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EVENT

# Speakers Blast Immigrant-Bashing at Day of Remembrance Program

James Omura is awarded NCCR's Fighting Spirit Award.

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The National Coalition for Redress/Reparation's 13th annual Day of Remembrance focused on the Japanese American community's immigrant heritage as speakers criticized immigrant-bashing in this country on Saturday at the Japan America Theatre in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo.

An estimated 550 people attended the yearly program commemorating President Franklin D. Roosevelt's issuance of Executive Order 9066, which authorized the internment of 120,000 persons of Japanese descent in U.S. concentration camps.

During the program, James Omura of Denver received NCCR's Fighting Spirit Award for his courage in defending editorially the Heart Mountain draft resisters during World War II.

Keynote speaker Glenn Omatsu, of UCLA's Asian American Studies Department, reminded the audience that the Japanese American community's very recent immigrant history is similar to that of people now being targeted by the current anti-immigrant campaign—mostly Latinos and other Asians.

"Here in Little Tokyo, our immigrant history is all around us. We're constantly reminded of the efforts of the first generation Japanese to secure a livelihood despite alien land laws, racist violence and wartime internment," he commented.

"We are also reminded of ongoing struggles, such as the decades-long campaign to win redress and reparations. That victory was not only for Japanese Americans, it was a victory for civil and human rights of all Americans," stated Omatsu.

The UCLA instructor told of the racism and violence early Asian immigrants had to endure, as exemplified by the 1871 lynching in Los Angeles of 19 Chinese and the subsequent passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

society is not immigrants taking jobs from Americans, and it is not cultural diversity, Omatsu asserted. "It is corporations getting rich from immigrant labor but denying any accountability to the laborers or the community they are exploiting. Those who engage in immigrant-bashing ignore these basic fundamental facts."

Punctuating the urgency for people of color to join in solidarity to oppose racism and demand corporate and government accountability, Omatsu also emphasized the need for Asian Americans to "educate our own community about the basic facts."

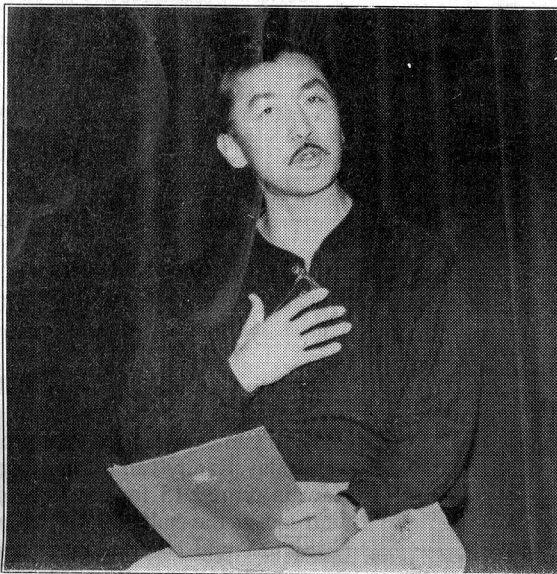
The Nisei generation can "provide valuable insight into the workings of racism in this country," Omatsu said. "The Nisei can also provide political insights about coalition-building and inter-ethnic alliances. And they can share their experiences about the successful campaign for redress and reparations."

Angelo Ancheta, executive director of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights-Los Angeles (CHIRLA), who disclosed that his Pilipino father would have been



Photos by MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpō

Frank Emi, right, congratulates retired newspaperman Jimmie Omura, recipient of the Fighting Spirit Award at NCCR's Day of Remembrance on Saturday.



Richard Katsuda of NCCR reads a poem written by Nobuko Miyamoto.

classified today as an illegal alien, also criticized the immigrant-bashing as "mean-spirited."



Glenn Omatsu speaks on immigrant-bashing.

our American way of life," he said.

Criticizing proposals to deny undocumented immigrants aid after the earthquake, Ancheta said,

Nikkei. "To receive it here in the focal center of Japanese America makes it that much more important."

Omura recalled that when he first "plunged into journalism, in Los Angeles in 1933, the situation was

immigrants had to endure, as exemplified by the 1871 lynching in Los Angeles of 19 Chinese and the subsequent passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

"In American history, Chinese and other Asian ethnic groups are the only populations that have been specifically targeted for immigration exclusion," Omatsu maintained.

The downtown financial district was at one time adjacent to Little Tokyo, Omatsu recalled, "symbolizing the complex relationship of immigrants to the corporate elite in this country."

Historically, he explained, "big business recruited immigrants as a source of cheap labor, but have never been concerned with their rights."

For corporations, the focus remains cheap labor and large profits—and not immigrants' human rights, Omatsu declared.

"In times of economic crises, immigrants are the first to be blamed for our problems. But immigrants are not responsible for plant closures, cutbacks in social services or the massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich during the past decades. These facts are the result of corporate decisions and government policies," he stressed.

"We need to redirect the debate from immigrant-bashing to deal with these decisions and policies," Omatsu said.

The basic problem in American

Richard Katsuda of NCCR reads a poem written by Nobuko Miyamoto.

classified today as an illegal alien, also criticized the immigrant-bashing as "mean-spirited."

Ancheta drew a parallel between the internment of Japanese Americans in concentration camps 52 years ago and the immigrant-bashing of today. "Racism and hysteria led to the internment, and the parallels are recognizable in the debate on immigration," said Ancheta.

