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JACL

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Erase the Database

by Kristi Lin

During the 2019 Day of Remembrance, Next Generation Nikkei (NGN) hosted a youth workshop about the racially motivated history of Chicago's gang database. Now, almost exactly four years later in February 2023, JACL Chicago has officially voted to sign on to the Erase the Database campaign and support the Community Restoration Ordinance, which would dissolve the gang database.



SJ CAVÉ DOI AND BRITNEY KUROKAWA-WITTES AT 2019 NEXT GEN. NIKKEI DOR WORKSHOP.

The Erase the Database coalition was started in 2017 and is building support to pass the Community Restoration Ordinance. This ordinance has two parts: the immediate dissolution of the gang database, and investment in community level long-term reparations for Black and Latinx communities that have been most impacted by the gang database, as well as reparations to individuals who have been placed in the gang database.

I attended a June 2019 NGN workshop, where I learned what the gang database is: a decentralized series of records that police can arbitrarily add individuals to. You can be added to the “database” for an assortment of reasons such as having tattoos or a certain hairstyle, stepping into gang territory, or being seen with “someone of interest.” The people most targeted are young Black and Latino men, with 98% of those on the list being people of color, and 14%-35% on the list being young people, some as young as 10 years old.

Criteria for the gang database is not dependent on criminal or gang activity, and police can put someone on the list without informing them or giving them any way to contest it. According to the City of Chicago's Office of Inspector General (OIG), “Over 15,000 individuals designated as gang members by CPD had no specific gang membership

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PAVE MAYORAL FORUM

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KANSHA FUNDRAISER!

See insert & page 8

Securing and maintaining the civil rights of Japanese Americans and all others who are victimized by injustice and bigotry.

Article submission deadline for our next issue is May 12, 2023.

The JACler is published by the JACL Chicago Chapter for its members, supporters, and friends. We welcome your comments, suggestions, and article submissions.

For More Information

For information about the JACL Chicago Chapter, call 773.728.7171, or visit www.jaclchicago.org

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Erase the Database continued

listed and no reason provided for why the individual was listed as a gang member." Additionally, CPD does not regularly review, correct, or purge the database, so once you are on the list, it is in the system forever.

The effects of being in the gang database are far-reaching and can be devastating. The gang database is shared with 500 external agencies including criminal justice and immigration agencies. If you are added to the gang database, you could experience increased harassment from police, withheld bond or harsher sentencing, housing or employment barriers due to criminal background checks, and/or targeted immigration policies including denial of DACA.

The Erase the Database campaign was started by activists supporting Wilmer Catalan, a young father who was separated from his family and held in ICE detention for a year, facing deportation proceedings because his name had been put in the gang database. In the OIG report, one young person described being put in the database at age 11 during a police stop. Even though they denied being a gang member, they were told by the officer that "because you're around gang members, you will be considered one as well." These are just a few stories from the more than 161,000 people who have been placed in the Chicago gang database.

I am struck by the connections between the gang database and the incarceration of Japanese Americans. In WWII, the FBI made lists of "dangerous" organizations and individuals—Japanese American community leaders, religious leaders, language teachers—and used that list to justify incarceration. These lists, like the gang database, criminalized being part of a community and looking a certain way. Both then and now, those in power use racial profiling and the idea of "good people" vs. "bad people" to



ANNE WANTANABE FACILITATING A CONVERSATION ON THE GANG DATABASE.

justify taking away people's rights. The Japanese American community, in response to the World War II injustices we experienced, fought for and won reparations and redress from the US government, to receive some recognition and restitution for the harm that had been done. We now have the opportunity to support another community in their fight for reparations.

JACL Chicago proudly supports the Community Restoration Ordinance and Erase the Database coalition. During this month of Day of Remembrance, I'm proud that we can honor the Japanese Americans who endured and survived incarceration by signing onto this campaign. We support their work to protect our fellow Chicagoans and strive towards a future where no communities are incarcerated. 🌱

Day of Remembrance 2023

by Rebecca Ozaki

Each year on February 19th, the Japanese American community commemorates the signing of Executive Order 9066 by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Executive Order led to the incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II and acts as a poignant reminder of the fragility of civil liberties in times of crisis and the importance of being vigilant in protecting the rights of all.

