

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.



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JACL
Japanese American Citizens League
CHICAGO CHAPTER

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Calendar of Events

Saturday, March 28, 2026 1pm	No Kings Rally: JACL Chicago contingent Downtown Chicago, IL Sign up at https://bit.ly/ChiJACLNoKingsMarch
Wednesday, May 6, 2026 Buses leave Chicago at 6am and return by 7pm	PAVE Asian American Action Day 2026 Illinois State Capitol, Springfield Learn more at https://bit.ly/AAADay2026
Sunday, May 17, 2026 Noon-2pm	2026 JACL Chicago Scholarship Luncheon Maggiano's Little Italy at Old Orchard Mall, Skokie, IL
Saturday, May 23, 2026 11am-1pm	Yuri Kochiyama's Birthday Celebration Restored Bookshop, 4613 N. Kedzie Ave., Chicago, IL
Thursday–Sunday, June 4–7, 2026	Kansha Project Trip Little Tokyo, Los Angeles & Manzanar National Historic Site, CA
Saturday, June 27, 2026 2:30-5:30pm	Kansha Culmination Midwest Buddhist Temple, 435 W. Menomonee St., Chicago, IL

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Celebrating 80 Years of Our Legacy

by Samuel Takahiro Dunn

Eighty years ago, JACL Chicago was formed to support the civil rights and livelihoods of people of Japanese ancestry who moved to Chicago after the closing of the WWII incarceration camps. On December 6th, 2025, the community celebrated JACL Chicago's 80th anniversary. Hosted at the New Furama restaurant in Chinatown, the event was planned by the fundraising committee consisting of Rebecca Ozaki, Pat Yuzawa-Rubin, Carol Yoshino, Tonko Doi, Mary-Clare Nagai, Ben Nishimura, and myself. A lot of hard work went into planning this event and I wanted to acknowledge the work of our committee.



PHOTOS BY JEANNIE TOMODA HARRELL

80TH ANNIVERSARY GALA ATTENDEES ENJOY DINNER COURTESY OF NEW FURAMA RESTAURANT.

our planning committee. I would like to shout out Pat, Carol, and Tonko's contributions as this event would not have been successful without their support.

Throughout the night, we had a silent auction and a slideshow with a mix of photos from our 80 years of history. We would go through the photos during our meetings

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SAVE THE DATE FOR
KANSHA TOO

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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 June 12th, 2026.

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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TAIKO PERFORMERS RYAN TOGURI AND AMANDA NGUYEN OPEN THE GALA.

80th Anniversary continued from page 1

and the memories of our legacy would all come back. The night's program started with Ryan Toguri and Amanda Nguyen presenting a powerful Taiko performance. We also wanted to acknowledge the history of leadership as Ben Nishimura, current JACL Chicago president, read through the names of all of the previous JACL presidents accompanied by slides of their photos. We were also treated to a video, featuring Megan Nakano, Lisa Doi, Bill Yoshino, Ross Harano, Tom Yatabe, and Eli Nishimura, recalling favorite memories of JACL as well as hopes for the future. I found it very powerful hearing about the many stories before my time and how much our community has evolved since then.



CAROL YOSHINO (CENTER LEFT) AND TONKO DOI EXCHANGE SMILES WHILE LEARNING A LINE DANCE.

Our keynote speaker of the night was Brandon Lee, a former JACL Chicago board member and the current Director of Communications at Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. I want to thank Brandon for his remarks that night. Chicago has been a victim of the recent ICE raids. We wanted to remind folks why we must acknowledge the history of Japanese American incarceration. If we want to preserve the idea of Never Again is Now, then we must continue to take action to protect our neighbors and our constitutional rights.

The night ended with Brandon Ishikata leading us in line dancing. I was amazed at how great he was at teaching us. I certainly lack rhythm and dancing experience, but Brandon guiding us led to an experience that was easy and fun to follow along.

A successful and fun night was possible because of our committee, collaborators, sponsors, and donors. I want to thank everyone that joined us and celebrated with us. I look forward to seeing you at our next fundraiser! 🎉

SEE MORE PHOTOS FROM THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION ON PAGES 8-9.

