

DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Common Thread Links Past With Present

Los Angeles event draws parallels between wartime hysteria against Nikkei and current anti-immigrant scapegoating.

RAFU SHIMPO SPECIAL

LOS ANGELES.—“50 Years After the Camps: Racism & Resistance Then & Now,” the theme of this year’s Day of Remembrance program, sponsored by the National Coalition for Redress/Reparations, ran like a thread through Sunday’s event at Centenary United Methodist Church.

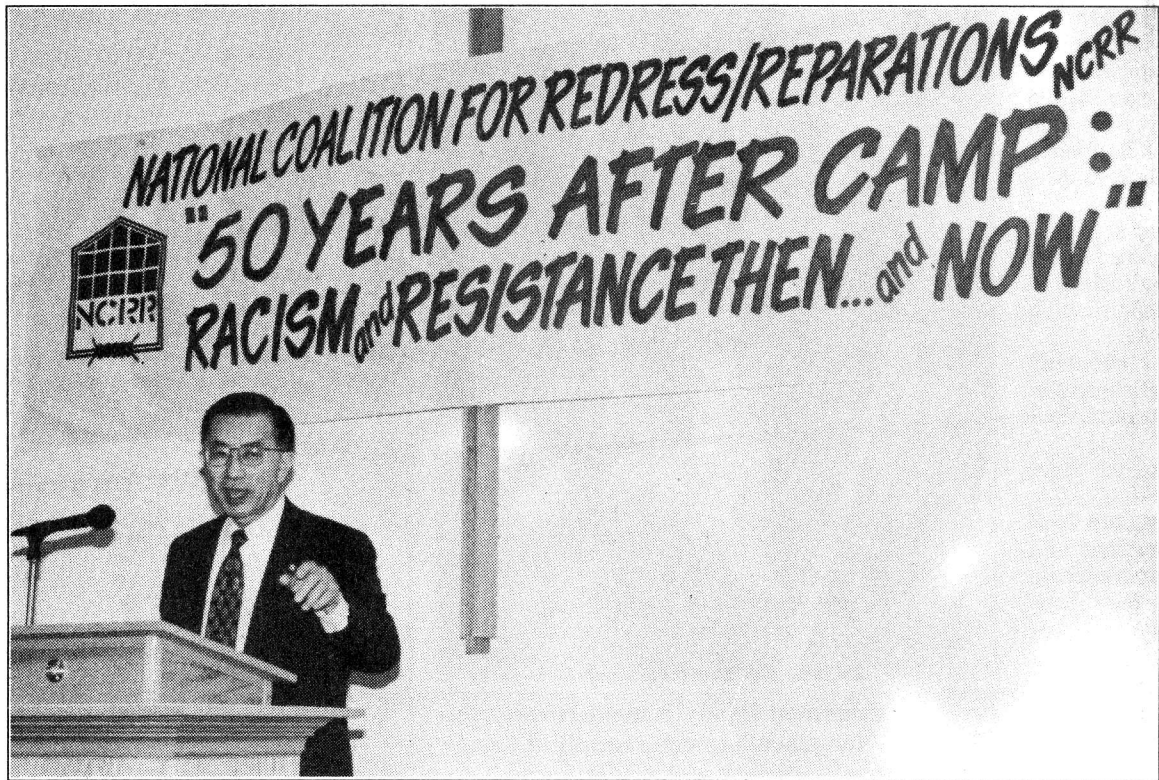
The program, attended by around 250 people, opened to the forceful beat of the UCLA Nikkei Student Union’s Kyodo Taiko group. In his welcome, current NCRP president Richard Katsuda described the similarities in the political and social climate in the U.S. “then and now” with the economic problems creating fear in the population making the climate ripe for the scapegoating of the Japanese during World War II and immigrants today.

Dr. Bob Suzuki, president of Cal Poly Pomona, continued this theme in his keynote address sharing his own experiences over the years and the lessons that need to be learned from history.

Dr. Bob Suzuki Delivers Keynote Address

Sharing an experience had as a student at UC Berkeley in the 1950’s, Dr. Suzuki did research and gave a report in one of his classes on the Japanese American wartime incarceration just a decade earlier. He was taken aback that no one knew about this event, except one other Japanese American student who was afraid to even speak about it.

