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JACL *on*

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JACL National Convention 2021

By Veronica Murashige

Over the July 15-18th weekend, JACL hosted its 51st national convention virtually. This marked a return to hosting national conventions since the start of the pandemic because one had not been held virtually or in-person in 2020. This year’s theme was “Communities Forged Under Fire,” which was titled as such to acknowledge the long history of the Japanese American community’s struggles and the struggles of marginalized communities from immigration, colonization, the fight for civil rights, and beyond. The four-day long convention brought members together during the pandemic for workshops, lectures, and debate on two important resolutions. It was held using Cadence, an online platform meant for hosting live, online, and hybrid events, Zoom, and eBallot, a platform used as a way to vote safely and securely. Highlights included Maia and Alex Shibutani speaking at the Sayonara Gala, performances by the Portland Taiko and Mark H Taiko groups, and a screening of the documentary *The Soul of America*. Important workshops such as “Tule Lake: Understanding Resistance” and “Transitioning Into the Workforce From an Anti-Opressive Lens,” were also held throughout the weekend.



On the last day of the convention, the JACL concluded the weekend with a second National Council Session that spanned almost seven hours. Delegates from JACL chapters across the nation engaged in debate about two resolutions: one regarding supporting the Black Lives Matter movement and the other regarding preventing and stopping anti-Asian hate and violence. Even with the technical difficulties that came with hosting a national convention virtually for the first time, the delegates engaged in a thoughtful and respectful discussion on these resolutions and they ended up passing with overwhelming majorities.

Continued on page 2

**SCHOLARSHIP
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*Watch for guidelines and
applications*

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 11/1/21.

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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National Convention continued

As stated in the official write-up of the convention, "the first resolution reaffirmed JACL's commitment to support Black and other communities whose civil rights, liberty, and well-being are denied by white supremacy and systemic racism. It further



committed the organization to seek to be actively anti-racist in its actions and policies. The resolution also commits its membership and chapters to work towards the passage of legislation such as the George Floyd justice in Policing Act and the BREATHE Act which remain under consideration by the United States Congress." The JACL recognizes that the United States has failed to address the systemic racism and implicit bias against Black communities and resolved that members should actively support these communities.

Regarding the second resolution, the official write-up states it was passed in response to the escalating hate crimes and incidents targeting Asian Pacific Americans in the past year, and called upon media, elected officials, and community leadership to denounce racial discrimination, white supremacy, and xenophobia that is often at the root of anti-Asian incidents. The resolution affirmed the need for mandatory ethnic studies curriculum in K-12 education as a means to mitigate and prevent future racially motivated violence." Racially motivated hate crimes against East Asians have increased recently due to the 45th presidential administration and the propagation of COVID-19 being associated with China.

After what was just about a hard year and a half, it was nice to have a community experience in the form of a four-day national convention. JACL members were able to successfully come together, support each other, and strengthen the bonds of the chapters in the current reality of living in a pandemic. 🙌

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TEAACH Act Signed Into Law

By Tonko Doi

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker signed the Teaching Equitable Asian American History (TEAACH) Act on Friday, July 9, 2021. It is set to go into effect January 1, 2022. With the signing, Illinois became the first state to require Asian American history to be taught in all K-12 public schools. Standing next to the governor were Sen. Ram Villivalam, who is Indian American, and Rep. Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz, who is Chinese American. Sen. Villivalam and Rep. Gong-Gershowitz were the original sponsors of the bill.

The lead organization, Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Chicago (AAAJC) was instrumental in working with Rep. Gong-Gershowitz and Sen. Villivalam in promoting the passage of the bill. TEAACH was championed by a coalition of more than 35 organizations including the Chicago chapter of the JACL.

On signing the bill, Governor Pritzker said, "Today, we are reaffirming our commitment to creating more inclusive school environments . . . We are setting a new standard for what it means to truly reckon with our history. It's a new standard that helps us understand one another, and ultimately, to move ourselves closer to the nation of our ideals." The bill will require schools to add a unit to their curriculums to study things such as the contributions of Asian Americans in government, the arts and humanities, science, and civil rights, as well as the contributions of Asian American communities to the economic, cultural, social, and political development of the United States.