Full Spectrum Features Premieres Community-Driven Film at 2026 Day of Remembrance

by Dr. Belquis Elhadi, Manager of Learning & Impact, Full Spectrum Education

On February 22, Full Spectrum Features (FSF) hosted a community screening of our short docudrama film, “Enough,” at the 2026 Day of Remembrance event at the Chicago History Museum. “Enough” is part of our forthcoming cinematic digital history project, *Reckoning with Redress*, a free and accessible, web-based educational tool that uses an emotionally resonant short film, immersive game, and interactive website to bring the history and legacy of the Japanese American Redress Movement to light.

Reckoning with Redress could not exist without innumerable researchers, archivists, organizers, writers, filmmakers, and community members—past and present. That is why we are excited to share the film with the very community who helped make it possible. We at FSF are deeply thankful to the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society for inviting us to host this year's event, which has allowed us to share this part of our project with the community for the very first time.

The Japanese American Redress Movement is often encountered as a brief footnote in the history of World War II, if it is encountered at all. Full Spectrum



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FULL SPECTRUM FEATURES



ABOVE: BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE COMMUNITY REENACTMENT THAT WAS FILMED AT NEIU IN MAY 2025 FOR THE DOCUDRAMA ‘ENOUGH.’

LEFT: FULL SPECTRUM FEATURES HOSTED THREE COMMUNITY PREP SESSIONS BEFORE FILMING THE REENACTMENT IN ORDER TO REFLECT ON REDRESS HISTORY. THIS PHOTO IS OF THE THIRD COMMUNITY PREP SESSION, HELD AT MIDWEST BUDDHIST TEMPLE IN MAY 2025. THE PANEL AT THE FRONT INCLUDES (FROM LEFT): ASHLEY CHEYEMI McNEIL, NAOMI NEGI, MARY SAMSON, AND JASON MATSUMOTO.

Education addresses this gap by connecting learners to stories of resistance, repair, and community strength that show how Japanese Americans organized in the 1970s and 80s to unfasten decades of silence around camp and compel the federal government to confront its own history of

injustice. During World War II, the U.S. government forcibly removed and incarcerated more than 126,000 people of Japanese descent without due process. Decades later in 1981, survivors and community members

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LEFT: EXTERIOR OF ATELIER YOSHINO, MY HOST FAMILY'S ARTS BUSINESS.

BELOW: WELCOME TO HIJIYAMA UNIVERSITY PRESENTATION ORGANIZED BY LOCAL STUDENTS.



My 2025 Kakehashi Project Experience: Envisioning a Future, Grounded in the Past

by Isabella Senno

As a member of the 2025 Kakehashi Project cohort, I had the opportunity to experience both Hiroshima and Tokyo through cultural exchanges, site visits, and meetings with governmental leadership. Alongside peers across the Pacific, with the support of the Japan International Cooperation Center and the Japanese American Citizens League, I wove collaborative visions for potential Japanese American futures and learned more about our community's roots.

While at Hijiya University, my group was matched with Leon, our student buddy, who led us through traditional games on a campus tour and gave insight into Japanese student life. As a Latino yonsei, meeting Leon was particularly meaningful, as during our time together he also shared his experience as a Japanese Peruvian. While I was previously aware of the Japanese diaspora within Peru, and other parts of Latin America, it was dually wonderful and unexpected to meet another person of Latin American descent in Japan.

Over the course of the day, Leon and I not only discussed our Japanese heritage, but also chatted about Latin fusion foods we both enjoy, what it was like to learn Spanish, and how we celebrate different holidays. Despite the ocean that separated us, we found details that tied our experiences together in ways both big and small.

These conversations led me to look ahead at what it can mean to be a bridge between the concepts of Japanese and American, to exist at the hyphen between these two identifiers. As we consider the future of the Japanese American community and what it means to be nikkei in an increasingly diverse world, it becomes more vital to imagine expanding the definition of American beyond the United States to more accurately reflect the breadth of our heritage, families, and social ties.

