The following letter was addressed to the editor of the Pacific Citizen in response to letters to the editor that were published in the July 29 issue. The two initial letters to the editor criticized the awarding of the Vision Award by the National Youth/Student Council to Black Lives Matter – Los Angeles.

This response was drafted by Miki Takeshita and Joseph Wat, 2016 Kansha Project alumni.

Dear Editor:

We were appalled and angered to read in the July 29 issue of the Pacific Citizen two letters to the editor protesting the awarding of the Vision Award by the National Youth/Student Council to Black Lives Matter Los Angeles and branding Black Lives Matter [BLM] as promoting violence against police across America. There was an array of frightening, unjust, and untrue sentiments that were expressed in those letters that needed to be responded to. As dedicated and proud members of JACL, the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States, we are writing this letter to speak out against this divisive and racist rhetoric by members of JACL against our Black brothers and sisters, and frankly, the white supremacy and entrenched racism in them.

There is a huge misunderstanding of the goals sought out by BLM organizers. Phrases like “cop haters” and “criminals” are not accurate descriptions of either BLM activists or the many African Americans who are now dead after interactions with police. Black Lives Matter is not an anti-police organization. It does not promote violence against the police. It is an anti-police brutality organization. The organization has made it very clear in its actions, website, protests and rallies that they are calling for an end to the injustices perpetrated by law enforcement on communities of color.

In many of these cases, Black men enter interactions with police for non-serious/non-threatening reasons and end up arrested, severely injured, and in too many cases dead. Although it may be illegal, changing lanes without a turn signal does not carry the death penalty although it was enough to kill Sandra Bland in Texas. Selling loose cigarettes should not have killed Eric Garner in New York. Slashing tires should not have killed Laquan McDonald in Chicago. And carrying a plastic gun most certainly should not have killed twelve-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland. Claiming that these men, women and
children could have avoided their deaths by obeying the law suggests that justice was appropriately served in each of these situations.

Somehow the statements “Blue Lives Matter” or “All Lives Matter” have grown as opposition chants to those working to uplift the African American community. Blue Lives Matter is a sentiment supported by our media, lawmakers, justice systems, and pension plans in a way that makes it an obvious statement. In contrast, Black Lives Matter is a mantra that we, as thoughtful and caring community members, and JACL as an organization, must repeat because of the consistent lack of repercussions for police officers who have overstepped their role as keepers of the peace and sworn upholders of the Constitution and instead perpetuate a state of fear and violence within the black community. The shooters in both Baton Rouge and Dallas were killed and later found to have no connections to Black Lives Matter. In fact, 71% of the police who have been shot and killed so far in 2016 have been shot by white men. To attribute the actions of single gunmen who have no affiliations with Black Lives Matter dangerous, incorrect and completely undermines any progress we have made thus far to end violence against the black community in this country. Black Lives Matter is something that still needs to be enacted to make All Lives Matter a true statement.

Although JACL was formed in 1929 to address discrimination against our own community of Japanese Americans, the current mission of JACL is to safeguard the civil and human rights of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans and all communities who are affected by injustice and bigotry. It has expanded its scope to fighting for the civil rights of Asian American and other minority communities. It was one of the first organizations in 2001 to protest the surveillance of Muslims after 9/11 and has continuously fought for LGBTQ rights. Have we somehow forgotten that during World War II, Japanese Americans saw themselves the target of horrific racial profiling, very similar to the racial profiling Black men are facing today, which resulted in the unconstitutional incarceration of 125,000 Japanese Americans?

While JACL is tasked with commemorating Japanese American history and culture, in particular the legacy of the Japanese American incarceration experience, it is dishonest to pretend as though we were the loudest or only voices condemning incarceration. We must gratefully recognize the support that our people received during this time. The black community, in fact, was one of the few groups to openly condemn Japanese American incarceration and express support for Japanese Americans. Hugh MacBeth, a Black lawyer based in Los Angeles, openly defended Japanese Americans during the war by arguing that “race-based confinement constituted unconstitutional racial discrimination.” He signed the JACL brief in the historic case Korematsu vs. United States and successfully defended Fred and Kajiro Oyama, who challenged California’s Alien Land Act, which prevented many immigrants from owning land. Many Black newspapers sympathized with Japanese Americans and wrote of the shared struggles of discrimination between Blacks and Japanese Americans. The California Eagle in 1943 called for the discontinued use of the slur “Jap,” even though many mainstream newspapers would continue using it for years. Even during the resettlement period after World War II during which Japanese Americans faced housing and employment discrimination, the African American community continued to show support for Japanese Americans, such as by protesting the removal of Japanese Americans from their positions in factories across the Midwest and West Coast. Black Americans active in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960’s successfully brought about the Immigration Act of 1965, which lifted racist immigration restrictions, allowing many Japanese Americans to gain citizenship.