Then Suzuki pointed out how the movement for redress in the 1980s helped many Japanese Americans overcome the fear and guilt, likening the incarceration to being raped. Many times the victim feels guilty, as if they did something to cause the attack



Photos by MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpō

Dr. Bob Suzuki, president of Cal Poly Pomona, delivers keynote at Day of Remembrance event.

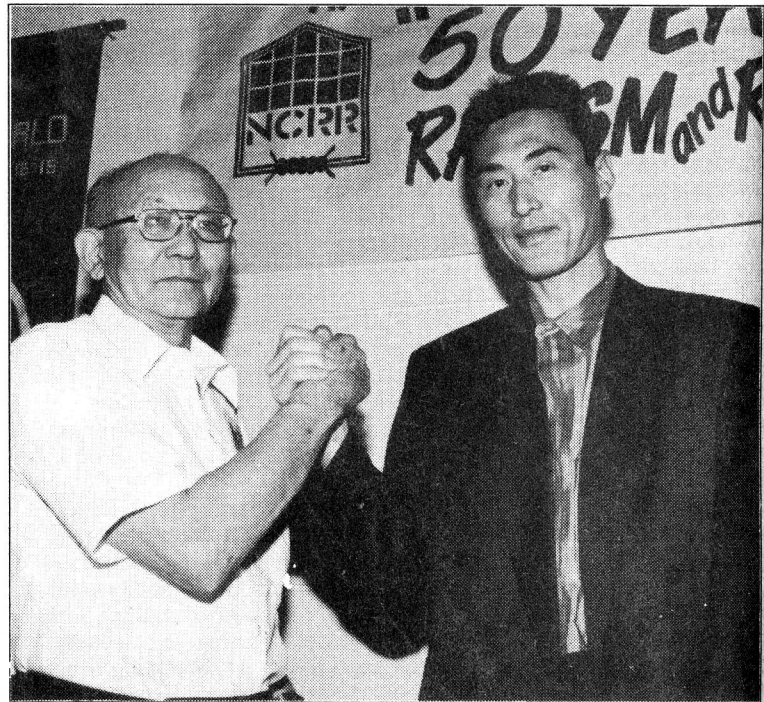
marriage because of their different races. And yet, she and her three sisters and brother were always taught to appreciate and respect other cultures and people and that differences were seen as positive and natural, not negative or something to be feared.

This foundation led to Camacho to become an activist mother and middle school teacher. She described how she helped her own 7-year-old daughter deal with a classmate’s disparaging comments about her part-Native American Indian background.

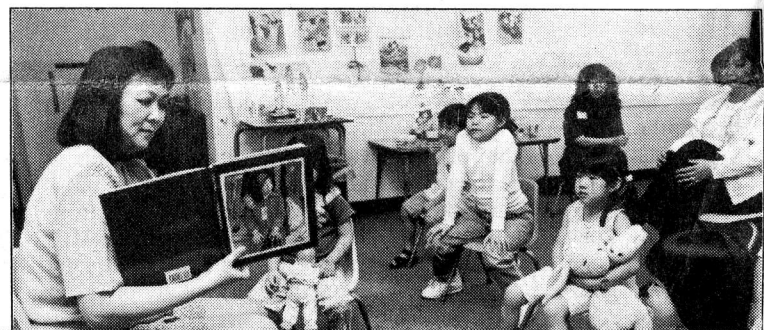
And she has taught her mostly Spanish-speaking students to channel their anger at measures like Prop 187 into positive political action. At her school rather than walk-outs which occurred in many schools in L.A., they staged a “stay-in” where students stayed later and used the time to have debates and discussion about the measure. And many students participated in precinct walking and other positive action to express their anger. She noted that the measure still passed, but the students and their parents learned important lessons about how to impact the system in a positive way, and the need for more Latino empowerment.

Saito and Monkawa Recognized for Their ‘Fighting Spirit’

A highlight of the program was the presentation of the “Fighting Spirit Award” to Jim Saito and David Monkawa. NCRP honors



Jim Saito, left, and David Monkawa, right, recipients of National Coalition for Redress/Reparations’ Fighting Spirit award.