My time on the Kakehashi Project exchange also led to links with the past. After leaving Hijiya University, we joined our host families in Yuki Town, a rural area about an hour outside of downtown Hiroshima City. Alongside three other participants, I stayed with the extremely gracious Yoshino family. While there, we learned local slang, ate delicious homemade oden, and appreciated stunning natural landscapes.

Most striking, though, was the Yoshino family's openness towards sharing their own history. We stayed in a multigenerational household, with a set of grandparents, two daughters, and their own children. Each person was a skilled artist in their own right, with disciplines spanning from music to weaving to pottery. Exploring their workshops and hearing the rich stories behind each craft while walking around their property

Kakehashi continued on page 5

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organized over 750 people in ten cities across the U.S. to give testimony about the impacts of incarceration before the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC). For many testifiers, these hearings were the first time they shared their stories. This watershed moment helped convince Congress to pass the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which offered a formal apology and monetary redress to Japanese American survivors.

As a docudrama, "Enough" includes a community reenactment of the 1981 CWRIC hearings: In May 2025, FSF hosted nearly 100 Japanese American and Asian American

participants at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU)—the same site as the original Chicago hearings—to recreate a scene of collective grief, solidarity, and bravery. Many of our participants were descendants of WWII incarceration survivors and redress activists, transforming this scene into an intimately-felt, community-led remembrance.

Reckoning with Redress will be the final installment in Full Spectrum Education's trilogy on Japanese American incarceration history. It builds on our award-winning projects, "The Orange Story" (2017) and "Resettlement: Chicago Story" (2023), which address the forced removal of Japanese Americans during WWII and post-war assimilation, respectively.

We plan to publicly launch this final project in September 2026 at NEIU. (You're all invited, of course!) This launch is designed to uplift the 45th anniversary of the hearings by returning to the site where community members spoke their truth and helped move a nation toward accountability. In a time of profound state violence, forced detainment and displacement, the history of the Redress Movement remains relevant to the moment we now face together. We hope you will join us at Day of Remembrance and our September launch to share space for reflection, and shared commitments to justice and ongoing community care. 🌱

Kakehashi continued from page 4

was truly unforgettable. Together, we bridged our backgrounds, languages, and contexts to create a space for open dialogue.

With a family history in Hiroshima prefecture, these exchanges provided a nuanced glimpse into family life and collective memory-making. I returned to Chicago not only with a suitcase full of handmade pottery, but also with a deeper understanding of where my own relatives came from, and how their lives might have been.

My Kakehashi Project experience made me determined to nurture the Japanese American community, domestically and abroad, and act as one of many bridges, equally connecting people, places, and historical legacy. 🌱



Kansha Project Celebrates 15th Anniversary

by Kendall Terashima

Fifteen years ago, the first Kansha Project founders and participants unknowingly began a new tradition for Japanese American youth. They participated in a service project at Manzanar, listened to community leaders at the Japanese American National Museum, and spoke up in spaces where quiet had long been encouraged in private life and public institution. What they carried back with them shaped the Kansha Project into something more than a trip. It became a practice of honor and care that continues to guide the program today.

As Kansha approaches its fifteenth anniversary, I find myself reflecting on my experience as a past participant and on how the program has bloomed over time.

When I was accepted into the 2025 Kansha cohort, I failed to anticipate how much the experience would impact me. I knew my family’s story in fragments: my great-grandmother’s memoir describing deportation and repatriation, the public school system’s abbreviated outline of wartime incarceration, and through the unspoken ways these histories shape our lives. At Manzanar, standing in the cemetery and looking out at the mountains, I felt the weight of my inheritance for the first time. I kept thinking about how many people had stood in that

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2025 Kansha Cohort

THE 2025 KANSHA PROJECT COHORT POSES WITH RANGER SARAH AT MERRITT PARK, MANZANAR NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.



2012 Kansha Cohort

THE FIRST JACL CHICAGO KANSHA PROJECT COHORT, IN 2012, POSES IN FRONT OF THE IREIHI AT MANZANAR NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.

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same place, looking at those same mountains, aware of how close freedom was and how unreachable it remained.

