

THEN THEY CAME FOR ME.

INCARCERATION OF JAPANESE AMERICANS
DURING WWII AND THE DEMISE OF CIVIL LIBERTIES

For Immediate Release



Powerful new exhibition at Alphawood Gallery examines the effect of racism and xenophobia from a dark period in American history

JUNE 29 – NOVEMBER 19, 2017

(June 5, 2017) *What does an American look like? Who is welcome in this country? What is every American's duty in the face of racist government action?* These and other important questions are posed by Alphawood Gallery's first original exhibition, ***Then They Came for Me: Incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII and the Demise of Civil Liberties***, debuting Thursday, June 29 and continuing through November 19, 2017. *Then They Came for Me* at the Alphawood Gallery (2401 North Halsted Street, Chicago) is free and open to the public.

Then They Came for Me examines a dark episode in U.S. history when, in the name of national security, the government incarcerated 120,000 citizens and legal residents during World War II without due process or other constitutional protections to which they were entitled. Executive Order 9066, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, set in motion the forced removal and imprisonment of all people of Japanese ancestry (citizens and non-citizens alike) living on or near the West Coast. During this 75th anniversary year of Executive Order 9066, we look back at this shameful past to learn lessons for our present and future in the face of new challenges created by fearmongering and racism at the highest levels of government.

Then They Came for Me is steeped in Chicago history. Thousands of previously incarcerated persons resettled here after release from the camps, and they built a vibrant and rich Japanese American community in the Chicago area that lives on today. This Chicago story forms an important part of the



2401 North Halsted Street | Chicago, Illinois 60614 | ALPHAWOODGALLERY.ORG



exhibition and its message. Alphawood Gallery has partnered with the **Japanese American Service Committee (JASC)** and members of Chicago's Japanese American community to produce *Then They Came for Me*. This important and timely exhibition will employ a wide range of photography, video, art and historical artifacts to provide multiple perspectives, engaging visitors in critical discussions of this story of injustice and its profound relevance today.

Alphawood Gallery is supported by the **Alphawood Foundation**. It was created to bring exhibitions to Chicago that further the Foundation's mission of promoting a more equitable, just and humane society.

"A difficult but important part of our mission is shining a light on great injustice, inhumanity and unfairness when it happens in our own country. By understanding how this could have happened only 75 years ago, we hope to promote a more fair and just America today. The lessons that we take from this history will help us counter the hatred and xenophobia being peddled in the name of national security and patriotism," said **Jim McDonough**, Executive Director, Alphawood Foundation. "The title of the exhibition, *Then They Came for Me*, acknowledges the terrible truth that this could happen to any group, to any one of us. And if we don't stand up for our neighbors when they are threatened in this way, who will stand up for us?"

Added **Michael Takada**, CEO of the Japanese American Service Committee, "We at the JASC and within the broader Japanese American community are proud to be a part of such a timely and important exhibit. Through our JASC Legacy Center archives, we have been entrusted with preserving and promoting the lessons learned through the experience of wartime incarceration and resettlement. For the Japanese American community, having seen what can happen when racism, xenophobia, wartime hysteria, and a lack of political leadership are allowed to flourish, we hope to continue to help spread the message that each new generation must challenge itself to guard our civil liberties and human rights, and to not take them for granted."

EXHIBITION CONTENT

Then They Came for Me draws largely upon 100 powerful images culled from the recently published book *Un-American* (CityFiles Press) by Chicago-based photography historians **Richard Cahan** and **Michael Williams**. Forming the core of the exhibition's incarceration narrative will be these works by renowned American photographers **Dorothea Lange**, **Ansel Adams** and others documenting the eviction of Japanese Americans and permanent Japanese residents from their homes and their subsequent lives in incarceration camps. Adams, Lange and others were hired by the U.S. Government's War Relocation Authority to document the "evacuation" and "internment" of Japanese Americans along the West Coast. Lange left the program after three months, and some of her photographs, which revealed her growing unease with the circumstances she encountered, were impounded by the military for the duration of the war.