The bill struck a chord with many throughout the legislative process, including youth organizers-- current Illinois public school students-- who played a key role in passage of the legislation. Kiana Yoshiko Kenmotsu, a fourth-generation Japanese American and high school senior, said, "I was incredulous when my classmates staunchly believed that my Korean War veteran grandfather, 442nd Regiment great uncle and thousands of innocent Americans were rightfully incarcerated."

to the Junior JACL, Nisei Post Drum and Bugle Corps, JA churches, temples and scout groups, JA high school social clubs and CNAAs sports teams. The friendships formed through these organizations will last a lifetime. Through education about Asian American history people will learn of the hardships the Asian people endured to survive. Educating Illinois students about Asian American history will enable you to have pride in yourself and pride in those who led the way. 🇺🇸



SEN. RAM VILLIVALAM, REP. JENNIFER GONG-GERSHOWITZ, THE ORIGINAL SPONSORS OF THE BILL, AND OTHERS LOOK ON AS ILLINOIS GOVERNOR JB PRITZKER SIGNED THE TEACHING EQUITABLE ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY ACT. IT IS SET TO GO INTO EFFECT JANUARY 1, 2022.

With the advent of this legislation, students will be educated on what and why the incarceration actually happened. Students will learn that despite prejudice, men, women and children worked hard to make a better place for themselves and their families. Japanese Americans growing up in Chicago from the late '40s to the '70s developed friendships thanks

**WATCH FOR JACL
CHICAGO SCHOLARSHIP
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Asian American Action Day

By Brandon Lee

On May 18, JACL Chicago joined members of the Pan Asian Voter Empowerment (PAVE) Coalition for the annual Asian American Action Day. The annual AAA Day is a celebration of the power within the Asian American community in Illinois, and an opportunity for us to advocate for this year's PAVE agenda.

Speakers included Governor JB Pritzker, who expressed his support for the TEAACH Act and Illinois Way Forward (later in the summer, Governor Pritzker would sign both into law), as well as additional support for the immigrant services line item that many immigrants across the state rely on. Senator Ram Villivalam, Representative Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz, and Representative Theresa



MEGHANA, SOO YOUNG, AND RYUKICHI KICK OFF ASIAN AMERICAN ACTION DAY.



PERFORMANCES FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES WERE HELD TO CELEBRATE AAA DAY.

The main takeaway from every Asian American Action Day is that our community gets stronger with every passing year. As members of the Pan-Asian Voter Empowerment Coalition, JACL Chicago is part of the movement to ensure that our communities are well represented in the statehouse. Hopefully next year we will be able to get back to doing these events in-person at the state capitol in Springfield.

Watch the recording of Asian American Action Day on Advancing Justice | Chicago's Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/advancingjusticechicago/videos/204800921296794/>

Mah (all members of the Asian American Legislative Caucus) spoke in support of Asian American communities as well as the TEAACH Act specifically.

This year, AAA Day featured a workshop on Asian American history, as well as performances by community artists, including a powerful taiko performance by Ho Estu Taiko.



Remembering Bernie Wong

By Cary Wong

On April 27, 2021, Chicago's Chinatown lost a beloved community leader when Bernarda ("Bernie") S. Wong passed away. Greater Chicagoland, Illinois and the U.S. lost a valued innovator, counselor and supporter of countless Asian American social service agencies as well as a mentor to hundreds who followed her example.

I lost a friend.

I first met Bernie when she and Esther Wong met with the Chinese American Civic Council in 1977 to present the idea of creating a social service agency to provide services to ease the entry of immigrants in Chicago's Chinatown. You could see the enthusiasm and passion in their belief that ultimately drove the formation of the Chinese American Service League (CASL), an organization that Bernie led for over 40 years before retiring in 2016.