And now, fifty years later, unarmed Black men are five times more likely than unarmed white men to be shot and killed by police. With this frightening statistic in mind, we need to stand with BLM organizers and fight for the right of our African American fellow citizens
to walk the streets without fear of police brutality. Of course we cannot forget Japanese American history and must continue to preserve it, but we must be cognizant of the fact that we are incredibly privileged to see it as history. Japanese Americans will never again be put into incarceration camps, and it is safe to say that many of us will never face police brutality. As a privileged minority group that can view the police as our protectors rather than threats to our lives, it is our duty to support Blacks and minorities in their fight against injustice and bigotry, as they have done for us.

We support and applaud the awarding of the NY/SC Vision Award to Black Lives Matter, and we look forward to being a part of JACL's concerted efforts to fight against police brutality in minority communities.

Sincerely,
Miki Takeshita, JACL Chicago and New York
Joseph Wat, JACL Honolulu

Jennifer Brown, JACL Chicago
Amy Chow, JACL Chicago
Mary Coomes, JACL Chicago
Lisa Doi, JACL Chicago
Takumi Harada, Board Member, JACL New York
Amara Hoshijo, Vice President, JACL New York
Gregory Kimura, JACL Chicago
Lane Mita, JACL Chicago
Christine Munteanu, JACL Chicago
Kenji Negi, JACL Chicago
Christine Nitahara, JACL Chicago
Eric Langowski, JACL Hoosier
Kristin Osakada, JACL Chicago
Anna Takada, JACL Chicago
Jordan Yamagiwa, JACL Chicago
Mari Yamagiwa, JACL Chicago
Kristen Yang, JACL Chicago
Grace Yoshiba, JACL Chicago

This response was drafted by Miki Takeshita and Joseph Wat, 2016 Kansha Project alumni. Several individuals and Kansha Project alumni have signed in support of this letter. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and signees and do not necessarily represent the views of the JACL Chicago chapter.

Chicago Nikkei Picnic
By Jeannie Harrell, Community Outreach Co-Chair

The Chicago Nikkei community came together on Saturday, July 30, to eat, drink and play at the annual Nikkei Picnic at Bunker Hill Forest Preserve. This year’s picnic was held at Grove 7, a secluded spot at the edge of the forest preserve that simultaneously offered a great deal of space and some intimacy for a small community feel. Three rows of picnic tables overflowed with contributions from those in attendance, including homemade sushi, onigiri, salads, and several different types of fried chicken (all delicious). Attendees also enjoyed kakigori, beer on tap, and yakisoba and gyoza fresh off the teppan—a special treat at this year’s picnic that will hopefully be repeated in future!

The picnic is a family affair featuring activities for all ages, and kids at this year’s picnic enjoyed a bouncy castle with built-in slide, pony rides, and classic Japanese field day events like tug-of-war and suikawari (blindfolded watermelon-breaking, like a healthier piñata). The picnic also featured set-ups for cornhole and volleyball that saw a lot of use as well. Picnickers of all ages enjoyed the karaoke booth, and those both behind the mic and in the crowd enjoyed singing along to “California Dreamin’” and other classic tunes.

Conspicuously absent from this year’s picnic was the famous Dunk Tank. Unfortunately, the parks and recreation department no longer offers permits for dunk tanks, so suggestions for future picnic attractions that involve both fundraising and public humiliation are highly welcome. See you at next year’s picnic!
And just like that, the 2016 Rio Olympics have come and gone. In what was the first Olympics hosted on South American soil, the host country had their fair share of problems in what will be remembered as the “Summer of Ryan.” That would be Ryan Lochte of course. But besides the 4x Olympian making up a story about being robbed in Rio, Brazil also had to deal with a media bus being hit by stray bullets, robberies, empty seats at a lot of the venues and the pool at the Maria Lenk Aquatics Center inexplicably turning green.

