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JACL *en*

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Teaching the Next Generation

by Mary Clare Nagai

This summer, I participated in the Kansha Project and Camp Daikon. Both of these programs created a space for young Nikkei adults to get to learn about and connect with our heritage as Japanese Americans. The Kansha Project took place from June 8th-10th included a trip to Los Angeles's Little Tokyo neighborhood and Manzanar Historic site while learning about the history of Japanese American incarceration. The first annual Camp Daikon focused on Japanese American history after WWII and contemporary issues within the community, and was hosted by JACL Chicago and Nikkei Uprising at the Japanese American Service Committee from July 29th-30th.

While I had heard stories about Manzanar, where my grandfather had been incarcerated, it was shocking to visit the site. There were recreated barracks to show what conditions were like, but our guide said they could not replicate the real conditions of the barracks without violating health and safety codes. We learned about the history of the Japanese American community, from immigration to incarceration. During orientation for the project, many participants reported feeling disconnected with their Japanese American history or not being



KANSHA PROJECT 2023 PARTICIPANTS AND FACILITATORS AFTER A SERVICE PROJECT AT MANZANAR HISTORIC SITE. TOP ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT): ELI NISHIMURA, SAM NISHIMURA, JACLYN CHIOU, MARY CLARE NAGAI, ASIA O'NEIL, AYAKO TISCHLER, KATIE HILL, JOE GALLIGAN. BOTTOM ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT): LAYLA McDERMOTT, JULIA NAKASHIMA, BETTY NAKASHIMA, NATHAN MOY, SJ CAVE DOI, REBECCA OZAKI

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JACL

Japanese American Citizens League

CHICAGO CHAPTER

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 November 20, 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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Teaching the Next Generation continued

"Japanese American enough," but the Kansha Project helped us feel more connected to our ancestors.

While the Kansha Project mainly focused on the incarceration of Japanese Americans, Camp Daikon examined contemporary struggles in the Japanese American community. Some topics we discussed included the myth of benefitting from being the model minority, Japan's history of imperialism, and Japan's influence as a soft power. Eli Nishimura, who also attended both the Kansha Project and Camp Daikon, reflected on



CAMP DAIKON 2023 JAN KEN PO TOURNAMENT FEATURING MARY CLARE NAGAI AND ESME OGIYAMA SURROUNDED BY CAMP DAIKON PARTICIPANTS. PHOTO BY TY YAMAMOTO.

the issues of the current Japanese American community: "when most people think about the history of Japanese Americans, they think mainly of Japanese incarceration. There's so much more to the Japanese American experience that people don't realize or know about." Camp Daikon and the Kansha Project were the beginning of educating my generation, but participants in both initiatives left wanting to become more involved in the Japanese American community. 🇺🇸



From Okinawa to Chicago

by JJ Ueunten, Cori Nakamura Lin, and Anne Watanabe

In June of 2023, the three of us visited Okinawa together. JJ and Cori are both yonsei (fourth generation) Uchinanchu/Okinawan, as well as being Nikkei (Japanese American). We all organize together in Nikkei Uprising, a Nikkei group in Chicago that fights for collective liberation, focusing on issues of incarceration and building solidarity with other communities, especially communities impacted by incarceration and Japanese imperialism. The trip was a personal, political and spiritual pilgrimage to connect with ancestry, grapple with the harms that Okinawan people and land have experienced from Japanese and US militarism and imperialism, and to connect with the ongoing resistance of indigenous Okinawans.

In Okinawa, we connected with anti-war activists protesting US military bases daily, many of whom are elders who appeared to be well in their 70s or older. As we heard the horrifying stories of Okinawans' war experiences, and how their lives had been treated as disposable by the US and Japanese militaries, it became clear why so many Okinawans are against the military bases. As Tsugiko Taira, the former director of the Haeburu Cultural Center told us, "Okinawans know that the military won't protect them—because of our experiences during the Battle of Okinawa."

Okinawa, the largest island in the archipelago south of Japan, had a distinct culture, languages, and identity for thousands of years, and for hundreds of years, were part of the independent Ryukyu Kingdom before being colonized by Japan. Okinawa was also the site of the bloodiest battle of the Pacific during WWII. Over 150,000 Okinawan civilians died, caught between the Allied and Japanese military in a brutal battle that lasted months. Okinawans still live with the aftereffects of these traumas.

