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Photos by MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpō

Fred Okrand (at podium), director emeritus for ACLU of Southern California, speaks during the Day of Remembrance program held Saturday at the Japanese American National Museum. Looking on are, from left, Richard Katsuda and Janice Yen of NCCR and *pro bono* lawyer honorees Alex Fukui, Lisa Ikemoto, Julia Mass, Reggie Chun and Christopher Prince.

## Day of Remembrance Focuses on Unfinished Business

NCCR points out the struggle continues for Japanese Americans who were denied redress as well as for Nikkei Latin American ex-internees.

By TAKESHI NAKAYAMA  
RAFU ACTING EDITOR

The struggle continues for Japanese Americans denied redress and for Nikkei Latin American former internees seeking equitable reparations, an estimated 275 members of the Japanese American community were reminded during the Day of Remembrance 2001 celebration on Saturday, Feb. 17, at the Japanese American National Museum in Little Tokyo (downtown Los Angeles).

The Day of Remembrance is held each year to commemorate the signing of Executive Order 9066 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on Feb. 19, 1942. This order authorized the evacuation and incarceration of all Japanese living on the West Coast.

Members of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) Pacific Southwest District, the Japanese American National Museum and the Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress (NCCR) organized this annual event to focus on the unfinished business in the community's struggle for justice.

### Japanese Latin Americans

During World War II, more than 2,000 Japanese Latin Americans were kidnapped from their homes in Latin America for use as

Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II. These individuals are still waiting for equitable redress and justice cries out for them to receive it," Rep. Becerra stated.

"When I first learned of (the wartime experiences of) the Japanese Latin Americans and the Japanese Americans, ... it seemed unfathomable ... but indeed it happened. It is part of our history. It is up to us to ... absolve our country of that wrong," he said.

Karen Parker of San Francisco, who is representing Japanese Peruvian Isamu Carlos Arturo "Art" Shibayama and his brothers Kenichi Javier and Takeshi Jorge Shibayama, said, "I was so shocked about how serious the crime was committed against Japanese Latin Americans."

The Shibayama brothers did not agree to the settlement in the *Mochizuki* case because they didn't think Japanese Latin Americans should receive only \$5,000 while their fellow internees, Americans of Japanese get \$20,000 each, Parker explained.

She charged that what the U.S. did in abducting Japanese Latin Americans to this country to be used in hostage exchanges with Japan was, according to all existing international laws, "war crimes on the highest level."

### Wen Ho Lee Case

Keynote speaker of this year's DOR was Alberta Lee, daughter of Dr. Wen Ho Lee, noted Los Alamos scientist who was imprisoned without a trial for more than eight months on charges of mishandling U.S. nuclear secrets.

Ms. Lee, 27, who took Asian American studies while at UCLA and learned about the World War II internment of Japanese Ameri-



Alberta Lee

Japanese Latin Americans were kidnapped from their homes in Latin America for use as hostage exchange and imprisoned in the U.S. until the end of World War II, according to documents discovered by researcher Michi Weglyn.

The Campaign for Justice, made up of a coalition of NCRR, JACL, the ACLU and others, is currently seeking the passage of the Wartime Parity and Justice Act, a comprehensive redress bill sponsored by Congressman Xavier Becerra (D-Calif.). HR 619, when enacted, will provide for public education funding, redress for Japanese Americans who have been denied under the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and redress for the Japanese Latin Americans who were forcibly taken from their home countries and imprisoned in the U.S.

Although a settlement agreement was reached on the *Mochizuki vs. United States* class action lawsuit brought by Nikkei Latin Americans against the U.S., the amount awarded to compensate each claimant was \$5,000, much less than the \$20,000 reparations paid to Japanese Americans.

"Over 2,000 Japanese Latin Americans were uprooted from their homes and forced into internment camps in the United States. This group was unfairly overlooked when Congress addressed the abuses by our government against

World War II internment of Japanese Americans, hadn't been involved in Asian American movements after college because, she said, "I thought that was in the past, I didn't think racism affected me ... Boy, did it come back to bite me."

Lee said she didn't really draw a parallel between the targeting of her father by the U.S. government and the Japanese American experience—although JAs were the first to come forward and help her father—until she attended a fundraiser in Minneapolis and heard David Mura read a poem his father wrote to his mother while they were in separate camps during WWII.

Just as Mura's father was isolated and silenced in the poem, "I realized that my father was silenced, and is still silenced," she commented.

"Seeing you all here, I have hope that some day our family name will be cleared, some day we will get reparations," she declared.

