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# Workshops Focus on Those Denied Redress, JA

Attorney Fred Okrand reports that a Justice Department official was "outraged" when he learned of the Nikkei Latin American story.

By TAKESHI NAKAYAMA

RAFU ASSOCIATE EDITOR

An ACLU attorney who traveled with a delegation to Washington, D.C., to lobby for redress for Japanese Latin American former abduct/internees related that a government official who heard their story was "outraged."

That report came during a work-

shop, "Redress for Japanese American Railroad Workers, Miners and Japanese Latin American Internees," presented in conjunction with the Day of Remembrance Saturday, Feb. 21, at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center in Little Tokyo.

The workshop on "unfinished business," one of two presented as part of the DOR commemoration, was sponsored by the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCRP) and the Campaign for Justice.

Bruce Iwasaki of NCRP said, "Anyone who hears the story of what happened to the Japanese Latin Americans is shocked. They cannot believe it happened. It's the kind of

government conduct that cries out for justice."

Fred Okrand, a member of the legal team in the class action lawsuit against the government, *Mochizuki v. United States*, reported that when the delegation met with Department of Justice officials Feb. 13 and informed them of what had happened to the Japanese Latin Americans during World War II, the Assistant Attorney General Ray Fisher was "outraged."

Okrand pointed out that the 2,264 Japanese Latin Americans who were abducted from 13 countries—mostly from Peru—and forcibly brought to the United States after their documents were taken away, were declared "illegal aliens" by

INS inspectors because they had no passports.

"How can they be in this country illegally when we brought them here. That's as legal as you can get," exclaimed the legal director emeritus of the American Civil Liberties Union.

"In my judgment, (Japanese Latin Americans) are here legally, and I think we can get the Department of Justice to reconsider," Okrand said.

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## and Redress, JA History

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fully, we can get the Department of Justice to change their minds (and compensate the Nikkei Latin American former internees).”

At the hearing on the lawsuit before the U.S. Court of Federal Claims on Feb. 13, Department of Justice attorneys maintained that Japanese Latin American former internees are not eligible for redress under the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 because they were neither U.S. citizens nor legal permanent resident aliens when they were forcibly brought to the U.S. But Judge Loren Smith deemed the government’s argument “illogical,” Okrand reported.

The government has asked for a  
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MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpo

**Dr. Kaoru Oguri, right, discusses how different historians perceive Japanese American historical events, during last Saturday’s Day of Remembrance workshop at the JACCC.**

# Workshops

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postponement on a ruling in order to seek a settlement.

Julie Small, media coordinator for Campaign for Justice, which has been supporting the lawsuit through media campaigns to raise public awareness of the issue, urged the community to write letters to Attorney General Janet Reno and members of Congress to solicit their support.

"It's our feeling that if we can create the political will to resolve this issue, then we will find a solution," said Small, who added that the delegation was able to meet with 21 legislators.

"It's amazing what the pressure of people traveling across the country to Washington, D.C., can do," stated Robin Toma, lead attorney for the lawsuit who announced that the U.S. Court of Federal Claims ruling on the case has been postponed until March 3.

## Railroad and Mine Workers

Sharon Tanihara of NCCR, one of the "children of evacuees," said the Office of Redress Administration (ORA) needs to hear the stories of the railroad and mine workers, who were fired immediately after the beginning of hostilities between Japan and the U.S., and were left jobless—and in many cases homeless.

She pointed out that there have been several reversals of their earlier decisions to deny redress to some applicants. "We're hoping ORA will review the cases that were

denied and tie them to the cases that were reversed and reverse their decision."

Tanihara commented that "ORA needs to do more outreach to the Japanese American community in letting people know that the railroad and mine workers and Japanese Latin American abductee/internees are now being considered as eligible, whereas before ... ORA would say 'No. You are not eligible because you didn't evacuate from the West Coast.' There are hundreds of people in Utah, Nevada and Idaho who haven't been told they are potentially eligible now."

Tanihara said the 26-member delegation which recently went to Washington, D.C., to lobby for redress action, met Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division Bill Lann Lee, and he told them the Department of Justice is looking into the railroad and mine workers cases.

## Writing Japanese American History

Another workshop, "Who Writes Japanese American History," moderated by Kenji Taguma and featuring Dr. Arthur Hansen, William Hohri and Dr. Kaoru Oguri, took a look at how Japanese American history has been written.

Dr. Oguri, a cultural anthropologist by training, noted that history books have differing perceptions of events, and likened it to the classic Akira Kurosawa film, "Rashomon," with different people giving opposing views of what happened.

As curator at the Japanese American National Museum, Oguri worked on a veterans exhibit that included Bruce Yamashita, a U.S. Marine reserve officer who charged the Marines with racial discrimination when they singled him out for race-based abuse during training at Officers Candidate School. He eventually won his case in court and was given his commission.

Because of "political editing" by some conservative members of the community, the Bruce Yamashita exhibit, as well as one about the Heart Mountain draft resisters, were taken out of the JANM veterans exhibit, Oguri said.

Discussing whether it would be better for an insider or an outsider to write Japanese American history, Oguri said an insider would better understand the events, the people and their nuances, but an insider could not have written the Lim Report because they would be afraid

of offending some people.

The Lim Report detailed the inner workings of the national Japanese American Citizens League leaders during the war and how they often seemed to be working against the best interests of Japanese America.

"It doesn't mean one is better than the other," Oguri said.

One source of minor controversy for historians is the term "concentration camp" in referring to the camps where Nikkei were locked up during World War II. Hohri remarked that President Franklin D. Roosevelt used the term twice, according to documents discovered in the national Archives. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also used the term in a Poston (Ariz.) photo caption when referring to the camps, he added.

"The Nazis used the term concentration camp as a euphemism for the extermination camps," said Oguri. "Using the term concentration camps to refer to Japanese Americans is correct."

Dr. Hansen, who has done numerous oral history interviews at California State University, Fullerton, is currently working on a biography about James Omura, wartime editor of the *Rocky Shimpo* who was the only journalist supporting the cause of the Heart Mountain draft resisters.

Omura, hounded for years by Nisei leaders after the war because of his support for the draft resisters, was forced to quit journalism to become a landscape gardener. History books about the Japanese American experience seldom mention Omura's story or that of the Heart Mountain draft resisters.

Hansen's interest in Japanese American history stems from his experience as a child growing up during World War II—playing war games and seeing relatives go into the military—and his interest as a scholar studying the Japanese American experience in the context of world history.

As a research scholar who has published a number of books, Hansen noted that it was important to read history books written by more than one historian because each will have a different emphasis.

*(Rafu Staff Writer Martha Nakagawa contributed to this story.)*

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