Today, Okinawa is the poorest prefecture in Japan, and 70% of the US military bases in Japan are in Okinawa, even though Okinawa makes up less than

RIGHT: ANNE, CORI AND JJ POSE TOGETHER SMILING ON A HILLTOP IN MOTOBU, OKINAWA WITH TREES AND MOUNTAINS IN THE BACKGROUND

BELOW: SIMEON MAN, JJ UEUNTEN, ANNE WATANABE AND CORI NAKAMURA LIN HOLDING SIGNS AT THE PROTEST AGAINST US MILITARY BASE CONSTRUCTION AT HENOKO BAY. SIGNS SAY "CLOSE ALL BASES", "NO MORE US BASES", "UCHINANCHU! DON'T GIVE UP~" (IN UCHINAAGUCHI) AND "NO WAR, LIFE IS TREASURE" (IN UCHINAAGUCHI).



1% of the landmass of Japan. 72% of Okinawans are opposed to the most recent base construction in Henoko Bay, which is destroying coral reefs in the incredibly biodiverse bay. Henoko is also one of the last habitats of the endangered dugong, a gentle sea mammal that is sacred to the Okinawan people.

The islands are incredibly beautiful and biodiverse—and it was heartbreaking to see that land under threat. We witnessed trucks digging up the dirt from the mountains—dirt which contains the remains of the war dead from the Battle of Okinawa—to be dumped onto the coral reefs of Henoko Bay.

We met powerful cultural workers doing language revitalization to teach

Uchinaaguchi (an endangered Okinawan language) to young people, or preserving the Okinawan textile practice of Bashofu (weaving with banana tree fibers). We learned that connection to one's land, people and culture is something that also links us to the struggle against war and imperialism.

As we experience the escalating impacts of climate change in Chicago and globally,

we are reminded of the urgency to understand the interconnection of these issues: indigenous people protect 80% of the world's biodiversity, the US military is the world's largest single consumer of fossil fuels, and half of the world's oxygen comes from the ocean. Protecting indigenous lifeways, sovereignty and land; protecting the

environment; and ending war are all essential for human life to continue on this planet. Okinawans have a saying, "nuchi du takara," meaning "life is treasure".

Many of the elders we met, when we told them that we were anti-war activists from the US, would say to us, "ganbarimashou" (let's fight together [to end war and the military bases]).

After returning to Chicago, we hosted a teach-in to share stories and reflections from our trip. If you would like the recording of the teach-in, or want to take action to oppose the military base construction at Henoko, please contact Nikkei Uprising at nikkeiuprising@gmail.com. 🌱

JACL National Convention Reflection

by Ben Nishimura

An executive order designed to destroy communities has ignited a flame within many of us to fight social injustices and preserve Japanese American history. The JACL National Convention was a clear testament to the solidarity Japanese Americans feel towards carrying out JACL's mission. Even before the start of the convention, the decision to switch hotels in support of unions and the ongoing LA hotel strike demonstrates JACL's fight against the infringement of basic human rights. In the heart of Little Tokyo, an ethnic enclave that was once vibrant, emptied, and vibrant once more, I had the opportunity to turn a legacy of pain and suffering into one of celebration and healing.

I attended my first National Convention as a delegate for the Chicago Chapter. Voting on behalf of the Midwest District Council (MDC) and being a part of the national council session educated me on current issues concerning NHAAPI communities. The 3 resolutions that passed during the council session were (a) advocating for the inclusivity and well-being of the LGPTQIA+ community, (b) condemning alien land laws, and (c) supporting the effort to study and create reparations proposals for African Americans. I had the privilege of being a spokesperson for the MDC's resolution, which addressed the numerous alien land laws being passed in southern states.

These laws are reminiscent of the anti-Asian sentiments that took away the constitutional rights of Japanese Americans during WWII. Although presenting this topic in front of a theater full of delegates was a daunting task, I am always eager to spread awareness on topics surrounding the challenges that minority groups presently face.

The workshops were one of many highlights during my time at the convention. With community leaders of different backgrounds and interests coming together to run these workshops, there was something for everyone. The workshops provided us with safe spaces to discuss topics such as mental health at the workshop "Balancing Wellness and Sustainable Advocacy" and our role as JACL youth at "The Next Generation of JACL." Being an artist who aspires to one day be an activist (artist + activist), I was eager to attend "ARTS, ADVOCACY,



LEFT TO RIGHT: RYAN SUDO, COLE LAMBO, BEN NISHIMURA, SIMON KUTZ

AND ACTIVISM: Visual Communications and the Fight for Little Tokyo." We examined art and its relationship with social justice in Little Tokyo, a town known to utilize all types of art to preserve its history and combat the sweeping wave of gentrification. All of the discussions I participated in at these workshops made me feel a kinship with other Japanese Americans who share similar experiences to me, and were in many instances the start to long-lasting, meaningful friendships.