This year's Day of Remembrance brought over 450 attendees together at the Chicago History Museum on February 19th, 2023. The event was hosted by the Chicago Japanese American Council, JACL Chicago, JASC, Japanese Mutual Aid Society, and the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society, and featured the world premiere of Full Spectrum Features' short film *Resettlement: Chicago Story*.

The program began when Chicago Historical Society President, Jean Mishima, welcomed the audience along with Chicago History Museum Senior Public and Community Engagement Manager Gregory Storms. The Chicago Nisei Post Posting and Retiring of Colors opened and ended the event. Hailee Nakai from Hoffman Estates High School read an excerpt of the evacuation notice. A proclamation recognizing the impact of EO9066 on the Japanese American community was presented by Nubia Willman from the Mayor's Office of Community Engagement. A reception followed the event.

Full Spectrum Features' Co-Executive Director, Jason Matsumoto introduced the film as he shared a story from resettlement that emphasized the privilege of being able to gather safely as a community today. Matsumoto highlighted that as our ancestors resettled and rebuilt their lives after incarceration, it took courage to gather because of the high risk it posed for Japanese Americans who were still deemed a threat to society following the war.



ATTENDEES WATCH FULL SPECTRUM FEATURES, *RESETTLEMENT: CHICAGO STORY* IN THE CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM, MCCORMICK THEATRE. PHOTO BY JOHN ADACHI.

Resettlement: Chicago Story shared the intergenerational story of the Yamamoto family and the challenges they faced as they tried to rebuild their lives years after incarceration. The film shares the story of Mary as she navigates life in a new school, her mother as she faces racism while running the family dry cleaning business, and Ojichan as he supports the family from the background. As the Yamamoto family encounters these struggles, they demonstrate their resilience as they find ways to support one another and stay true to their values as Japanese Americans, ultimately ending in a moment of joy and celebration.

Ashley Cheyemi McNeil, Director of Education and Research at Full Spectrum Features followed the film by sharing the online educational companion to the short film where a student or educator could interact with the Yamamotos' story by clicking meaningful objects in their home and listening to excerpts from the characters' stories on the educational platform.

The program ended with a panel led by Ashley Cheyemi McNeil, Professor Helen Cho (Northwestern University

Professor of Asian American Studies), and Filmmaker Reina Higashitani (film director and professor at the New American Film School, Arizona State University) as they discussed the creation of the film and its potential impact moving forward. Questions were open to the audience and various audience members shared praise for the film and memories of Chicago's Japanese American thriving community, even reflecting on prominent Japanese American businesses that flourished post-resettlement such as Toguri's on Belmont. An audience member asked a poignant question about a specific scene from the film and impact on solidarity between black and Japanese American communities. Full Spectrum Features released an apology letter about this scene that you can view at <https://bit.ly/FSFapologyletter>.

Day of Remembrance 2023 raised themes of gratitude, community, and resilience. Thank you to those that were able to attend. You can view a recording of the event at <https://chicagodor.wordpress.com>. 🎥

Asian American Coalition of Chicago Holds Its 40th Annual Lunar New Year Celebration

by Karen Kanemoto & Megan Nakano

The Asian American Coalition of Chicago (AACC) welcomed in the Year of the Rabbit at its 40th annual Lunar New Year celebration on February

18, 2023 at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare in Rosemont, Illinois. This year's event was hosted by the Vietnamese American community, who chose the theme, "Celebrating Four Decades of United Leadership and Service."

The day began with education and business forums featuring speakers from local universities, government agencies and non-profit organizations. The forums were followed by an interfaith prayer session and exhibition fair. Participants then proceeded to the grand ballroom for the reception and gala dinner.



