



Photos by MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpō

Michi Weglyn speaks at the Day of Remembrance program on Saturday in Little Tokyo as prominent guests listen in background.

# Michi Weglyn Honored at Day of Remembrance

By TAKESHI NAKAYAMA  
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Researcher and author Michi Nishiura Weglyn was presented with the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations' (NCR) "Fighting Spirit" Award during the 18th annual Day of Remembrance held Saturday afternoon at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo.

The program, which marked the historic Feb. 19, 1943, signing of Executive Order 9066 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt authorizing the internment of Japanese Americans on the West Coast during World War II, was co-sponsored by NCR and the Friends of Michi Weglyn.

Kay Ochi, NCR vice president, told the estimated 300 people in attendance that in presenting the Fighting Spirit Award to Weglyn, "we honor another valiant fighter. Her weapons have been her pen, her library card, her devotion to justice and her passion to reveal the truth."

Weglyn was honored for her book ("Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps"), for her generosity and "her leadership in bringing the community

Noted author of "Years of Infamy" stresses the need to make final push for those seeking redress.

business of people denied redress: the Nikkei railroad and mine workers who were fired right after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the Japanese Latin Americans who were kidnaped from their native countries and interned in the United States as hostages to be used in prisoner exchanges with Japan.

Weglyn charged that the government's denial of redress to Japanese Latin Americans, whose passports and documents were taken away before they were kidnaped and brought to the U.S., was based on a "counterfeit immigration status" that they were illegal aliens.

As for the railroad and mine workers, who fired right after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Weglyn uncovered evidence showing there was a liaison established in May 1941 between the railroad companies and the U.S. government. "How could such coincidental firings of railroad workers take place unless

the government ordered it?"

"Both groups should be compensated and apologized to for the monstrous violation of their rights. The Department of Justice should bring about justice," Weglyn said.

"We must all extend a helping hand to those scarred by betrayal. Let us all do our share to

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Bruce Iwasaki of NCR leads a workshop on redress.

together in this final push for redress," Ochi announced.

In accepting the NCR award, Weglyn stated, "How blessed we have been during the 10-year struggle (for redress) to have the help of people with remarkable dedication ... in making this historic achievement possible."

But, she cautioned, there is the unfinished

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ensure that the Civil Liberties Act ends on a good note and not in despair," she said.

Kathy Nishimoto Masaoka, NCCRR vice president, said her organization, in winning redress for Japanese American former evacuees, learned that it "took a variety of people doing a variety of activities ... It took researchers and writers like Michi Weglyn to expose the truth about the government's involvement (in the internment)."

Masaoka said that just as the camps are part of Japanese American history, so is the fight for redress. "It is a legacy of suffering ... and it is the reason Japanese Americans understood much more clearly that it's important to stand up and speak out against injustices."

Clifford Uyeda, founder of the San Francisco-based National Japanese American Historical Society, praised Weglyn for having "broken from the Nisei convention of passive submission to White racism."

"She not only called the government liars, but she proved it," he said. "What was more remarkable was the well-controlled anger, an anger that no Nisei dared to put in a book but every Nisei felt. Michi was emotional about the camps, and that emotion was shared by all of us."

Dr. Arthur Hansen, director of the Oral History Program at Cal State Fullerton, said that Weglyn became "a people's historian ... and she placed the experiences of the draft resisters to the heart of her book's robust narrative. Instead of cavalierly dismissing this segment

of the detained population as a small, subversive band of pro-Axis troublemakers, Weglyn showed that their number was considerable and their intentions often honorable ... and their actions consonant with the American tradition of dissent."

Ruth Mizobe Shikada was governor of the Pacific Southwest District Council of Japanese American Citizens League when that group three years ago offered an apology to the Fair Play Committee and the draft resisters of Heart Mountain for the national JACL's "attempt to single out these men as disloyal to their country and for failing to support these men in their right to object to the unjust actions of the United States government."

She pointed out that if it were not for the efforts of writers such as Weglyn, "our community would not know of the struggles and sacrifices of these men who stood up against the government demanding the rights guaranteed to them as American citizens."

William Hohri, who served as spokesperson for the National Council for Japanese American Redress which filed a lawsuit against the government to try to gain redress for Nikkei former internees, said, "'Years of Infamy' did one thing for the wartime devastation of Japanese America. It properly placed the burden for this massive and egregious violation of civil and constitutional rights squarely on the president and the government of the United States."

Hohri said that in NCCRR's fight for justice, "we took the govern-

ment to court with the Constitution in one hand and 'Years of Infamy' in the other ... Michi led the way and we followed."

Toshiko Kawamoto, widow of draft resister David Kawamoto, paid tribute to Weglyn for being "instrumental" in bringing to light the actions of the resisters.

Kawamoto thanked Weglyn and revealed that when the author learned Kawamoto's husband had not graduated from San Jose State University because of the wartime internment, she wrote to the university president and convinced him that David Kawamoto should be given his diploma posthumously.

Weglyn's 1976 book, which played a significant role in the redress movement, won her the 1976 Anisfield-Wolf Award in Race Relations.

Weglyn and her family were evacuated from Stockton and interned at Gila, Ariz., when she was 15. In 1944, she was allowed to attend Mount Holyoke College after she received a full scholarship. Her college career, though, was cut short a year later due to health problems.

Weglyn, who later studied fashion design in New York, designed costumes in New York until her retirement in 1966. In 1967, with the encouragement of her Holocaust survivor husband Walter Weglyn, she began research on the Japanese American internment.

She spent eight years digging through files at the New York public libraries, the National Archives, UCLA and UC Berkeley.