Prior to CASL, in early Chinatown services that helped immigrants were provided on an ad hoc basis by the Family Associations, or "Tongs," churches, relatives and friends of recent immigrants. By the time CASL was founded, there was limited and mostly informal involvement by these groups.

CASL formalized the delivery of professional guidance in navigating English speaking and other skills necessary for recent immigrants to become successful, productive U.S. citizens. CASL's services grew to include job placement help, navigating Social Security, Medicare and other income and health care programs. CASL created a Culinary Training School that is successful in placing its graduates at many prestigious restaurants and hotels. It provides Senior and children day care, homemaking services to the elderly. CASL also sponsored the creation of a senior living facility, the Albert & Bernie Wong Senior Living Community.

CASL's mission and programs grew as Bernie recognized the needs of the

Bernarda "Bernie" Lo Wong
October 24, 1943 - April 27, 2021



Chinatown community. Bernie lived in and near Chinatown during her life in Chicago and was able to see firsthand the evolving needs of her community. As soon as she recognized a community service need, she was quick to work tirelessly to have CASL provide it.

During Bernie's funeral mass on May 15, 2021, well-known persons including Lori Lightfoot, Toni Preckwinkle, Danny Davis, Dick Durbin, Linda Yu and others shared personal experiences of meetings with Bernie. The common theme of their accounts was Bernie's ask to fill a CASL need and how she never took no for an answer. In fact, she often recruited them as advocates.

CASL is now the largest employer in Chinatown and the largest Asian American social services agency in the Midwest.

Despite all the accolades and recognition from U.S. Presidents, Senators, Representatives, Governors, Mayors, foreign dignitaries and influential persons, Bernie never lost her common touch. Often on errands while walking in Chinatown, the elderly, adults and children would greet Bernie with a smile when approaching her and would always get a smile in return. Bernie would always stop and chat whether she knew the person or not. Her character sets an

example for all who wish to serve their community. Many, many will miss her. 🙏

For more information on Bernie's life go to:

<https://www.berniewongtribute.com/>

<https://www.caslservice.org/bernie>

Red Angel Unveiled in Honor of Bernie Wong

excerpted from Block Club Chicago



On October 12, 2021 a sculpture titled, "Red Angel," created by the renowned Zhou brothers was unveiled and dedicated to Bernarda (Bernie) Wong.

The sculpture is located at Princeton Avenue and Tan Court, near the Chinese American Service League that Bernie founded over 40 years ago. The Zhou brothers credit the success of their artwork in the United States in part to the Chinese American Service League and Chicago's Chinatown Community for support and help in becoming U.S. citizens. 🙏

A Reflection on 10 Years of the Kansha Project

By Christine Munteanu

I've often heard the Kansha Project described by participants as "something you never knew you needed": a connection to a community you didn't know existed; an opportunity to heal from trauma you didn't realize you carried; a piece of your personal/family/collective history you weren't aware you were missing.



MIA SATO SHARES PHOTOGRAPHS SHE TOOK OF HER TRIP.

You can imagine how difficult it was for us to recruit for a program "no one knew they needed" in the early years – it was easier for us to convince older family members to force their young relatives to participate than it was to recruit participants directly!

Despite those initial struggles, over the past ten years, we've seen the way the Kansha Project is a meaningful and transformative experience. As participants' reflections and creative projects illustrate, the Kansha Project has a profound impact on their sense of identity, community, leadership, and social justice.

Beyond its individual impact, one of the most beautiful (and somewhat unanticipated)

outcomes of the Kansha Project is the way it has led to a blossoming of a vibrant community of young adult Japanese Americans in Chicago.

In the fall of 2015, the Alumni Leadership Board (ALB) was created as a way to re-engage past participants of the program in planning, facilitating, and supporting the Kansha Project. When I think back to that time, it was truly a perfect storm of people and circumstances: Bill Yoshino and John Tateishi, our original trip leaders from 2011 – 2015, were looking to retire from the program, so we needed to find a new group of facilitators. At the same time, there were also a core group of alumni from the past 4 years of the program who had graduated college and were back in Chicago, looking for a way to get involved and give back.