With that being said, my biggest takeaway from the National Convention was the people I met. I confidently take on new opportunities with JACL knowing that I stand on the sturdy shoulders of fellow members who make their mission evident through their daily interactions with others. From the MDC representative checking me into my room when my card declined, to the Vice President of the Twin Cities Chapter holding the shuttle for me, to the criminally underrated band "Asian Persuasion" bringing me jubilation, to the other Chicago delegates always having my back, I hope to help share the selflessness and commitment I saw at convention with the Chicago Chapter! 🙏



TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:
SIMON KUTZ, VINI TAGUCHI,
COLE LAMBO, BEN
NISHIMURA. MIDDLE ROW
LEFT TO RIGHT: RYAN
SUDO, KRISSIE FUNG, ZARA
ESPINOZA, AYAKO TISCHLER.
FRONT ROW: KT UNO

Understanding Gratitude

by Nathan Moy

Sacred ground. At first I didn't quite understand exactly what this meant. But as we stood in silence I felt the weight of the stories, the struggles, and the memories of that place. The ground was not just to commemorate those who had passed there, but it represented the adversity of a people. A people and legacy that I am proud to be a part of.

This June I had the privilege of going on the Kansha Project, and it was an incredible and powerful experience. Our cohort of 10 participants and 4 facilitators explored together what it means to be Japanese American—the *legacy*, *remembrance*, and *gratitude* for that identity. In my own journey of learning what it means to be Japanese American, I deepened my understanding of gratitude through this project.

My grandfather, Ikuro, passed away before I was born, and I always wished that I had the chance to meet him. In preparing my culmination project after the trip, I asked my mom for a few memories and thoughts on my grandfather and what he was like. She wrote to me, "I love him and miss him so very much! You remind me of him so much. I sure wish you could have known him." My grandfather was incarcerated at Jerome, and seeing what

his life during camp would have been like was an incredibly powerful and moving experience. This wasn't just history, it was a part of *my* history.

While visiting Manzanar National Historic Site, I felt that I was able to connect and understand my grandfather and his story in a way I never had before. As we went from place to place at Manzanar, I saw his story in each place. The barracks he lived in, the mess hall he worked at, the bathrooms he used, the basketball courts and baseball fields he played in. It's one thing to read or learn about the conditions, but seeing it forces a deeper understanding of life there. We had the honor of assisting on a service project to restore Merritt Park at Manzanar. I experienced the landscape—the dust, burrs, and ants—for only a few hours. It was hard work, and I developed a deeper appreciation and gratitude for what my grandparents were forced to endure. It made me all the more grateful that I had a nice hotel, good food, and a comfortable life to return to.

The Kansha Project gave me a twofold gratitude. With each thing we saw and learned about life there, I was filled with more and more gratitude. I was so grateful for the tribulations that my grandparents endured, and their



NATHAN MOY IN FRONT OF SENBAZURU, A TRIBUTE TO HIS GRANDFATHER IKURO KINISHI.

perseverance through a punishment that they did nothing to deserve. I am grateful for my family heritage, stories, and values that have been passed down. And I am also so grateful for the Kansha Project, and the opportunity to connect with and understand my grandfather and family history in a way I never had been able to do before.

For the culmination project after the trip, I assembled a senbazuru, or 1000 paper cranes, to express the gratitude that I felt. I gave this as a gift to JACL for the life changing opportunity to go to Manzanar, and dedicated it in memory of my grandfather. While at Jerome, my grandfather wrote, "Many people look at this country without a future for us Niseis after the war. But I myself cannot picture it this way. Somehow or another I cannot seem to forget all the swell times I've had and many a good friend I've left behind." I am filled with gratitude for the amazing experiences, fond memories, and wonderful people that I met on the Kansha Project. 🍀



KANSHA 2023 COHORT AT SERVICE PROJECT AT MERRITT PARK, MANZANAR HISTORIC SITE.

JA Summer Festivals

by Jennifer Brown

This summer, the Japanese American community came together again for several long-standing Japanese community and Chicago traditions: the Japanese American Community Picnic, Ginza Fest, and Japan Fest. JACL was present at all three events, and had opportunities to build community with both new and old friends, and build awareness of our programs and the critical campaign we're pushing to End the Gang Database.

Even though it was a rainy day, the Japanese American community turned out in droves for the **35th Annual Chicago**

Nikkei Community

Picnic with more than 100 people attending from Japanese and Japanese American communities. Our board members, staff, and several community partners were instrumental in putting the event together. As always, the picnic was jam-packed with activities and a wonderful potluck buffet. Many people showed off their pipes doing karaoke, and kids got to enjoy horseback riding and traditional "Suika-Wari" (where you're blindfolded and split a watermelon using a stick—akin to a piñata). The community showed off their cooking skills by bringing lots of traditional Japanese foods, and of course classic picnic items like onigiri, yakisoba, and hot dogs. JACL Chicago's Next Generation Nikkei, Kansha Alumni, and local organizing group, Nikkei Uprising organized a large gathering of young adults during the event.

