

Leading the Way

JACL Hawai'i, Honolulu Chapter



Winter 2003

No Sword to Bury: Japanese Americans in Hawaii during World War II



JACL Hawaii members Brian Niiya and Dr. Franklin Odo

JACL Hawaii and the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii co-sponsored a book signing for Dr. Franklin Odo, who is the president of the Smithsonian Institute's Asian-Pacific-American Program in Washington, D.C. Dr. Odo talked about his new book called "No Sword to Bury: Japanese Americans in Hawaii during World War II." The books were sold out within the first half hour of the event and the room was packed to maximum capacity. What a tribute to all the Varsity Victory Volunteers during World War II who showed up and were recognized with a round of applause from the standing room only crowd. JACL is proud to co-sponsor such events as this one and will continue to support these types of programs in the future. We congratulate another outstanding JACL Hawaii member, Dr. Franklin Odo!



National JACL 75th Anniversary Convention hosted by Honolulu Chapter

E Komo Mai! We welcome our members, their families, and friends to the 75th Anniversary JACL National Convention, "Our Legacy, Our Future: Ensuring Diversity in America." The convention will take place at the fabulous Waikiki Beach Marriott Resort and Spa from August 10 – 14, 2004. Please register early! Registration forms are available at our website at jaclhawaii.org. The registration fee is only \$200 for current JACL members, and it includes several meal events, including our gala Sayonara

Banquet to be held at the Hawaii Convention Center. We are also proud to honor and pay tribute to the veterans of WWII at a special Veterans Tribute Luncheon on Friday, August 13, 2004 at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, Coral Ballroom. Tickets for this event are \$50 per person. Limited seating available, so sign up early! Registration is limited, so please don't be left out of this once in a lifetime experience. Again, please check our website at jaclhawaii.org to register. If you need a registration form mailed to you, forms will be available at the end of January 2004, and you can request for a registration brochure by calling (808) 523-8464.

We are honored to have Senator Daniel K. Inouye and former Governor George R. Ariyoshi as our honorary chairs for the convention. All of the Hawaii congressional delegation, as well as Congressmen Honda and Matsui also join the convention as honorary vice chairs.

President's Message

Susan H. Kitsu



Dear Members,

Happy Holidays!

This has been an incredible year for JACL. As I look back on all the wonderful programs and events that we have sponsored and co-sponsored with other groups in Hawaii, it is amazing what a few volunteers can do. I want to sincerely thank each member of the board of directors and all the committee members who have worked so hard throughout the year to continue to make JACL a very important organization in our community. I look forward to 2004, and I stand prepared for the new challenges ahead and will continue to ensure that JACL is a voice to those who face discrimination and injustice.

I want to also thank each one of our members for your continued support of JACL Hawaii, Honolulu Chapter. As we near 2004 and the 75th Anniversary of JACL nationally, I want to encourage you to please get involved with JACL and take part in the upcoming convention. This is your convention, please attend. We have some wonderful programs and have exciting speakers that we hope to confirm over the next few months. You can register and get more information by going to our website at jaclhawaii.org.

As we near the end of 2003, and look at the new year ahead of us, I'd like to wish you and your family a healthy and prosperous 2004!

Mahalo nui loa,
Susan H. Kitsu
President

National and District News:

Our district will be hosting a fundraiser in northern California on March 27, 2004. Their keynote speaker will be George Takei, from the hit show Star Trek. If you are interested in attending, please call (808) 523-8464 for more information.

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Dale Minami, the attorney who represented Fred Korematsu against the US for violating his civil rights during WWII has been confirmed as our opening speaker. Dale is a dynamic and passionate speaker who advocates for civil and human rights. Don't miss the opening ceremonies on Tuesday, August 11, 2004.

For additional questions, or volunteer opportunities, please call JACL Hawaii at 523-8464. Mahalo!



Racism Without Consequences Is *Our* Fault?!

David M. Forman

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Give me a break. As if offensive comments about Asians aren't bad enough by themselves. Now people blame us because racist statements by prominent figures are fading away with relatively minor ramifications for those who uttered them? Excuse me, but that's just plain ridiculous.

"[LPGA golfer Jan] Stephenson escaped without punishment . . . [b]ecause there are so few prominent Asian-Americans in politics or sports journalism to take her to task," wrote ESPN The Magazine's Eric Adelson. Later, Adelson suggested that "maybe it's because Asian Americans don't apply to political or leadership positions as often as they could." He was not alone; numerous other commentators chided the Asian-American community for failing to express their outrage. These reactions show how easy it is – even for those who consider themselves our allies – to ignore the underlying problems and, *once again*, blame Asian-Americans.