The ALB took the Kansha Project and transformed it. Unique fundraising



AMY CHOW DISCUSSES HER EXPERIENCE ON THE KANSHA PROJECT.

campaigns, creative reflection projects, local coalition-building efforts, and a focus on art and activism: these are just some of the ways our ALB members expanded and improved the Kansha Project. What the energy and creativity of our ALB members demonstrated was the strong desire for sustained engagement and a commitment to social justice among young Japanese Americans in our community.

It used to be that the ALB was the only major way for young folks to get involved with JAACL Chicago, so at one point, I think we had over 15 members of the ALB! Since then, we've seen so many other opportunities and spaces for youth to grow and thrive, including Next Generation Nikkei and Nikkei Uprising. I am so inspired by the way Kansha Project alumni have claimed their place as artists, activists, scholars, organizers, and leaders



ATTENDEES OF THE KANSHA 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION.

Remembering Bernarda Wong

By Bill Yoshino

I know of few who had the outward zeal that Bernie Wong possessed in working for the community and the organization she served. Bernie founded and led the Chinese American Service League (CASL), which would become the largest Asian American social service organization in the Midwest. I don't think I would be making her more than what she was by saying she was truly legendary among her counterparts and colleagues in the Asian American social service community and beyond.

I first met Bernie in 1983 when she hosted a meeting at CASL (then a 2nd floor office on Cermak) in the aftermath of the judicial outcome of the murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit. Bernie had invited two leaders from the campaign in Detroit to talk about the case and fundraising efforts to seek justice for Vincent Chin. The case of Vincent Chin was a watershed for Asian American coalition-building efforts throughout the United States including Chicago and

10 Years of the Kansha Project continued

of our community. What's also been exciting is that young Nikkei leadership in Chicago has also grown beyond just Kansha alumni, and has brought in so many other amazing young folks who are ready to help shape our community's present and its future.

The Kansha Project, and our Chicago Nikkei community more broadly, has been strengthened by the creativity, energy, passion, and commitment of the youth in our community, and has demonstrated the power of engaging youth as active partners instead of passive recipients of our community's legacy. My hope is that the Kansha Project can continue to serve as a testament to the ways our community is stronger when we forge an inclusive, collaborative, and evolving understanding of what it means to be part of the Japanese diaspora. 🌸



BILL YOSHINO AND BERNIE WONG ON THE LEFT OF HAROLD WASHINGTON.

Bernie recognized the need to assist in this important cause.

Bernie's contributions went far beyond her work with CASL. She was present in the nascent movement for political empowerment among Asian Americans in Illinois during the 1980s. In 1983, Bernie was among a group of Asian Americans who worked with Harold Washington, the newly-elected mayor of Chicago to bring Asian Americans into the processes of local government. Together with people like Ross Harano, we established the Mayor's Asian American Advisory Council and later advocated for the creation of the Chicago Commission on Asian American Affairs. Asian Americans truly had a voice in Washington's administration.

I recall Bernie saying on multiple occasions that whenever she attended a meeting, she always made it a point to say something. Having served with her as a member of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, I know this to be true. However, this personal maxim was especially important in settings where Bernie was the only Asian American at the table as during her tenure as the first Asian American to

be appointed as a commissioner for the Chicago Public Library. The public library in Chinatown stands as vivid testimony to her advocacy.

Bernie made a difference and left a genuine legacy in a career of service to her community. I join with the Board of JACL Chicago in extending condolences to the family of Bernie Wong. We will miss Bernie's warmth, openness, and steadfast enthusiasm, attributes that endeared her to many, and which played a significant role in her leadership for Asian Americans in Illinois. 🌸

THE BLACK AND JAPANESE AMERICAN REPARATIONS BOOK CLUB

Learn more and register at:
<https://dornsifeusc.edu/events/site/192/37660385412715/>

The 2021 Go For Broke Soldiers Stamp Programs

By Wayne Osako (condensed by Veronica Murashige)

The U.S. Postal Service has announced that the official release date of the Go For Broke Japanese American Soldiers of World War II Forever Stamp will be Thursday, June 3rd, 2021. The stamp will be issued first in Los Angeles, California, where the stamp campaign originated in 2005. Organizers seek to celebrate the release of the historic stamp, which is the first to feature the image of an Asian American soldier.