In an era of social media, NBC tried delaying coverage of popular events like women’s gymnastics to primetime viewing in an effort to make up for the $1.23 billion dollars spent for the rights to show the games. However, in some cases this decision backfired, as media reports told everyone who won the event already, making the event, “not must see TV.”

But let’s focus on the positive. Yes, Rio, you had more problems than most people can remember, both going into and during the games. You had 150 doctors write to the World Health Organization, asking for the games to be moved due to the spread of the Zika virus. You had thousands forced to move from their homes to build new venues, and, now that the games are over, the reality that many of these venues, will never be used again (see Sochi 2014 as an example).

And yet, there were many great stories too. The dominance of Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt, and the emergence of Simone Biles and Katie Ledecky just to name a few.

But there were other amazing stories to come out of these games as well, most of which were not mentioned by NBC. For instance, if I were to say the name Feyisa Lilesa, what comes to mind? Lilesa was a silver medalist in the men’s marathon category who, after crossing the finish line, raised his arms above his head in an “x.”

Lilesa was protesting the Ethiopian government’s killing of hundreds of the country’s Oromo people, the country’s largest ethnic group. Many of these protests ended in bloodshed and the deaths of over 400 since November. By making such a statement, Lilesa may not be able to return home, for fear of retribution from his country in the form of jail or even worse, death.

“The Ethiopian government is killing my people, so I stand will all protests anywhere, as Oromo is my tribe,” Lilesa said. “My relatives are in prison, and if they talk about democratic rights, they are killed.”

Seeing stories like this is what makes the Olympics great. While the media and other entities only focus on the popular sports that will generate ratings like women’s gymnastics, swimming, and men’s and women’s basketball, the fact is that there are great stories like Lilesa’s that need to be brought to the forefront and recognized for the incredible amount of courage that he’s displaying. This is something we should be honoring 365 days a year, just not once every four years. I admire those who take a stand in the face of adversity. My thoughts and prayers with the Oromo people.

As he crossed the finish line, Ethiopian marathon runner, Feyisa Lilesa raised his arms forming an “X” in protest of the Ethiopian government’s killing of hundreds of his Oromo people. Lilesa won the silver medal in the men’s marathon at the 2016 Olympic Games.
Our Chapter’s annual golf outing was started some 25 years ago by Roy Teshima and Roy Iwata.

Both were long time and sadly, recently deceased JACL members. This outing is open to members, non-members, people who know how to golf and even those who don’t. It has been an enjoyable way for JACL members and the community to join together to bring awareness and show support for the Chicago Chapter.

The golf outing moved to a new location this year. On July 21st, it was held at the Glenview Park Golf Club, in Glenview, IL. The staff at the golf course and the Café restaurant, where we held our awards luncheon, were very accommodating and I hope to return there for next year’s outing. Despite the hot temperatures (94 degrees) and a 45 minute weather delay, all 39 golfers completed their round.

At the end of play, everyone gathered at the Café restaurant for lunch and the award presentations. All participants received some type of prize, but there were also some special awards. The top gross score was turned in by Kaz Ideno with an 81. Prizes for the top 3 handicap scores went to Kaz Ideno and John Schneider with 57 and Al Shimizu with 62. There was a prize won by Bryan Robson for being the closest to the pin on hole #6. Prizes for the longest putt made went to Larry Yoshino on hole #12 and Helen Ideno on hole #17. The prize for the longest drive went to Matt Kawamoto on hole #16.

As chairperson for this outing, I would like to give a special thank you to Carol & Joyce Yoshino and Carol Miyake. Their help with checking in golfers and recording everyone’s score was greatly appreciated. Also, thanks to all who came out to play, all who made donations, and all who helped in bringing people out to play. I am looking forward to next year’s outing and hope to see all of you again.
I feel really privileged to have participated in it,” said one of the teachers in commenting on JACL’s recent workshops on the incarceration. The participant went on to say, “I love that it wasn’t just professors imparting their knowledge, but speakers who were instrumental in the redress movement, the Korematsu case, as well as those who lived in the camps.”

National JACL held two weeklong workshops for teachers on July 24-29 and on August 7-12. Titled Civil Liberties in Times of Crisis: The Japanese American Incarceration, the workshops were sponsored through a $165,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. A total of 72 teachers from throughout the United States attended the sessions.