The following day, upon returning to Little Tokyo, the National Guard was deployed just outside our hotel, inciting fear in immigrant populations and cutting our programming short. The distance between past and present collapsed. Our experience did not allow history to remain contained or abstract. It required us to understand memory as something that informs the present and demands response. That understanding clarified that being a descendant is inseparable from being accountable to the world we live in.

That sense of accountability connects every Kansha Project cohort, from the first to the fifteenth. Each group enters the program shaped by its own political moment, but the core experience remains consistent: learning how to hold both grief and gratitude, and deciding what to do with what we inherit. The first Kansha participants modeled how to carry that responsibility forward, and their example continues to shape the program.

Today, Kansha extends beyond the trip itself through collective effort. Alumni from across cohorts have come together to form the Alumni Leadership Board, a space for continuity and shared leadership. Through cultural community events and intergenerational programming, the ALB works to keep Kansha alive throughout the year. The goal is to ensure that this project remains not a single experience, but an ongoing commitment.

This work exists within and because of the larger mission of the Japanese American Citizens League. Kansha reflects JACL’s long-standing commitment to civil rights, redress, and community care. As

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the organization continues to evolve, Kansha alumni contribute time, skills, and resources toward sustaining that mission and expanding its reach.

Fifteen years in, Kansha continues to grow in depth and scope. Grounded in history and sustained by community contributions and support, it remains a place where gratitude is paired with responsibility, and where learning leads to action.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who has contributed to Kansha’s ongoing success, and extend the invitation to join us for Kansha’s culmination on June 27th. Please look for more information on the Kansha Project 15th Anniversary celebration in mid-October and join us for our Nisei Lounge fundraiser on May 14th!



SAVE THE DATE!
KANSHA too!

OCTOBER 2027
WHAT IS KANSHA, TOO!?

Kansha, Too! is an adapted version of JACL Chicago’s Kansha Project. Kansha, Too! explores the history of the Japanese American WWII incarceration and its continued impact and ongoing legacy in the Japanese American community. The program consists of a trip to Los Angeles’ historic Little Tokyo neighborhood and a day-trip to Manzanar National Historic Site. This program is for everyone who’s asked, “Can I go on Kansha, too?”



MORE INFORMATION AT:
JACLCHICAGO.ORG/PROGRAMS/KANSHA-TOO/ OR SCAN QR CODE
QUESTIONS? EMAIL REBECCA@JACLCHICAGO.ORG





ABOVE: The 2026 JACL Chicago Board is sworn in.

RIGHT: Shiz Hidaka and Kent Iuchi.

FAR RIGHT: Brandon Lee, Communications Director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, presents the keynote speech.

BELOW: JACL Chicago intern Maya Ostermann and her father, Mark Ostermann.



Celebrating JACL Chicago's 80th Anniversary



ABOVE: Kansha Project 2025 alumni: (back row from left) Benjamin Walker Barlow, Jack Shimabukuro, and Darcy Combs. (front row from left) Sora Seals, Christel Thompson, Jackie Fowler, and Emily Umeda.



LEFT: JACL Chicago Program Director Rebecca Ozaki receives well-deserved flowers.

BELOW: Cook County Board Commissioner Josina Morita and JACL Chicago Board President Ben Nishimura pump up the crowd.



ABOVE: Lisa Doi (left, with husband Eric Langowski) and Megan Nakano receive certificates in honor of their past service as Board President.

RIGHT: Jason Matsumoto and line dance instructor Brandon Ishikata are all smiles!

FAR RIGHT: State Representative Hoan Huynh, 13th District (left) joins Ross Harano at the gala.



PHOTOS BY JEANNIE TOMODA HARRELL

by Lisa Doi

The candidates in attendance (listed alphabetically) included journalist Kat Abughazaleh, Skokie School Board member Bushra Amiwala, former FBI agent Phil Andrew, Evanston Mayor Daniel Biss, economist Jeff Cohen, State Senator Laura Fine, and State Representative Hoan Huynh. After sharing opening statements, the candidates addressed immigration reform, ICE enforcement, healthcare access including Medicare and Medicaid, language access, social services, and anti-Asian violence.



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