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"A Measure of Restitution"

Special Project Seeks Former Students Interned During World War II

Executive Order 9066, as it was known, is one of the most infamous security measures ever enacted by the United States government. Signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and dated February 19, 1942, it authorized the military to relocate Japanese Americans, among others, from along the Pacific coast to inland internment camps.

A response to the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, the order kept approximately 120,000 ethnic Japanese people confined to the camps for the duration of the war. Most were Nisei or Sansei, second or third-generation (respectively) Japanese Americans who were American citizens. Having given up homes and jobs, many also had their educations interrupted or abruptly ended.



Nu Alpha Chi student club photo from 1942 Del Sudoeste Yearbook.

An estimated 250 such students attended California State University institutions at the time, including San Diego State. Recent legislation prompted the CSU to confer honorary degrees to those students through the California Nisei College Diploma Project. Now the search is on to find them or their descendants in order for the degrees to be awarded.

LOOKING FOR CLUES

October 2009
 September 2009
 August 2009
 July 2009
 June 2009
 May 2009
 April 2009
 March 2009
 February 2009
 January 2009

PAGE TWO

THIS IS WAR Friends Leave College Without Bitterness

• Tuesday evening a train pulled out of the Union Depot, carrying Japanese to Owen Valley for the duration of the war.

On that train were many of our Japanese friends who were enrolled at the college—and there to see them off were several representatives of the student body and faculty.

We think that was a fine thing to do. Down there were Dr. Hepner, Dr. Dotson, Dean C. E. Peterson, and several members of the student body.

On that train may have been several dangerous enemy aliens, and a lot of Japanese whose sympathies were with the Islands rather than with America—but on that train, too, were many, many American citizens with Japanese faces, who were submitting to the law of the land without bitterness or hatred of the lawmakers, and with the idea of doing their part for the nation that they have made their own. And among these were a lot of kids we know.

We will miss people like George Kita, and Fred Chino, and Ryo Morikano, and Henry Koide and Iwao Ishino. They are our friends. Some of us were indignant that they had to go—all of us were sorry.

The wisdom of the plan to have Japanese evacuated from the military area that San Diego has become is not much doubted. As one of the former students told Dr. Dotson: "It's wisest and safest that we go now and show we are loyal." The justice of the plan we cannot decide now. Sometimes an injustice to a few is a greater justice to the many. That question will wait, and those immediately affected by it are content that it should for now.

But we are glad that there were some of us down there to say goodbye to friends who are leaving. It is too bad more of us did not know that the "zero" hour was so soon.

P.S. Some of the kids have promised to write to The Aztec after they get settled. Copies of The Aztec will be sent to them at their new address, along with the copies being sent to other ex-Aztecs now away from the college.

Student names were found in archive stories like this one from the 1942 Aztec campus newspaper describing transport of San Diego State students to internment camps.

That's where Kristina Moller comes in. She has been charged with the task of reviewing campus records to identify former San Diego State students who may qualify for the honorary degrees. The work isn't easy. She has pored over thousands of individual transcripts and

notations looking for clues that might provide some definitive answers.

"Some (lost students) left prior to then, so it's hard to know whether their education was interrupted by being sent to an internment camp or if they were actually done with their education and had no intention of pursuing it further," she explains during a respite from her search.

"(If) they have a withdrawal date of January 1942, it gives me a pretty clear idea that they withdrew because of being sent to an internment camp."

Robert Ray, head of Special Collections and the University Archives in the SDSU Library provided names for Moller's search. He looked through yearbooks from the early 1940s to turn up leads.

"I got the names from two photos in the 1940 and 1941 yearbooks of a Japanese American (student) club," Ray says. "It disbanded after 1941, of course."

Archived information from the Aztec campus newspaper was helpful as well.

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"There were several articles when most (interned students) got on trains at (San Diego's) Union Station and were sent off," Ray reports. "The quarterback of the football team (George Kita) was one."

WHERE WRONGS HAVE BEEN DONE

With the information Ray provided, Moller began her search through what she estimates has been at least 50,000 individual documents. Fortunately, she says, SDSU recently converted all of its records from film reels and fiche to electronic files.

Still, "unlike an electronic text file where you can search for content within (a student's name, for example), I've been looking through groupings of pictures of data (which are unsearchable)," she says. "We had a little bit of a numbering system that gave me a good guess of where I could look to find students, but there was some scrolling through the files and searching. Other campuses' records offices are literally sifting through all this one by one."

It would seem a daunting task, but it's a job Moller says she appreciates.

"For me, personally, I think it's very interesting," she insists. "There's a part that's a little bit tedious, but I'm highly analytical and I love methodical, detailed work, so I don't mind going through the records. I think the purpose behind this whole effort is very important.

"I'm really glad to be a part of it. It's a very meaningful, worthwhile project. There's a measure of restitution that our campus can be involved in for a great wrong, and there's a big place in my heart for things to be restored where wrongs have been done."

SHARING INFORMATION

So far, Moller has come up with the names of 43 former San Diego State students she believes might qualify for honorary degrees. She is working with a campus committee to find them or their descendants and organize a special event to present the degrees later this semester. Others are involved, too.



An archive story from the 1942 Aztec campus newspaper features San Diego State quarterback George Kita, who was sent to an internment camp by government order.

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 San Diego State Alumni Association
 | 5500 Campanile Drive | San
 Diego, CA 92182-1690
 (619) 594-ALUM (2586) |
sdsualumni.org | alumni@sdsu.edu



Kristina Moller researches names of former students for California Nisei College Diploma Project.

"(SDSU professor) John Putman from the history department started to collaborate with people off campus - Susan Hasegawa, who is a history professor at San Diego City College as well as Gwen Momita, who is president of the Japanese-American Historical Society of San Diego," explains Moller. "It's this great joint effort of people from different perspectives who have all been sharing information."

Given the role she has played, would Moller like to attend the degree ceremony and perhaps put a face or

two with the names her painstaking work turned up in all those documents from decades past?

"I would love to see part of the fulfillment of all the work," she admits. "To get to meet some of the people and actually see them face to face and hear their stories from them or their family members would be the ultimate. It would be very moving.

"But if that never happened for me, I'm satisfied just being able to contribute this part."

Her part in helping to set "a great wrong" just a little bit right.