

# Seeking Justice for Japanese Latin Americans



From 1941 to 1945, the U.S. government orchestrated the mass abduction and forcible deportation of 2,264 men, women and children of Japanese ancestry from 13 Latin American countries to be used as hostages in exchange for Americans held by Japan. Over 800 Japanese Latin Americans (JLAs) were included in two prisoner of war exchanges between the U.S. and Japan. Those who remained were imprisoned in U.S. Department of Justice detention camps. Since JLAs who were kidnapped by the U.S. were improperly classified as "illegal aliens," and since many of them were barred from returning to their home countries in Latin America, more than 900 incarcerated JLAs were forcibly deported to war-devastated Japan.

The passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 (CLA 88), which provided for an official apology and token reparations of \$20,000 to eligible Japanese Americans, was an historic achievement. Yet because the U.S. maintained that JLAs were "illegal aliens," they were excluded from CLA 88.

In 1996, a class action lawsuit (*Mochizuki v. U.S.A.*) was filed against the U.S. government on behalf of all JLA internees who were denied justice under CLA 88. Campaign for Justice, a coalition of civil rights, human rights and community organizations, was founded the same year to support JLA redress efforts. A controversial settlement agreement reached in 1998 provided for an official apology and \$5,000 in compensation payments to eligible JLA internees. While the majority of JLA internees accepted the settlement, many of them felt that they were receiving unequal treatment.

The struggle for justice continues for JLAs. Campaign for Justice is currently seeking equitable resolution of remaining redress issues for JLAs as well as for those Japanese Americans who have not received redress and strongly urges our communities to support these efforts to resolve this unfinished business.