#### **Pro Bono Lawyers**

Also acknowledged were 13 Southern California lawyers involved with redress lawsuits: Alex Fukui, Lisa Ikemoto, Scott Yamaguchi, Julia Mass, Patrick Hattori, Reggie Chun, Robin Toma, Paul Mills, Bruce Iwasaki,

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# Remembrance

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Manjusha Kulkarni, Christopher Prince, Fred Okrand and Gerald Sato. These attorneys were recognized for their community work on behalf of Japanese Latin Americans and many former Japanese American evacuees who were denied redress.

Richard Katsuda, president of NCRR-Los Angeles, lauded the volunteer lawyers, many of them recruited by the Japanese American Bar Association (JABA), who worked *pro bono* (without fee) to try to obtain redress for those Nikkei who were denied compensation on bureaucratic or legal technicalities.

"The Japanese American and Japanese Latin American community are fortunate to have such dedicated lawyers working for them," Katsuda emphasized.

Fukui, one of the JABA attorneys working on the cases of those Nikkei who were originally denied redress by the government, said, "What made the project really special for the JABA attorneys was the widespread community collaboration (including historians, researchers and law students). We feel very privileged to be able to contribute in our small way. And we hope to continue to be partners with everyone in the community in our continuing fight for redress."

Fred Okrand, legal director emeritus for ACLU of Southern California, said, "This has been a great moment in our lives. It has been such satisfaction to work for a cause like the Japanese Latin Americans and the Japanese Americans. All I can say is few lawyers get the chance to do this kind of work and I'm grateful that I did."

## Awards

Another feature of this year's Day of Remembrance program was the honoring of community leaders Alan Nishio, one of the founders of NCRR, and Dr. Mitchell Maki, who co-wrote (with Dr. Harry Kitano and Dr. Megan Berthold) "Achieving the Impossible Dream: How Japanese Americans Obtained Redress."

Nishio received NCRR's Fighting Spirit Award, while Maki was presented JACL-PSW's Community Achievement Award, both for their work in leading the fight for redress.

## Young Volunteers

The Day of Remembrance attendees included not only the Nisei who experienced the World War II evacuation and internment, but also many younger members of the community who volunteered



Photos by MARIO G. REYES/Rafu Shimpō

**NCRR members reenact their picketing efforts on behalf of various groups and issues during Saturday's Day of Remembrance.**

in the fight for justice.

Ikemoto, one of the JABA volunteer attorneys who was honored at the DOR, told the *Rafu Shimpō*, "I feel very honored and very humbled."

She helped Carol Seno Song obtain redress in the fall of 1999 after she was initially denied because she was in the group born after ORA's arbitrary cutoff birthdate of Jan. 20, 1945.

"We were very lucky and Carol was great in helping me develop the case," stated Ikemoto, who had heard about some of the World War II internment experience from her grandparents and also from Asian American Studies classes at UCLA. "It's been great working on redress case, it's been a great learning experience. I've gotten a lot of satisfaction. It's been a really great community experience."

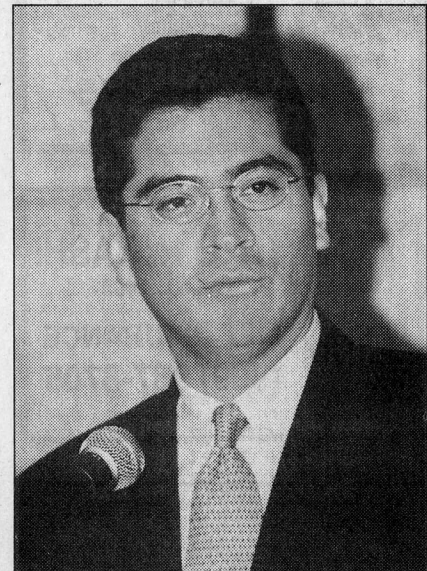
Fukui, another JABA lawyer, commented, "I get an immense degree of satisfaction from working for redress. This allows me the opportunity to really interact with the community, to work on issues of real concern to me. It's just really easy when you feel a passion this kind of work. I've been able to work with so many people—the folks at NCRR ... they've been wonderful to work with."

Fukui is assisting Patrick Hattori in representing Wendy Hirota, whose redress claim had been rejected by the Office of Redress Administration.

Mariko Nakanishi, education and outreach coordinator for the Campaign for Justice, disclosed that her mother

and family are Japanese Latin Americans from Mexico who were interned during the war. "When I heard about what happened to Japanese Latin Americans, I realized not many people knew about it. The redress movement that began decades ago is still not over."

"People need to know this is not just a Japanese American issue, and we need to bridge to other communities on issues like immigration and civil rights for people of color," declared Nakanishi, who is a paralegal at an immigration law firm. "Hate crimes and racial profiling are also issues that we need to continue working on."



**Rep. Xavier Becerra**