

**Testimony of Dr. Roger N. Buckley to the Appropriations Committee
February 11, 2009
RE: Asian Pacific American Commission**

Honorable members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in support of the Asian Pacific American Commission.

My name is Roger Buckley and I am a resident of the town of Coventry. I am professor of history and the founding director of the Asian American Studies Institute at the University of Connecticut, at the Storrs campus

Permit me to be candid because candor saves time. What I say may, as one scholar put it, annoy the stodgy guardians of the old history of the United States, but I believe the public has a right to know what a complex yet marvelous history we have as Americans. The telling of the history of this great country has been and continues to be a story that is incomplete. We remain largely ignorant of the centrality of race and ethnicity in the development of American society. And no where is this more in evidence than in our understanding and appreciation of Asian American history.

The history of peoples of Asian descent in this country offers no less than a dramatic retelling of our nation's history. If we allow ourselves to look beyond the smoke screen of the "model minority myth", we see that Asian Americans have had to struggle to secure their place in American society. In doing so they have left a lasting legacy in every civic enterprise they touched – in the arts, in commerce, in education – but especially in the area of law. No examination of the history of immigration law, citizenship, property, civil rights would be complete without studying the impact of Asian Americans. Should any one doubt this claim, consider the body of law – generated by district courts and the Supreme Court- regarding the illegal incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans in American-styled concentration camps during World War Two. In my view this unlawful imprisonment of virtually the entire Japanese American community was the greatest violation of civil rights in 20th Century America – bar none. And yet, I am sad to say, most Americans are ignorant of the internment of Japanese Americans. This includes residents of the State of Connecticut. Students in my Internment class, which I have taught at Storrs for ten years, are woefully ignorant of the magnitude of the incarceration of Japanese Americans. This is an unmitigated national embarrassment that points a bony finger at the educational system and political environment in this country.

The question before us today is quite simple: do we recognize the centrality of diversity and create a dynamic institutional structure with a diversity mandate, or do we bury it in some larger structure where it will get lost among competing and different mandates? Political will is best demonstrated during hard times like these.

The Asian Pacific American Commission is a necessary organization, one that is best suited to promote growing Asian American interests in the State of

Connecticut. It is also ideally positioned to help the State make public policy for the fastest growing ethnic group in the state and the nation.

In 1993, the University of Connecticut was face with a similar challenge when it considered the establishment of an Asian American Studies program. There were two options. One called for scattering Asian American courses among several departments in the humanities. That would result in the absence of any unified Asian American intellectual presence, but it would be a cheaper solution. The second option, which would involve greater costs, would be the creation of an independent academic unit and all that went with it: visibility, budget, space, staff, status, outcome. The University, to its lasting credit, chose the second option.

Without understanding all the peoples and the cultures of the United States, there can be no true comprehension of American history and society. Will the election of President Obama to be a political fluke, or will his presidency open wide the doors of public service for all Americans at the highest levels? This, ultimately, is the question before us today.

Thank you for this opportunity.

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