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Suzuki also talked about the McCarren-Walters Act passed in the 1950's that not only provided a legal justification to the camps, but legitimized future such actions. Because the country was still in the midst of the McCarthy hysteria, many feared this act would be used against African American and other activists who were challenging segregation and racism in U.S. institutions at the time. Suzuki was part of the movement that eventually succeeded in repealing this act.

In closing, Suzuki reiterated the danger of the current rise in "xenophobia" clearly illustrated in the passage of Proposition 187 and other such measures that attempt to scapegoat various groups and to reverse the progress made in the past decades since the Nikkei incarceration.

Bicultural Experience Teaches Camacho to Respect Others

Following a powerful musical performance by Masakazu Yoshizawa on *shakuhachi*, this theme of Racism and Resistance was put in a personal context by Linda Camacho, an officer with the regional Mexican American Political Association.

Camacho described her bicultural family and their struggles against racism over the years. Her mother is a Kibei-Nisei who was interned in Tule Lake camp during the war. Her father is an Mexican immigrant who came to this country in the 1950s. He was the oldest son in a large family, and felt responsible to provide for them back in Mexico after his father passed away.

She went on to share the difficulties faced by her parents in even getting someone to perform their

Japanese American student who was afraid to even speak about it.

Saito and Monkawa Recognized for Their 'Fighting Spirit'

A highlight of the program was the presentation of the "Fighting Spirit Award" to Jim Saito and David Monkawa. NCRP honors individuals with this award "who have dedicated themselves to the struggle for justice and exemplify the fighting spirit that enabled the Nikkei community to win redress..."

Kathy Nishimoto Masaoka of NCRP, in introducing Saito, described his outspoken, "feisty" style that led to the government recognizing two groups of Nikkei who were almost excluded from redress. They were the Nisei chick sexers and those drafted into the military before the outbreak of the war. His spirit also led him to challenge the racist and unfair policies of the Department of Water and Power. He finally won a court case against them after years of struggling to gain the recognition and compensation that he deserved.

Monkawa's 20-plus years of activism and advocacy by NCRP's Kay Ochi. A pattern emerged of his continuing to fight for those with the least power both within the Nikkei/Asian community and beyond it. This reflected the way he described his own life, growing up as part of the majority who "worked the hardest at the most difficult jobs, but were not valued or respected." Ochi emphasized his style of teaching people the skills to be able to fight for themselves, noting that many people see him as a role-model.

Redress Update Shared

A redress update was given by emcee Reiko Nimura. To date, 79,515 people have received their redress payments. There are 2,300 who have been denied. Of these, various categories are in the process of appeal. The largest number of people affected are the children of the "voluntary" evacuees. NCRP is optimistic about the various appeals because in the case of people from Hawaii, there was a denial initially, but on appeal the denial was overturned, signaling the possibility of other denials being reconsidered.

A community meeting will be organized in May by NCRP featuring Deval L. Patrick, head of the Civil Rights division of the Justice Department, and Dede Green, current head of the Office of Redress.

The program ended on an inspiring note, with highlights of testimony from the 1981 Commission Hearings in L.A.—a reminder of the courage and strength exhibited by the community in demanding justice overdo for nearly 40 years.



First-grade teacher Patty Nagano, left, conducts a children's workshop on the camp experience as part of the Day of Remembrance program, assisted by Ruth Kondo, far right, and Maryann Ito, standing center.



Day of Remembrance speaker Linda Camacho, second from right, back row, flanked by her family, from the left, fiancee of Monica, Randy Tanijiri; sister, Monica Camacho; father, Humberto Camacho; mother, Marjorie Matsuda Camacho; husband, Gilbert Sanchez; and children, Carla, front left, and son, Augustino.



Neighborhood friends since elementary school join other attendees in congratulating Fighting Spirit Award recipient Jim Saito, fourth from the left. They are, from left to right, Bill Dickinson; Charlie Tajiri; wife, Kathy Saito; Frank "Cito" Gonzalez; Tosh Mori; Vernon Ward; and Bob Gonzalez.

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