THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF THE JACL

Oct. 2-15, 2026

PACIFIC CITIZEN



2026 JACL NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS





FRESHMEN * UNDERGRADUATE * GRADUATE * CREATIVE ARTS
* DENTISTRY * LAW * PERFORMING ARTS * STUDENT AID

CELEBRATING 97 Years

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NATIONAL JACL 2026 SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

By David and Carol Kawamoto

Since 1946, National JACL has provided financial assistance to our community's top scholars through its National JACL Scholarship Program. The first scholarship awards were provided by Mrs. Haruye Masaoka, in memory of her son, Ben Frank Masaoka, who was killed in action during World War II while serving with the legendary 442nd Regimental Combat Team in France.

This year, the program is awarding 36 scholarship awards totaling $85,500. This JACL program, which began by providing college scholarships for veterans returning to the U.S. from WWII, now provides monetary awards for the following categories: Freshmen, Undergraduate, Graduate, Law, Creative and Performing Arts and Student Aid.

This program is made possible by the generous donations from our community. Just as Mrs. Masaoka generously gave in 1946, we have numerous scholarship endowments that were created to aid our community's scholars. Each scholarship carries the name of the donor family, and one can find more information on each scholarship on the JACL website *(www.jacl.org)*.

In 2026, a committee from JACL's Central California District evaluated the Freshmen applications for their first year. The CCDC committee was chaired by Debbie Ikeda of the Fresno chapter. The committee members and their respective chapters are Marcia Chung (Fresno), Katsuyo Howard (Fresno), Conor Hustedde (CCDC Youth Representative), Dale Ikeda (Clovis), Shelly Kiritani (Fresno), Charlene Kiyuna (Fresno) and Brian Tsukimura (Fresno/CCDC governor).

For the Undergraduate, Graduate, Law, Creative and Performing Arts and Student Aid categories, a committee from the Pacific Southwest District reviewed the applications and selected the winners for 2026.

The PSW committee was chaired by then-PSW District Gov. Joseph Gu of the SELANOCO chapter. The committee members and their respective chapters are Cathy Arakaki (Las Vegas), Aiko Dzikowski (Venice-West Los Angeles), Denise Fuse (Arizona), Alice Ishigame-Tao (SELANOCO-Orange County), Sarah Taketa (Ventura County) and Carol Young (Venice-West Los Angeles).

Please join us in thanking the volunteer committees who generously gave their time and expertise to evaluate the applicants. Without their work, this program would not be possible.

We also want to particularly thank our JACL staffer, Matthew Weisbly, for all of his work on this program. With the JACL's financial challenges, he is one of the few remaining staff members and has assisted with the scholarships in addition to his numerous other tasks. We can never thank Matthew enough for his hard work and dedication to the JACL.

As has been the case for every year that we've been involved with this program, the recipients are a truly impressive group. Their scholastic excellence, extracurricular activities and community service are unparalleled.

The JACL is glad to recognize them with their appearance in the *Pacific Citizen's* Scholarship Special Issue and reward their excellence with a financial grant. Congratulations to all of them. We look forward to great things from them in the future. ■

George and Sakaye Aratani CARE Applications Now Open

UCLA's Asian American Studies Center's 2026-27 Aratani CARE Award applications are now being accepted through Dec. 4. Awards will be announced in January. Nonprofit organizations and qualified individuals are invited to apply for awards that generally range from, but are not limited to, $1,000-$5,000.

The George and Sakaye Aratani "Community Advancement Research Endowment," or Aratani CARE Awards, are given to projects that benefit the Japanese American community. Projects that strengthen ties between the Japanese American community and UCLA students, staff and faculty are encouraged. Award recipients must list and acknowledge UCLA's Asian American Studies Center and the George and Sakaye Aratani CARE Award as co-sponsors on all PR and programs.

Information about the funding and how to apply is available at the Aratani CARE website at http://www.aratanicare.org/.