Anne Shimojima
JAPANESE AMERICAN EXEMPLARY
COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Anne Shimojima received the Japanese American Exemplary Community Service Award. For the past forty years, Anne's professional storytelling and work as an elementary school librarian have introduced Japanese and Japanese American culture and history to students and adults. Since 2007, she has performed *Hidden Memory: An American World War II Story*, describing her family's immigration and incarceration experiences, in nine states, Washington DC, and Tokyo, where she was a guest of the Japanese government. As part of Asian American Storytellers in Action, she is a volunteer editor for the YouTube channel Asian American Storytopia, introducing Asian stories and culture to elementary school children in an effort to fight anti-Asian violence. In 2020, she was awarded the Foreign Minister's Commendation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan, for contributions to promote friendship between Japan and the United States. In 2022, she was again recognized by the government of Japan with the conferment of the Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays.

Michael James ("MJ") Ichiro Olszewski received the Japanese American Community Youth Who Excels Award. An alumnus of Jamieson Elementary, MJ is currently a junior at Amundsen High School, where he studied the Japanese language for two years and is carrying a challenging workload of honors classes. He enjoys playing basketball in his spare time and hopes to pursue a career in sports media. MJ volunteers as a youth basketball coach at the Sansei-Yonsei Athletic Association, where he shares his love of the sport with children aged five and up and dedicates his time at various Association fundraisers setting up and serving meals. He also enjoys other types of community service activities that honor and support his community, such as putting down

flags and beautifying Montrose Cemetery for Memorial Day or packing meals at Feed My Starving Children events.



Michael James ("MJ") Ichiro Olszewski
JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY
YOUTH WHO EXCELS AWARD

Strategy for AARP, gave the keynote address.

The 2023 Pan Asian American Ping Tom Memorial Award went to Grace B. Hou, Secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), and NBC 5 Chicago received the Grand Asian American Sandra Otaka Memorial Award in recognition of its diverse news coverage and human interest stories featuring the AAPI community. Daphne Kwok, Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Asian American and Pacific Islander Audience

The Japanese American community will host next year's AACC Lunar New Year Celebration on February 10, 2024, at Drury Lane in Oakbrook Terrace, as well as the Asian American Festival in May 2024. Please contact co-chairs Karen Kanemoto and Anna Ninoyu at AACChicago2024@gmail.com for more information on volunteer and sponsorship opportunities. 🌸

PAVE Mayoral Forum Recap

by Eric Langowski

The fourth Pan-Asian Voter Empowerment (PAVE) 2023 Mayoral Candidate Forum was held at the Chicago History Museum on February 6th, 2023. The forum had over 300 attendees and was simultaneously interpreted in 8 different Asian languages. Seven candidates were present including State Rep. Kam Buckner, Congressman Jesus "Chuy" Garcia, Ja'Mal Green, Cook County Commissioner Brandon Johnson, Alderman Roderick Sawyer, Paul Vallas, and Willie Wilson. Alderwoman Sophia King and current Mayor Lori Lightfoot were not present.

Every four years, the PAVE Coalition hosts a Mayoral Forum to allow mayoral candidates to directly engage with Asian American communities and voters. The PAVE Coalition consists of 16 Asian American advocacy and direct service organizations in the Chicagoland area, including JACL Chicago. Founded in 2011, the PAVE Coalition focuses on increasing voter turnout and civic participation among Asian Americans, the fastest growing racial demographic in Chicago, and improving the lives of Asian Americans through advocacy and policy change.



During the forum, six community members each representing a different PAVE organization asked a question addressing a different issue:

Public safety (*Apna Ghar*): What systemic changes will you make to address the root causes of violence to ensure safety?

Language access (*Muslim Civic Coalition*): As mayor, what will you do to ensure that members of our communities are not denied access to emergency services or public services due to a language barrier or lack of cultural competency?

Elder care (*Alliance of Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment*): A recent survey of Asian American seniors conducted by Chinese American Service League found that seniors are most concerned about living in poverty and isolation as they age, (particularly given the pandemic). As mayor, what specific policies will you implement to address poverty and isolation among our older community members?