Stamp Our Story is the ad hoc coalition of family and friends of the Nisei soldiers that backed the proposal for the Go For Broke Soldiers Stamp, and includes the many organizations that have supported the cause. Due to public petitioning by Stamp Our Story, a multitude of lawmakers across the country from both sides sent letters of support for the proposal to the Postmaster General. The campaign even received the overseas support from French citizens and officials in areas that were liberated from German forces by Go For Broke Soldiers.

Fusa Takahashi (93) of Granite Bay, Aiko O. King (93) of Camarillo, and the late Chiz Ohira of Gardena.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the USPS will produce a national-level dedication in a virtual form through a ten-minute video that will officially announce the release of the Go For Broke Soldiers Stamp online. Stamp Our Story and coalition partners are working with the USPS on the video tribute, which will feature multiple voices from the community sharing the story behind the stamp to the American public.

33,000 Americans of Japanese heritage enlisted anyway to show their American loyalty and help in the US war effort. The 100th/442nd RCT would become the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in US history, including 21 Medals of Honor, and 8 Presidential Unit Citations. Following the end of the war, returning Go For Broke veterans

became community leaders and entrepreneurs, and a number of them became prominent lawmakers, such as the late Senators Spark Matsunaga and Daniel K. Inouye.

The USPS named the stamp after the Go For Broke motto of the U.S. Army's 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team

(RCT), but which now commonly refers to all of the American men and women of Japanese heritage who served in the war. Most served in the 100th/442nd RCT, Military Intelligence Service (MIS), 1399th Engineer Construction Battalion,



Women's Army Corps (WAC), Cadet Nurse Corps, and Army Nurse Corps. The phrase "go for broke" comes from Hawaiian pidgin English and means to persevere and go for your goal with everything you have. It was popular slang among the soldiers, and became their battlecry.

Find more information at www.StampOurStory.org.

The image on the stamp is Private First Class Shiroku "Whitey" Yamamoto, of Ninole, Hawaii. He served in the 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team, Anti-tank Company. The USPS said that his image is meant to symbolically honor all of the American citizens of Japanese heritage who served in the US military during the war. 🇺🇸



PHOTO COURTESY OF STAMP OUR STORY

THE GO FOR BROKE JAPANESE AMERICAN SOLDIERS OF WORLD WAR II FOREVER STAMP WAS UNVEILED IN LOS ANGELES.

Formerly called the Nisei World War II Soldiers Stamp Campaign, the effort was started in 2005 by three California Nisei women who each endured incarceration in US detention camps during the war:

CWRIC Commemoration Event

Bearing Witness: The 40th Anniversary of Chicago's CWRIC Hearing

On September 22nd and 23rd 1981, the Commission on the Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) held a hearing at Northeastern Illinois University to collect testimony on the Japanese American wartime experience. This event commemorates those who testified. Recordings of the witness from 1981 will be paired with contemporary speakers who will reflect on the legacy and bear witness to this history today.

There are two ways to participate in this event. First, the main program will premiere on our website on September 25th at 3pm. At that time, you can visit jaclchicago.org to tune in to the program. You can also watch a recording of this program afterwards at the JAACL Chicago YouTube page. Second, we will host a short, post-program conversation on Zoom at 4:30pm on the 25th. Please fill out this form to RSVP: <https://bit.ly/cwircform>



PRESIDENT REGAN SIGNS THE CIVIL LIBERTIES ACT OF 1988 INTO LAW AS REPRESENTATIVES HAPPILY LOOK ON.