Gov. Pete Wilson's proposal to deny U.S. citizenship to American-born children of aliens "would gut the 14th Amendment, the hallmark of our Constitution, designed against slavery and oppression of people of color," he continued.

"The history of this nation has always been a history of exclusion. Our immigration laws have always been designed to keep people out, not let them in," Ancheta added.

The parallels to the past are "striking," he said. "We encourage importation of foreign labor in times of economic boom, the way Japanese immigrants were brought to the fields of Hawaii... We give immigrants jobs no one else will perform..."

However, during an economic downturn, the popular response is to claim that "immigrants are unassimilable, they take away American jobs, they use up all the resources and threaten our culture,

denying disaster relief to immigrants is "an 8.1 on the race-baiting scale. It's just cheap politics, nothing more," he added. "Earthquake aid is not a political football. It's a basic fundamental necessity."

He said this country cannot focus on the immigration problems and at the same time "close our eyes to the exportation of capital as transnational corporations leave the United States to set up shop in other parts of the world."

"This is not a Mexican problem, it's not a Chinese or Haitian problem. It's our problem," he said.

NCCR's Fighting Spirit Award honoree Omura was the lone Nikkei editorial voice to take a stand in support of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, which was resisting the government's efforts to draft Nisei young men out of U.S. concentration camps into the military.

For his stand, Omura was indicted along with members of the Fair Play Committee on charges of conspiracy. He was tried in federal court in Wyoming in 1944 and acquitted, successfully arguing that his conduct was guaranteed under the First Amendment rights of Freedom of the Press.

Although he was acquitted, Omura was ostracized and harassed by leaders of the Japanese American Citizens League so that he was unable to keep a job in journalism, stated Frank Emi, a former member of the Fair Play Committee who introduced Omura at the program.

Omura eventually quit journalism and toiled in obscurity as a landscaper.

"I'm honored to receive this award," Omura told the gathering made up of five generations of

Criticizing proposals to

local chapter of Japanese American makes it that much more important."

Omura recalled that when he first "plunged into journalism, in Los Angeles in 1933, the situation was similar, with the ground shaking from the Long Beach earthquake and long lines of people at soup kitchens during the Depression.

Saying that Japanese Americans don't know their own history, he paid tribute to playwright Frank Chin for "rescuing the story of the draft resisters from archival oblivion."

He added, "We are indebted to him for bringing this message to us. I hope in my lifetime, I will be able to see an organization of this nature award a similar plaque to Mr. Chin."

Omura thanked the NCCR-L.A. for giving him the award, and noted that times must be changing for someone to "reward me for something I've been abused for so many years."

After the program, Omura told *The Rafu Shimpō*, "It's a great privilege to accept this award."

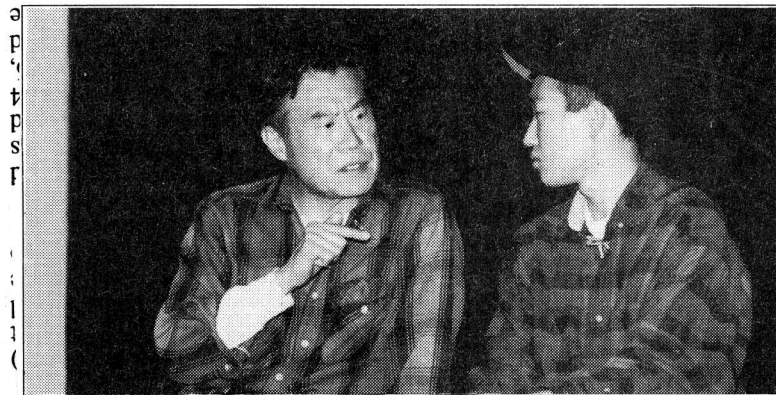
However, he added, "I will never forgive the JACL until they apologize to the Japanese community. Even if the former leaders are gone, the organization must apologize."

Just as Japanese American demanded that the president of the United States apologize for the past administration, "there is no reason why JACL shouldn't apologize to Japanese America whom they betrayed," he declared.

The Day of Remembrance program also featured immigration vignettes performed by Quynh-Tram Nguyen and Le Van Pham, Vietnamese; Rose Lago and Feliciano Melgar, Filipino; Rachelle Ang, Nguyen Huynh, Craig Wong and Reed Wong, Chinese; Suggie Oh, Hae Jung Yoon and Nancy Yoo, Korean; and Sab Shimono, Brady Tsurutani, Miya Iwataki and Richard Katsuda, Japanese.

A cultural performance was offered by Cambodian poet Chantara Nop and flutist Ponn Yinn.

Drummers from Bibak Dance Ensemble, Jodaiko of UC Irvine and UCLA Korean Cultural Awareness Group opened and closed the program.



Actor Sab Shimono, left, plays the lead in a segment of Momoko Iko's play, "Gold Watch." Brady Tsurutani, right, is the son in the short sketch.



The Bibak Dance Ensemble perform to an enthusiastic crowd.

### Yen-Dollar Rate

The U.S. dollar closed higher against the Japanese yen Tuesday, while prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange were mixed in moderate trading.

The dollar ended the day at 105.95 yen, up 0.72 yen from Monday's close but below its finish in London overnight at 106.30 yen. After opening at 106.48 yen, it ranged from 105.70 yen to 106.50 yen.

—Associated Press

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