

Recently featured by NBC Bay Area, Judge Gogo reflected on the significance of the project and the importance of preserving these voices while survivors are still able to share their experiences. As the number of living witnesses to this history continues to decline, the project has taken on even greater urgency.

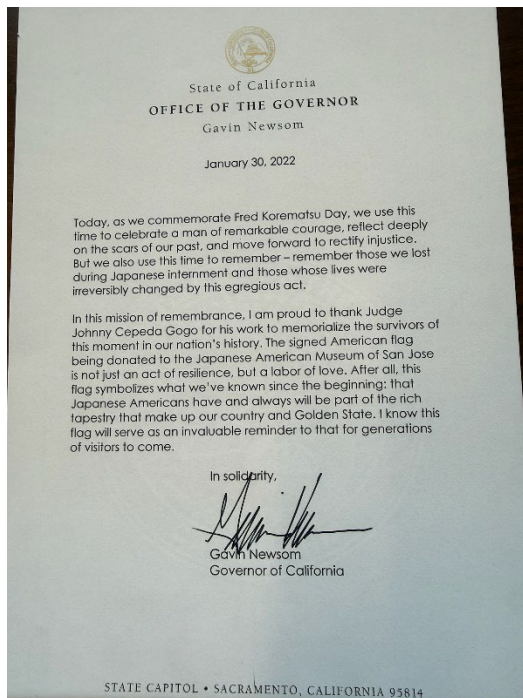
Judge Gogo's dedication exemplifies the Court's commitment to community engagement, education, and preserving the stories that help shape our understanding of justice. Through this project, he has created a lasting tribute to those who endured hardship, served their country, and strengthened the principles of democracy and civil rights for future generations.

The flags stand not only as symbols of patriotism, but also as powerful reminders that safeguarding constitutional rights requires vigilance, education, and a willingness to learn from history.

View: [Stars, stripes and signatures. Judge Johnny Cepeda Gogo collects US flags signed by Japanese American veterans – NBC Bay Area](#)



Alt text: Two men sit in modern gray chairs on a red studio set in front of a large screen displaying the title "Asian Pacific America with Robert Handa." One man wears a dark suit and tie, while the other wears a dark jacket, shirt, and sneakers. Both are smiling toward the camera in a television studio setting.



Alt text: Letter from the Office of the Governor of California on official State of California letterhead, signed by Governor Gavin Newsom and dated January 30, 2022. The letter commemorates Fred Korematsu Day, reflects on the history and impact of Japanese American incarceration during World War II, and recognizes Judge Johnny Cepeda Gogo for donating a memorialized Japanese American internment flag to the Japanese American Museum of San Jose. The letter praises the donation as a symbol of resilience and remembrance and concludes with the governor's signature.