The fundamental problems are deeper than the substance of Ms. Stephenson's stupid comments or, for that matter, Congressman Howard Coble's pathetic attempt to justify the imprisonment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. Responding that she didn't really mean it, or that she/he is really a nice gal/guy after all, misses the larger picture. These comments are related to the job/housing/public accommodation discrimination, hate violence, etc., which has plagued Asians in America for more than a century. This is not about being "offended" by Ms. Stephenson's statement. It's about the real damage to peoples' lives that can result when public figures feel free to articulate racist ideas about a particular group – for instance, the internment and the killing of Vincent Chin.

Although progress is indeed being made, our baby-steps have not outpaced deeply rooted prejudices. With time, many people have become less overtly racist. Some, like Ms. Stephenson – and to a much, much lesser extent Congressman Coble – have, at least, *attempted* to apologize for their hurtful comments. But did you look closely at what Ms. Stephenson actually said? At the end of the day, after issuing her apology, it was the thought that she may have "ruined" the end of her career that brought tears to Ms. Stephenson's eyes. LPGA Commissioner Ty Votaw may have been convinced of her sincerity, but I certainly was not.

Sure, it was nice of Ms. Stephenson to admit that she "was wrong" for saying that Asian players are hurting the LPGA. But her attempt to blame the interviewer for the "controversial undertone" – as well as Golf Magazine's editor for apparently ignoring her request to tone down those remarks – was far more revealing to me. Ms. Stephenson knew what she was saying when she said it: "This is probably going to get me in trouble, but the Asians are killing our tour. Absolutely killing it. . . ."

At least Mr. Adelson of ESPN got it partly right. He noted Ms. Stephenson's explanation, on the one hand, that her problem with Asians (as a *group*, mind you) is their "lack of emotion." On the other hand, she described similar qualities in non-Asians as "working really hard" and being "focused all the time." Ms. Stephenson didn't call Asians "sneaky," but she did appeal to the racist biases that are unfortunately part of our nation's history: "they . . . refus[e] to speak English" and have "taken over"? Give us a break.

The Japanese American Citizens League ("JACL") rightfully denounced Ms. Stephenson's "insensitive, insulting and . . . dangerous promotion of stereotypes." But, unlike those who satisfy themselves by blaming the victims for their perceived failure to express outrage at the offenders, the JACL did more. The JACL also called upon Ms. Stephenson to apologize to the gay community, for her comment that "gay relationships" also "hurt the tour."

The problem is not that Asian-Americans have failed to speak out. We have spoken out in the past, we are speaking out now, and we will continue to do so in the future. Is it our fault that the mainstream media doesn't cover our

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reactions? Is it our fault that prominent Asian-Americans who do speak out are marginalized as having parochial, self-serving interests and perspectives? Give us a break.

The problem is, instead, that we are not being listened to, or not being taken seriously. One reason is that those who *are* capable of being heard are not speaking out with us. For example, I recently learned that it took the Association of Trial Lawyers of America ("ATLA") – which is apparently Congressman Coble's largest single contributor over the last four election cycles – almost *three months* to respond to the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association's ("NAPABA") twice written concerns about the Congressman. Despite ATLA's implicit (if not obvious) access to Congressman Coble, their leadership reportedly told NAPABA that it was "trying" to set up a meeting but that there were "no guarantees." Say it with me now: ... "Give us a break!"

David M. Forman is an Asian-American who has served as an officer with the JACL Hawaii – Honolulu Chapter for more than seven years.

2004 JACL/OCA DC Leadership Conference Dates Set

Applications Available Online

Washington, DC — Applications are now available for the 2004 JACL/OCA DC Leadership Conference, which has been scheduled for Friday, March 12th through Tuesday, March 16, 2002, announced Kristine Minami, Director for Public Affairs for the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). All national JACL members in good standing are encouraged to apply through their districts.

Established by JACL in 1984, this four-day program has the goal of introducing potential community leaders to the national policy making arena. Co-convened with the Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) since 1994, the JACL/OCA DC Leadership Conference is structured to provide a broad overview of the decision-making process at the federal level, including meetings with and briefings by public officials and key policymakers who serve in Congress, the White House, a variety of federal agencies, advocacy organizations and the media. Participants also will be briefed on legislative issues affecting the Asian Pacific American (APA) community and will examine the role Asian Pacific American civil rights organizations such as JACL and OCA play in affecting public policy and pursuing civil rights legislation in the nation's capital.

"The JACL/OCA Leadership Conference in Washington, DC is a wonderfully rewarding experience," commented Alayne Yonemoto, JACL 2003 National Gala Dinner Committee Chair and PSW executive board member. "It provided me with the opportunity to see national civil rights organizations in action and to hone my advocacy skills. I came away from the conference with new friends, a new perspective, and the motivation to take on new projects. The experience is something that I will never forget."