The workshops were designed to provide experience-based insight into the incarceration by visiting sites such as the Santa Anita detention facility and Manzanar concentration camp. In addition, the workshops were held at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles and the first session consisted of a walking tour of the Little Tokyo area led by Alan Nishio and his colleagues from the Little Tokyo Service Center. One of the teachers commented, “The power of place cannot be underestimated. The trips in Little Tokyo, Santa Anita, and Manzanar are experiences I will never forget.”

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, author of Farewell to Manzanar, captivated the teachers with episodes from her book and with the manner in which some of these episodes were translated into a movie version of her work. June Aochi Berk and

A visit to the Santa Anita detention facility was part of each weeklong workshop providing teachers with experience-based insight into the Japanese American incarceration.

Each weeklong teacher workshop visited the Manzanar concentration camp to develop a deeper understanding of the incarceration.
On Saturday and Sunday, June 11 and 12, the Forest View Educational Center in Arlington Heights was host to the 2016 Chicago Japan Festival. Exhibitors, vendors and performers from Japanese American and Japanese national organizations seemed to fill the Center from end to end. Visitors were treated to an incredibly diverse array of all that Japanese culture has to offer. Exhibitions included everything from *ikebana* to fruit carving, many vendors took advantage of the opportunity to sell their own handcrafts and traditional Japanese artwork and goods, and performances over the course of the two days included martial arts, a cosplay contest, and concerts in genres from taiko to ukulele. As with any festival, food was a major highlight—I overheard attendees raving in English and Japanese over the *gyudon* and curry rice available courtesy of Tensuke Market and Crescent Bakery, to say nothing of the “Pocky Girls” and “Pocky Guys” on site handing out copious free samples of Cookies ‘n’ Cream flavored Pocky. Yum!

I found the experience of volunteering very rewarding! In the morning I was assigned to the Kids Corner goldfish-scooping pool (with perhaps inauthentic, but much more sensible plastic goldfish) and loved the opportunity to share Japanese culture with enthusiastic and impressionable young children. It reminded me of going to *matsuri* with my parents as a kid in Tokyo. I hope that the festival continues into the next generation, and the little ones I chatted with grow to have the chance to bring their own children to experience the festival atmosphere that makes Japanese culture so special.

In the afternoon, I volunteered at the JACL table. At around 4PM, the festival featured a screening of the documentary *Legacy of Heart Mountain*, and after the screening I saw a considerable amount of traffic as many people wanted to get their own copies. One teacher even bought four copies of the DVD to distribute among his colleagues! I remain hopeful as ever that JACL’s presence at Japanese cultural events around Chicago helps to promote the invaluable story of Japanese and Japanese American people in the United States. I’m grateful for the opportunity to share Japanese American history as well as JACL’s mission to promote it.
SUMMER IN THE CITY
By Carol Yoshino, JACL Chicago Member

Living in Chicago (or actually anywhere in the Midwest), we know that our summers are near and dear to us — every nice day is never taken for granted.

In our community, one of the summer highlights is Midwest Buddhist Temple’s Ginza Holiday Festival held in mid-August. Everyone who goes looks forward to all the wonderful food. The vendors who offer unique gifts and the variety of entertainment provided.

As in past years, JACL Chicago was a happy participant in this event, signing on for booth space to sell whatever novelty item we have, to disperse information on all of the programs and activities we’re involved with, and most important, to see our members face to face and meet new friends.

This year’s Ginza started out with a very rainy Friday evening, but Saturday and Sunday didn’t disappoint. JACL Chicago Board members and friends took turns staffing our booth the entire time greeting friends and telling everyone who stopped by what our chapter is up to. We also sold Kansha Project t-shirts and sunglasses (it was very sunny!).

Thank you, MBT, for holding this rite of summer for our community and for the invitation to participate year after year.

Catching up with friends, enjoying the performances, working the JACL booth, trying to stay cool, forming new relationships—the Ginza Holiday Festival is a community event shared by all Chicago.
The JACL National Convention took place at the Monte Carlo in Las Vegas from July 11 – July 15. This is the second consecutive year it was held in Las Vegas, Nevada. To open the 2016 Convention, David Lin, National President, welcomed the National Council for the last time because it was the end of term for the previous National Board. National Council resolutions, plenaries, and National Board elections were the primary components at the 2016 Convention.