TRI-C Summer Concerts

By Elaine Kaneshiro

It's been quite a year and a half of pandemic, and like every church and organization, TRI-C had to cease normal routines and operations. With concern and caution, the church quickly pivoted

to virtual Sunday services and meetings without skipping a beat, thanks to our technology support. We stayed connected with our amazing virtual Choir, several mass distributions of covid supplies,

cookies and gifts, and our Christmas stockings for our friends at A Just Harvest. Our concerns of racism led us to a formation of a Justice & Equity discussion group, a Crossroads anti-racism training workshop and an Advancing Justice Bystander Intervention training.

Thanks to Kelly Ijichi from

Mom's Chicago, we were able to offer a modified Aki Matsuri, our annual fall food fest. In addition, we offered a few hours of live music in our Peace Garden during the food pick-up hours which was a big hit. This became the inspiration for our Music in the Garden series this summer.

Longing for a way to gather people together safely, our talented Music team reached out and recruited musical groups eager to share their music with us outside on our front lawn . . . something for everyone! Funk, jazz, musical theatre, bluegrass, classical, rock! And what could be better than adding delicious food from talented vendors to complete the evening! Recognizing the important work Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago was doing in response to the current anti-Asian hate crimes, and the significant role they played in getting the TEAACH Act passed in Illinois, we decided to direct donations received to this organization.



LIVE OUTDOOR MUSIC AT TRI-C WAS VERY POPULAR DURING AKI MATSURI FOOD PICK-UP.

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JASC Fresh Market

By Veronica Murashige

Over the summer, the Japanese American Service Committee started hosting their first ever fresh market, which occurs in person every second and fourth Thursday of each month in the JASC building's warehouse. From the middle of June to the end of October, there are vendors selling produce, prepared foods, and other fun items such as t-shirts, knick knacks, and books. Market goers can enjoy a katsu sando from Mom's, pick up shishito peppers and edible flowers from Hinata Farms, sushi from M Squared Catering, and end their outing with desserts like sweet potato cinnamon rolls from Margie the Foodie.

One of the highlights of the market season has been Wagyu Day, where multiple vendors were given wagyu to incorporate into their products. Onigiri Shuttle Kororin made wagyu onigiri while M Square Catering had samples of wagyu katsu sando and wagyu nigiri. Everything was very delicious!

I have enjoyed being able to see friends and community members once again on a semi-regular basis. It has been hard for me to regain a sense of normalcy during the pandemic, and the bi-monthly market provides a space for me and others to see familiar faces and make new friends. The market is always a fun, welcoming, and delicious time that made my summer a lot better.

My fingers are crossed in hopes that the JASC will be able to host the fresh market again next year! 🍀



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JASC

ABOVE: BEAUTIFUL PRODUCE FROM HINATA FARMS. TOP RIGHT: BUTTER MOCHI AND DONUTS FROM MOM'S. BOTTOM RIGHT: SUSHI FROM M SQUARE CATERING.

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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

Friday, September 25

3:00 – 4:30 pm online
4:30 – 5:00 pm discussion on Zoom

CWRIC Commemoration Event

Stream the event at jaclchicago.org and watch the replay on the JACL Chicago YouTube channel

Learn more and register here: <https://bit.ly/cwirform>

Thursday, September 30

3:30 – 6:30 pm

JASC Fresh Market

Ongoing every second and fourth Thursday of the month until October 29th
4427 N Clark St, Chicago, IL 60640

Wednesday, October 13

7:00 – 9:00 pm

JACL Chicago Board Meeting

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

Thursday, October 14

3:30 – 6:30 pm

JASC Fresh Market

Ongoing every second and fourth Thursday of the month until October 29th
4427 N Clark St, Chicago, IL 60640

Wednesday, October 20

5:00 pm PST

The Black and Japanese American Reparations Book Club (ongoing)

Reading chapters of Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress, *NCRR: The Grassroots Struggle for Japanese American Redress*

Learn more and register here: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/events/site/192/37660385412715/>