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Harry Honda dedicated 61 years to promoting the ***Pacific Citizen***, providing thoughtful coverage of JACL chapter activities, national news and events and issues of general interest to Japanese American and Asian American readers. The fund was launched with a generous donation from author and activist Grant Ujifusa, whose intent was to support the ***Pacific Citizen*** in hiring outside contributing writers. This support helps expand and strengthen coverage from across the country for our national readership.



Editor Emeritus Harry Honda as drawn by Pete Hironaka

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

EDUCATION OPENS DOORS . . . HOLD THEM OPEN

By Lilly Simmering, JACL Executive Director

Education is deeply valued in Asian American communities. How many of us have bonded over jokes about just *how much* our families value it? When I was younger, I didn't fully understand why.

During my senior year of high school, I secretly applied for a job at Dai Ichi, a local Japanese fast-food restaurant in Fresno, Calif. My parents were furious. They could not understand why I would want a part-time job when I needed to focus on finishing school. For me, though, it was about independence and freedom from the guilt of watching my parents work every day on our family's strawberry farm just to pay for things like my gas or AP exams.

Sadly, my budding relationship with chicken teriyaki bowls and shrimp tempura came to an end about four months later. I received my admission letter to Pepperdine University and learned that, though I had been admitted early, I still needed to keep my grades up. Apparently, senioritis was not part of the admissions package.

Pepperdine was a wonderful experience. At the time, there had been at least two Hmong American students before me, but only one had graduated. I would become the second and the first Hmong American woman to graduate from Pepperdine.

As my educational journey continued through law school, I began to understand why education mattered so much to my family and community. In many Asian countries, access to education has historically been a privilege rather than a guarantee. A single national exam could determine a young person's educational and professional opportunities, and wealth or corruption could sometimes influence access.

Twenty-three years later, as I pursue a dual executive MBA through UCLA and the National University of Singapore alongside classmates primarily from Asian countries, I appreciate even more the educational opportunities available to us in the United States.

Education opens doors, but it also opens minds. And both can be powerful and, sometimes, threatening.

At its purest, education is about knowledge: gaining it, earning it, using it and spreading it. And when you think about the many ways we spread knowledge, the connection between education and advocacy becomes clear.

Advocacy is, in many ways, the act of sharing knowledge. It doesn't always have to be spoken. It can be written. It can be expressed through art or music. Sometimes, advocacy is simply being visible and showing up when it matters.

As JACL announces this year's National Scholarship recipients, I am excited to see what they will do next. I hope they remember that there is a community watching — ready to cheer them on in their moments of greatness, support them through their hardest moments and learn from the knowledge and experiences they will gain and share.

Our scholarship recipients demonstrated not only financial need but also a commitment to carrying forward the stories of the Japanese American community and opening doors for the Japanese Americans and Asian Americans who will come after them.

So to each of our scholarship recipients: ***Congratulations.*** I wish you every success as you begin this next chapter. Learn as much as you can. Ask questions. Challenge assumptions. Share what you learn. And when you find an open door, remember to hold it open for the AAPI person coming behind you.

And, of course, nothing lower than an A-minus is acceptable.

Just kidding.

Mostly.

Lilly Simmering is executive director of the JACL. She is based in the organization's Los Angeles office.



IN OUR WORDS

JACL PSW YOUTH + NIKKEI PROGRESSIVES + LTHS J-TOWN SOCIAL

By Sebastian Carbajal

On Aug. 29, JACL PSW Youth teamed up with Nikkei Progressives and the Little Tokyo Historical Society for a collaborative evening social. Thirty of us moved through Little Tokyo together that day, tracing community history before closing the evening at Far Bar.

We met at 4 p.m. at the Nikkei Progressives office on First Street. Guided tours were led by Mike Okamura and David Nagano of the Little Tokyo Historical Society.