Added Shin Inouye, Washington DC Chapter board member, "As a result of this conference, I gained a greater appreciation for how one person can effect change. As Japanese Americans, our community has a unique perspective, experience and responsibility that compels us to speak out to ensure that we as a nation continue to safeguard our core freedoms and liberties. The JACL/OCA conference provided me with greater knowledge and more effective tools for helping our communities mobilize on the issues we face today."

"JACL members at every level of membership will benefit from this invaluable experience," noted Walter Kawamoto, President of the Florin Chapter in Northern California.

Criteria for selection include demonstrated leadership abilities and a commitment to making an active contribution to the Japanese American community and to JACL. Each JACL District Council may select up to two delegates and an alternate to attend the program. The \$800 tuition for the program, which includes housing, curriculum materials and some meals, is paid by the sponsoring chapter and District Council.

Further information, including application materials and procedures, are available on the JACL website at <http://www.jacl.org/leadership.html> or contact your district governor.

Why I Joined JACL

Eleen Trang

In 1980, my parents came to America to live the “American dream.” It was supposed to be the land of democracy, freedom, and justice, the opposite of the home that they were fleeing. So as I was growing up, I believed in this utopian society, where everyone is treated equally and fairly. It didn’t take very long, however, to realize that America isn’t perfect. Everyone isn’t treated equally or fairly, but the fact that it isn’t doesn’t mean that it shouldn’t be.

This is where JACL has become important in my life and it should be in yours. JACL is an active civil rights organization that promotes equality and non-discrimination. With its roots firmly grounded in Japanese values, the organization has grown to support the civil rights of other minority groups, such as Arab Americans, who were blatantly discriminated against after 9/11. So why am I a member of JACL? That’s simple. Being a part of JACL helps to create a better world, one where organizations like JACL are no longer necessary.

A’ala Exhibition to Open at JCCH

by Brian Niiya

Though few people under the age of sixty remember it, the A’ala area of downtown Honolulu was once a thriving Japanese business enclave and residential community. A new exhibition titled “A’ala: The Story of a Japanese Community in Hawai’i” tells the story of that community. Organized by the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai’i, it opened at the Center on December 10.

The roots of A’ala date back to the early part of the 20th century, when many Japanese immigrant families left the sugar plantations for Honolulu and other cities. Located in the western end of downtown Honolulu adjacent to Chinatown, A’ala soon became a mostly Japanese cluster of family run businesses. In the 1920s and 1930s, A’ala became a gathering place for Japanese from throughout O’ahu thanks to its central location and abundant shopping, dining, lodging and entertainment options. Many Japanese Americans over the age of seventy fondly recall the smell of freshly roasted chestnuts and the weekend trips to one of A’ala’s movie theaters that featured the latest Japanese movies as well as live entertainment.

The exhibition tells the story of A’ala in this period through the eyes of people who once lived, played, and worked there. Most of the businesses in A’ala were operated by Japanese immigrant families whose living quarters were located above or adjacent to the businesses. The A’ala Committee, chaired by Jane Komeiji, is mostly made up of people who grew up there in this period and who have first hand memories of the old A’ala. They helped to gather the photographs, objects, and stories that are featured in the exhibition.

In addition to the exhibition, there will be a slate of other activities and programs, including an A’ala reunion, tours, and screenings of movies from the period. Once the exhibition completes its two month run at the Cultural Center, it will travel to other venues throughout O’ahu and beyond.

Though the A’ala community no longer exists physically—it fell victim to changing demographics, changing transportation patterns, and the rise of the modern shopping center in the 1950s and 1960s—the memory of A’ala lives on in the hearts of those who once lived, worked, played, and shopped there. This exhibition presents an opportunity for the rest of us to learn a little about those memories.

The Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii is located at 2454 South Beretania Street. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am to 4 pm. For more information on the A’ala exhibition, contact the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai’i at (808) 945-7633.



JACL Hawai'i
Honolulu Chapter
P.O.Box 1291
Honolulu, Hawaii 96807

Last Chance in 2003 to make a donation!

JACL needs your support to continue the great programs, events, and activities that we hold throughout the year! Please give generously. All donations are tax deductible. JACL is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

I'd like to make a donation to continue JACL's work in the community!

\$ _____ is enclosed as my support.

Thank you so much for your generosity.

Happy New Year!

**Please Join Us for
The "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
Celebration"
Friday, January 16, 2004
6:00 - 11:00 PM
Cost: \$40 per person
*A Very Special Evening of Dining,
Dancing & Civil Rights Empowerment***

JACL Hawaii is a co-sponsor of this event and if you would like to purchase tickets please contact Susan Kitsu at (808) 523-8464.