Affordable housing (*Vietnamese Association of Illinois*): Rent increases have skyrocketed in the past year and a half and many Chicagoans are facing challenges finding affordable housing. The eviction moratorium and requirement of additional notice for landlords to raise the rent are only band-aid solutions. This is a two part question.

an influx of migrants and asylum seekers. How will you ensure that Chicago lives up to its title of being a Welcoming City and supports immigrant communities in finding permanent housing, securing jobs, and accessing public services?

Asian American community support in Chicago Public Schools (*Indo-American Center*): Starting in 2025, CPS will be governed by an elected school board instead of one appointed by the mayor's office and is expected to face a deficit of \$600 million. How will you address this anticipated deficit, and what is your long-term vision for how our public schools are funded?

At the end of the forum, the PAVE Coalition also asked if each candidate would commit to meeting with the PAVE coalition if elected. All candidates assented that they would.

On most of the issues, there was widespread agreement among the candidates present with the exception of Willie Wilson who often took more maximalist positions particularly on immigration and public safety. The candidates were interested in speaking with the Asian American community and addressing the needs of our diverse community.

Brandon Johnson and Paul Vallas will be on the ballot in the runoff election on April 4th. Be sure to make a plan to vote!

Visit <https://www.chicagoelections.gov> for more information. 🗳️

Do you support rent control (which would require the repeal of the Rent Control Preemption Act of 1997)? And what specific policies do you support to increase affordable housing?

Immigration

(*Hana Center*): Over the past year, Chicago has seen

Storytopia

by Anne Shimojima

Who loves a good story? Everyone! When the world shut down and anti-Asian violence increased, a group of Asian American storytellers from around the country began meeting weekly on Zoom to provide support and friendship to each other. From this beginning, Asian American Storytellers in Action grew into a collective whose mission is to promote and celebrate Asian American culture and heritage through the art of storytelling.

To help fight anti-Asian violence, we have created a free YouTube channel called **Asian American Storytopia**. Each fifteen to twenty-minute video consists of diverse stories and fun activities presented by professional storytellers and aimed at elementary school students, their families, and all story lovers. There are twenty-one episodes available for viewing at our channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/AsianAmericanStorytopia>

Our storytellers represent the countries of China, Japan, Korea, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Siberia, and the Philippines. Viewers can learn to make origami bunnies, cranes, and jumping frogs; make onigiri; play an interactive game; learn a Cicuk card game; and see and hear a Chinese ditze flute. Our stories include classics like Urashima Taro, an Indian story about Krishna, a ghost story from China, a clever story about a fly from Vietnam, and animal stories from the Philippines, India, Malaysia, Siberia, and Japan.

Please visit our website to find out more about our storytellers and see activity instructions:

<http://asianamericanstorytopia.com>

Our vision is for the world to embrace and celebrate diversity where all peoples are respected and treated equally. We hope you will join us by visiting our channel and even better, subscribing! Help us to work towards a just and safe world for all. 🌍

Remembering Tyree Momii

by Ashley Tam, Kathy Hamano, and Tonko Doi

Born and raised a Southsider, lover of all things sports, and a man with a heart of gold, Tyree Momii was known in the Japanese American community as a jack of all trades. He was the go-to person for so many things, and a face you just assumed you would always see at the next community event.

Ty was born on June 10, 1951, to Toa and Ets Momii. He was the older brother to Holly Momii Yoshimura, and from a very young age, a superstar athlete in the Chicago Nisei Athletic Association (CNAA). Sports came naturally to Ty, but he was definitely a standout when it came to baseball.

In 1990, Ty channeled his second love—basketball—into the Sansei Yonsei Athletic Association (SYAA) for the children of former CNAA members. At a church gym every Saturday in February and March, young children learned the fundamentals of basketball from JA coaches, including Kaz Ideno, Larry Tanaka, Jon Kataoka, Steve Arima, and Jerry Miyata. Tracey (Hirai) Shimabukuro led stretching exercises. With operating costs covered by sponsors—such as Mickey and Clay Hamano, JASC, Nisei Post, and Windy City Silkscreen—the cost to participate was only two cans of food per child per session. These canned goods were then donated to a local food pantry.

