

The Early Years of the New England Chapter of the JACL

The New England Chapter, initially founded in 1948 and continued until 1952, pushed for settlement of World War II evacuation claims and for naturalization of Issei. The current Chapter was reactivated in 1979 by a group of Nisei and Sansei, who were professionals, college students and academics living in New England. The focus of the Chapter was to respond to the unique needs and concerns of the Japanese American community living in the New England and more specifically to build local public interest in the national redress campaign. The Executive Committee included: David Sakura, President, Kei Kaneda, co-chairperson Redress Committee, Mel Kawakami, membership committee and Gary Glenn, recording secretary. By 1981, the Chapter membership had grown to nearly 40 members and the Chapter had built an extensive pan Asian network of friends, community activists and institutions that could be called upon for support.

In May 1979, one of the first activities of the Chapter was its co-sponsorship with other Asian, non-profit community, and governmental groups in the first observance of Asian Pacific American Heritage Week at the John F. Kennedy Federal Building in Boston. A photographic essay on the incarceration of Japanese Americans was created by Tetsuo ("Taka") Takayanagi and was widely viewed by visitors to the Federal Building. As part of a community outreach program other members of the Chapter appeared on several local television programs to describe their internment experiences during and after the Asian Pacific American Heritage Week.

During 1980 and 1981, the Redress Committee of the New England Chapter, under the leadership of Kei Kneda, played an active role in bringing the Commission on Wartime Evacuation and Internment of Civilians to Boston. At the request of JACL and Harvard faculty member, Kiyo Morimoto, President Derek Bok, Harvard University agreed to co-host the Commission hearings, which were held on the Harvard campus in December 1981. Unlike the Commission hearings held on the West Coast, no personal testimonies were given. Instead, several panels were convened to discuss the constitutionality (or lack thereof) and the emotional, and economic impact of the internment, and possible guidelines for redress to the internees. Panelists included noted legal and constitutional scholars such as: Professors Lawrence Tribe (Harvard), Alan Dershowitz (Harvard) and David Musto (Yale University).

Following the Commission hearings, members of New England Chapter, including May Takayanagi, Eji Suyama, and Gary Glenn continued to be active in the process that led to the successful passage of legislation by Congress that implemented the Commission recommendations, including redress for internees.

Finally, a special note of recognition should be given to Harvard University students, Glen Fukushima, Alex and Laurel Kimura, and Michael Adachi for their vision in reorganizing the New England Chapter of the JACL.

J. David Sakura
May 2004

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Chapter Name **New England JAACL**
Year Founded **1948**
Mailing Address
Phone Number
Email Address
President **Steven Nishino**
Past presidents **Margaret Y. Yamamoto, and David Sakura**

The chapter was founded in 1948 with activities centered on WWII internment claims and naturalization of the Issei. After a hiatus, the chapter was reactivated in 1979 to respond to the unique needs of a widespread Japanese American community. **Harvard students**, Glen Fukushima, **Alex and Laurel Kimura**, and Michael Adachi, ~~at that time students at Harvard University~~ were instrumental ~~and should be recognized for their role~~ in the reactivation. The new chapter under President David Sakura worked to develop an extensive pan Asian network of community activists and organizations for cooperation and support on common issues and concerns. One of its first activities was the co-sponsorship of the Asian Pacific American Heritage week with ~~and a public display of a~~ photographic essay by chapter member, Tetsuo Takayanagi, of the ~~incarceration of people in internment~~ camps. Several members reflected on their internment experiences in local television appearances.

With the redress campaign underway, the chapter was ~~in~~ **at** the forefront in building local public interest ~~among an extensive pan-Asian network. in the internment.~~ The Chapter Redress Committee, **under the leadership of Kei Kaneda**, was active in bringing to Boston the hearings of the **Presidential Commission** on Wartime Evacuation and Internment of Civilians. The hearings, co-hosted by Harvard University, ~~arranged~~ **consisted of** panel discussions with noted constitutional scholars, **such as Harvard Professors Lawrence Tribe and Alan Dershowitz**, ~~to discuss where~~ constitutional issues of **the internment were discussed**. After the **Commission** hearings chapter members, **including May Takayanagi, Eji Suyama, and Gary Glenn**, ~~remained~~ **continued especially** active in the **legislative** process that ~~resulted~~ **led to the** implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

The chapter continued its activities of programs to bring together and promote the common bonds and issues of the Japanese American community. In 1997 Professor Paul Watanabe, University of Massachusetts, discussed Asian American political fund raising and its impact on the AA community. It co-sponsored a screening of "Rabbit in the Moon" in 1999. In 2000 a reception for the playwright Philip Gotanda was held before the performance of his play "Sisters Matsumoto" in Boston. Also in 2000, it participated in a sponsorship of a panel of Nisei veterans at Harvard. In 2001, JAACL member Erica Harth held a book signing, together with some of the contributors, for "Last Witness", a collection of reflections on the internment.

At the same time it has reached out to the larger community, with particular attention to the other Asian and ethnic groups. It has invited and joined with other Asian organizations in the observance of Annual Day of Remembrances in February. In 1998 NE JAACL joined with other co-sponsors for a "Day of Remembrance: Redress, 10 years later." It featured a video "Meeting at Tule Lake" followed by a discussion with panelists of three ~~past NE JAACL chapter members~~ **presidents** instrumental in gaining support for redress: Kei Kaneda, May Takayanagi and David Sakura.

In the aftermath of September 11 there were concerns for the loss of civil liberties and prejudice, For the 2002 Day of Remembrance commemoration the chapter invited other community groups to co-sponsor a forum on "Civil Liberties under Threat." ~~It was a shared~~ Experiences **were shared among members from** Arab American, Asian American, Muslim, Sikh and South Asian communities. For 2003 there was a series of one act play readings, "Don't Fence Me In", about one family's internment experience, "Curfew" set in the West Bank town of Ramallah and "Under Cover" an exploration of what it means to be "interned" behind a symbolic veil. For 2004 the Day of Remembrance commemorated a relatively little known saga of the Japanese Latin American Redress Experience with Grace Shimizu, of the Campaign for Justice Redress NOW for Japanese Latin Americans.

Two Japanese American Congressmen, ~~Robert Matsui and Mike Honda~~ spoke at two different forums **made recent appearances in Boston: Congressman Robert Matsui was here spoke at a forum** in 2001 ~~at a forum, which later seen shown~~ on CSPAN and **Congressman Mike Honda** was featured in a JAACL forum

on National Security and Civil Liberties in 2003 along with **Massachusetts Congressman** Barney Frank, a ~~Congressional colleague from Massachusetts.~~

These were some of the interesting activities of the New England Chapter, a relatively small and widespread membership covering the six New England states.

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With the redress campaign underway, the chapter was in the forefront in building local public interest among an extensive pan Asian network. The Chapter Redress Committee was active in bringing to Boston the hearings of the Commission on Wartime Evacuation and Internment of Civilians. The hearings co-hosted by Harvard University, arranged panel discussions with noted constitutional scholars, as Lawrence Tribe, to discuss constitutional issues of internment. After the hearing chapter members remained active in the process that resulted in implementation of the Commission recommendations.

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