There might only be one thing people look more forward to than the amazing community buffet, which is the famous **Ginza Holiday Festival** teriyaki chicken. This year was no exception of the community driving in from as far as Indiana to taste the chicken and enjoy the great vendors that set up each year, especially since this was the first Ginza fest since

the pandemic. The 65th Annual Ginza Holiday Festival vendors included many local artisans and the Waza, master artisans from Japan, creating handmade crafts originating over 300 years ago and passed down through generations. Throughout the event there were ongoing stage performances featuring Taiko drumming, Minyo folk dancing, demonstrations of martial arts, and more.

To end the summer line up, JACL Chicago also had a booth at the **Japan Festival** hosted by the Chicago Japanese American Council (CJAC) at the Chicago Cultural Center. The festival aims

to foster meaningful cultural exchange and deeper appreciation for Japanese culture. With hundreds of attendees from diverse backgrounds across the state, the event showcased performances from alumni of the Takarazuka Revue, an all-female Japanese musical theater troupe, and Japanese folk dancers, Team Kawachi Ondo from Los Angeles. Exhibits also included a tea ceremony by Urasenke Chicago Association and soba-making.

JACL Chicago had successful and productive weekends at all three events, especially

gathering signatures for our petition to End the Gang Database. All communities including ours have felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this year's summer festivals demonstrated the importance of community connection through quality time, cultural heritage, and, of course, food. With the return of Ginza Festival after its three-year hiatus, and despite a rainy day at the Picnic, we are grateful to our volunteers and the event organizers for making these successes possible. We are blessed by the community's strong bond to come out and support one another. 🍵



TOP CLOCKWISE: JACL CHICAGO NEXT GENERATION NIKKEI AND NIKKEI UPRISING MEMBERS GATHER AT THE 35TH ANNUAL JAPANESE AMERICAN PICNIC. RIGHT: JACL BOARD MEMBER, JENNIFER BROWN TABLING AT THE MIDWEST BUDDHIST TEMPLE GINZA FESTIVAL. BELOW: KANSHA PROJECT PARTICIPANT ELI NISHIMURA AND BROTHER KANSHA ALUMNI LEADERSHIP BOARD MEMBER, BEN NISHIMURA TABLING AT JAPANFEST IN THE CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER



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(5/26/2023–9/12/2023)

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Anderson family <i>In memory of Rick Okabe</i>	Nakamura Lin Family
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Darcy Combs	Nicole Otake
Tonko Doi <i>In honor of Gail Shintaku</i>	Juliana Pena
Mary Doi <i>In honor of Hana Hogan</i>	Vianny Saito
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Samuel Dunn	Karen & Les Suzukamo
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Patti & Albert Hara <i>In memory of Rick Okabe & Gregg Oshita</i>	David & Joan Takada
Emily Harada	JJ Uenten
Hashimoto family <i>In memory of Rick Okabe</i>	Anne Watanabe
Clare Hiyama	Julie Wernick
Erica Hori	Judy Tanaka & Cary Wong
Elaine and Darrell Kaneshiro <i>In memory of Rick Okabe</i>	Phillip Wong
Kaneshiro family <i>In memory of Rick Okabe</i>	Jane Yakusiji
Mari & Peter Langowski	Mari Yamagiwa
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	Allison Yasukawa
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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

Monday, October, 1st, 2023

Kansha Alumni Leadership Board 2023-2024 application opens

Saturday, October 7th, 2023

12pm – 3:30pm

Aki Matsuri

Christ Church of Chicago, 6047 North Rockwell St. Chicago, IL 60659

Saturday, October 21st, 2023

2pm – 4pm

JACL Midwest District Council Meeting

JACL Chicago Office, 5415 N. Clark St. Chicago, IL 60640

Sunday, October 22nd, 2023

JACL Chicago Board Retreat

JACL Chicago Office, 5415 N. Clark St. Chicago, IL 60640

Saturday October 28th, 2023

4pm – 7pm

The Night Parade Book Party

UIC- Student Center East (Illinois Room A & B), 750 S Halsted St, Chicago, IL 60607

Saturday, November 11

10am – 3pm

JASC Holiday Delight & Kodomo Matsuri

Japanese American Service Committee, 4427 N. Clark Street Chicago, IL 60640

Sunday, November 12, 2023

Doors Open at 6:30pm

Kishi Bashi "Omioyari" Film

The Vic Theatre, 3145 N. Sheffield Ave. Chicago, IL 60657

More information: <https://www.jamusa.com/#announcements>

November 16, 2023

Next Gen. Nikkei Basket Weaving Workshop with Cori Nakamura Lin