Ashley (Oshita) Tam recalls, “His passion for the game kept our small minds focused on simple drills . . . and while it was important for every participant to learn drills properly, it was more important

for everyone, parents included, to have fun! We didn’t know if we would see our friends again anytime soon, but at least every Saturday for two months, we would all be together!”

For more than 30 years, SYAA welcomed hundreds of children who participated first as players and then as coaches. Parent Kathy Hamano states, “Ty coached my BTC Girl Scouts friends and me, and decades later, we were reunited as he began coaching my boys in 2014. At that time, they were 6 and 7 years old and looked forward to ‘Tyree Basketball’ every year. Ty couldn’t wait until my boys were old enough to become coaches.” And for so many community members like Kathy, we just assumed we would all see each other again the following year.

On January 29, 2023, Tyree suffered a heart attack. With his sister and niece by his side, he passed away on February 6, 2023.

Kathy notes that the JA community “lost an amazing man who touched



ASHLEY TAM AND TYREE IN 1988. IF YOU KNEW TY BACK THEN, YOU REMEMBER THAT PERM!

the lives of so many.” Ashley adds, “You could just see how proud he was of all the children he has helped raise in some capacity throughout the years.”

The future of SYAA is still undetermined, but if it were up to Ty, the program would continue to welcome kids and their canned goods for decades to come. 🏀



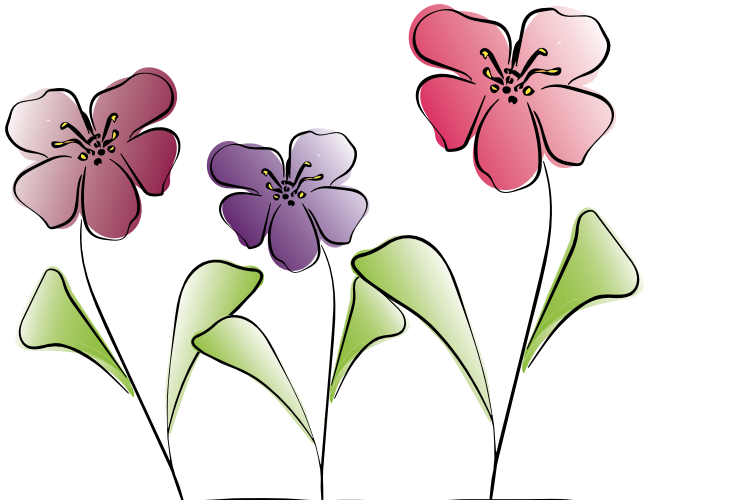
ABOVE: SYAA 2014 – READY FOR “TYREE BASKETBALL”.
RIGHT: SYAA 2023 – FIRST BASKETBALL CLINIC SINCE PANDEMIC.



Thank You 2022 & 2023 Donors!

(as of 3/9/2023)

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The Japanese American Citizens League is a non-profit human and civil rights organization dedicated to preserving the civil liberties of Japanese Americans and of all Americans.

We welcome your participation.

Go Green! Receive the JACler newsletter (in full color), news and updates via email. See page 2

Calendar of Events

Wednesday, March 1st, 2023 11:59pm	JACL Scholarship applications due
Monday, March 6th, 2023 11:59pm	Kansha Project applications due
Sunday, March 26th, 2023 2:30pm	Before They Take Us Away Screening Asian Pop-Up Cinema AMC Evanston 12, 1715 Maple Ave, Evanston, IL 60201
Thursday, April 6th, 2023 6:30pm – 9:30pm	Kansha Project Fundraiser Nisei Lounge 3439 N Sheffield Ave, Chicago, IL 60657
Tuesday, May 9th, 2023 All day	Asian American Advocacy Day Pan-Asian Voter Empowerment Coalition (PAVE), Springfield, IL
Sunday, May 21st, 2023 Time TBA	JACL Chicago Scholarship Luncheon Maggiano's Old Orchard 4999 Old Orchard Ctr. Ste. A28, Skokie, Illinois, 60077-1480
Sunday, June 25th, 2023 Time TBA	Kansha Project Culmination Location TBA