Of the resolutions presented to the National Council, two topics dominated the floor: the budget deficit and the Pacific Citizen. After a presentation from the former board Treasurer about the dire state of JACL National’s budget crisis, the National Council voted to reject the proposed budget and a group of dedicated delegates spent their spare hours during Convention to crunch numbers and presented a new proposed budget that successfully eliminated the need to cut two National staff and one Pacific Citizen staff position. The budget was passed by the National Board but the proposed Emergency Resolution to create an additional finance oversight committee failed to pass.

Additionally, a resolution was presented to the National Council that asked for JACL members to pay a fee if they would like to continue to receive a hard copy of the Pacific Citizen (PC). The issue of whether to eliminate or keep the hard copy that members receive in the mail has been ongoing at previous Conventions with conflicting points of eliminating high costs vs. catering to the Nisei generation that stays connected to the community through the PC. This year the existence of the Pacific Citizen came further into question due to the high cost of running the newspaper in our current budget deficit. A panel consisting of print and multimedia experts provided an introduction to the issues surrounding the Pacific Citizen including the diminishing future of print media by some experts while acknowledging the unique Japanese American community and the significance of the Pacific Citizen in JACL’s history. The National Council voted to pass the resolution for members to pay an additional fee in order to continue to receive paper copies of the newspaper.

Finally, the National Board was elected into office with Gary Mayeda as President, Michelle Amano as VP General Operations, Jeffrey Moy as VP Public Affairs, Matthew Farrells as VP Planning and Development, and Kota Mizutani as National Youth/Student Council Chair. Appointed to the National Board was Colleen Morimoto, our former Midwest District Governor, Kenji Kuramitsu as Youth Representative, and Alan Nishi as Secretary/Treasurer.

Additionally, youth and young professionals held a strong presence at this year’s National Convention. Notable moments include Black Lives Matter Los Angeles receiving an award from the National Youth/Student Council. The award acceptance speech reminded us of the solidarity that is needed amongst communities of color. And the youth passed out a letter written by other Asian American youth addressed to their elders to talk about the issue of anti-blackness that is prevalent in the Asian American community. A plenary was held about mixed race and the shin community. And a young professional caucus was held after hours to provide an opportunity to connect with one another and envision their hopes for the Japanese American community together.

The National Convention was run by volunteers, interns, fellows, and staff led by Interim Executive Director, Bill Yoshino and Interim Associate Director, Stephanie Nitahara. Bryan Hara, Megan Nakano, Mari Yamagiwa, and Rebecca Ozaki represented the Chicago Chapter as delegates. 😊

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Kenji Negi, has been an active member of JACL Chicago. He was a participant in the 2013 Kansha Project, and has been a member of the Kansha Project Alumni Leadership Board that just concluded its pilot year. Many of us have known Kenji to be a caring and giving member of our community, so it was no surprise to many of us to hear about his good deed last month.

In early August, I happened to see a news segment on Facebook that featured a familiar face. The segment, by Mai Martinez of CBS, described how a local man lost his wallet while attending a packed concert at the Aragon Ballroom. Though he described thinking that would be the last he would see of it, he was contacted a few days later by Kenji who asked if this man lost his wallet. Soon after, this man was reunited with his wallet, with all cards and cash intact, and expressed being extremely grateful for Kenji’s efforts. When asked about the experience, Kenji shared “It was a complete surprise when CBS contacted me for a quick interview, but I simply wanted to do the right thing. I’ve experienced that unsettling feeling of losing something important like a wallet before, so I’m just glad that we were able to return the wallet back to its owner!” We’re proud of you, Kenji. And now all of Chicago knows how great you are too! 🙌

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Coming soon!
Tonko’s Chicago JA Reunion
Details to be announced
Calendar of Events

Wednesday, September 14
7 PM
JACL Chicago Board Meeting
JACL Chicago Office, 5415 N. Clark Street, Chicago

Tuesday, September 20
6:30 – 8:30 PM
The Two Moritas: On Japanese American Representation in City and County Government
JASC, 4427 N. Clark Street, Chicago

Thursday, September 22
7 PM – 9 PM
Next Generation Nikkei Launch Party
Fat Cat Bar, 4840 N. Broadway Street, Chicago

Wednesday, October 12
7 PM
JACL Chicago Board Meeting
JACL Chicago Office, 5415 N. Clark Street, Chicago

October 14–16
11 AM
Midwest District Council Meeting
Detroit, Mi