Alongside the photographs will be a rich trove of documents, diaries, art, other photographs and archival materials—the majority generously lent by JASC's Legacy Center and rarely seen in public. Video and visual art complementing the experience includes regular screenings of the film *And Then They Came for*





Us, a moving new look at this issue by noted documentarians **Abby Ginzberg** and **Ken Schneider**. (The film has its Chicago Premiere at the Gene Siskel Film Center (164 North State Street) Monday, June 26, at 7pm; for more information, please visit <http://www.siskelfilmcenter.org/andthentheycameforus>).

PROGRAMMING

Following the model of Alphawood Gallery's successful presentation of *Art AIDS America*, which offered more than 120 programs with partners across the city, *Then They Came for Me* will include a robust series of programs both on and off-site to encourage and expand conversations on related contemporary issues. On its opening night (Thursday, June 29), Alphawood Gallery will conduct a "Know Your Rights" training by Art Now, Act Now in association with local social justice organizations. Weekly **public exhibition tours** will begin Saturday, July 1 at 1pm, and will take place every Wednesday and Saturday at 1pm, and every Thursday at 6:30pm. A **Take Action** space at Alphawood Gallery will be dedicated to advocacy and will feature programming, resources and materials from partner organizations. Visitors will be invited to participate in an **oral history project**, to which they can contribute their personal stories relating to the incarceration and resettlement. Many additional public programs at the Gallery are in development, including performances by **Tatsu Aoki**; a panel entitled *Rightlessness: From Japanese Incarceration to the Muslim Ban* led by American Studies scholar **Dr. Naomi Paik** (UIUC); a reading of **Chay Yew's** original play "Question 27, Question 28" (presented by Victory Gardens Theater); a performance of *Home/Land* by the Albany Park Theater Project; a special edition of the Neo-Futurists' *Infinite Wrench*; an Anti-Workshop led by performance artist **Karen Finley**; film screenings including *Far East of Eden*, *Rabbit in the Moon*, *Looking for Jiro*, *Skate Manzanar* and more.

Additional public programs and events (to be announced shortly) will address the impacts of Executive Order 9066 that are still felt throughout Japanese American communities and beyond, and provocatively explore vital questions about citizenship, immigration, racial discrimination, profiling, economic disparity, detainment, civil liberties, equality, activism and more.

ABOUT ALPHAWOOD FOUNDATION CHICAGO

Alphawood Foundation Chicago is a grant-making private foundation working for an equitable, just and humane society. It awards grants to more than 200 organizations annually, primarily in the areas of the arts and arts education, advocacy, architecture and preservation, domestic violence prevention, the environment, promotion and protection of the rights of LGBT citizens and people living with HIV/AIDS, and other human and civil rights.

ABOUT ALPHAWOOD GALLERY

Alphawood Gallery was created by Alphawood Foundation Chicago to serve as a venue for exhibitions furthering the Foundation's charitable mission. The 12,000-square-foot space first served this purpose for the Chicago presentation of the groundbreaking national touring exhibition, *Art AIDS America*, which was on display from December 1, 2016 to April 2, 2017. Alphawood Gallery is open Wednesdays and Thursdays from 11am-8pm, and Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 11am-6pm. Admission to Alphawood Gallery is free and open to the public.





The Gallery is conveniently located at 2401 North Halsted Street in Chicago near the CTA Fullerton 'L' stop, as well as several CTA bus routes. Limited free parking is available in an adjacent parking lot, along with more plentiful metered street parking and garage parking nearby.

For more information and updates on *Then They Came for Me*, please visit us at www.alphawoodgallery.org as well as on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

###

Photos available [HERE](#).

MEDIA CONTACT:

Beth Silverman/Liza Massingberd
The Silverman Group, Inc.
312-932-9950
Beth@silvermangroupchicago.com