My favorite part of the tour is the sidewalk itself, as the ground is its own work of art. Facing west, the right sidewalk on First Street has engraved bands, each representing a decade of Little Tokyo's history, with the name of the businesses that once stood at that spot. One band is painted black, marking two things at once: the forced removal of Japanese Americans to concentration camps and the era when this neighborhood was known as "Bronzeville," home to a Black community who had come West for wartime jobs and settled in Little Tokyo, given it was one of the few communities in Los Angeles without racist housing covenants; that's the same reason Japanese Americans, and later, Mexican Americans, settled in Boyle Heights.

It's important to make it clear that these migrants didn't displace Japanese Americans. They were also victims of that same segregation. Bronzeville disappeared in the postwar years for a mix of reasons: wartime jobs drying up, white landlords giving preferential leasing back to returning Japanese Americans. But the nail in the coffin was the city's use of eminent domain to seize the blocks bounded by Main, Los Angeles, First and Temple streets, demolishing nearly a quarter of the neighborhood to build the Parker Center police headquarters and displacing Japanese Americans and African Americans alike.

That context isn't part of the official tour, but it changes how you see a building like the one that now houses the Go For Broke National Education Center and the J. Morey office; that brick building was originally Nishi Hongwanji Temple. During the Bronzeville era, while Japanese Americans were incarcerated in concentration camps, the space was home to an African American Baptist congregation. The temple itself later relocated to what is now Nishi Hongwanji, and the old building found new life housing the stories of Japanese American veterans.

Back at Nikkei Progressives, our hosts offered us an introduction to their work and shared an overview of both the Asian American Movement's roots in Little Tokyo and Japanese American activism more broadly.

This talk was led by Miya Iwataki, Mark Masaoka, Kimi Maru, June Hibino, Jen Noji and Valerie Morishige. Miya joked it was "at least a six-hour presentation condensed into a half hour," and she wasn't wrong, but it landed anyway, tracing a throughline from the fight for redress and Ethnic Studies programs all the way to the Iraq War protests.

Last year, around the first No Kings protest, I saw that Nikkei Progressives had constructed the flag of Palestine using origami paper cranes: strung up and hung together, various colors forming the shape of the flag; that image was my first real encounter with Nikkei Progressives' art committee.

At the social, I learned it was one piece of a much larger operation that includes ICE community watch patrols, visits to support detainees at Adelanto and a standing Palestine committee.

None of this happened because JACL National asked for it. It happened because our youth board decided to build it, alongside Nikkei Progressives and the Little Tokyo Historical Society, on our own initiative. That matters because the relationship between JACL and Nikkei Progressives hasn't always been an easy one.

Some of the people who now lead NP are there, in part, because they left JACL, disillusioned by moments where the organization didn't live up to what it claimed to stand for; that history is real, and it isn't something a single social event resolves. But it's also exactly why a day like this means something.

When the next generation of JACL leadership chooses to show up, listen and build trust with the organization our elders sometimes walked away from, it's a statement that we're serious about being a civil rights organization.

This can't be a one-off. Little Tokyo is dense with organizations doing serious work, and JACL has the national reach to back that work up in ways smaller orgs often can't. If we're ever too cautious to do what needs to be done ourselves, we owe it to the orgs that aren't able to stand behind them, loudly and without hesitation. The only real question left is why it took us this long to start.

(This commentary has been edited for space. For the full version, visit www.pacificcitizen.org.)

Sebastian Carbajal is the PSW youth representative of the NY/SC, born and raised in East L.A. and an active member of the Little Tokyo community.

Thank You for Your JACL Membership!

We're grateful to have some of the most engaged and committed members around! Because of your loyal support, we have more premium membership upgrades and generous additional gifts than ever. We're also appreciative for those who renew year after year (some for 50 years or more!) and for our increase in new members. Your dedication is essential to our ongoing mission for social justice, education, and community! Thank you! – *JACL Membership Department*

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REFLECTIONS

JACL PASSES RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

By Mitchell Matsumura

(Editor's Note: Following is a personal essay about the behind-the-scenes actions that went into the passage of R-1, Resolution in Support of Immigrant Communities Targeted by ICE.)

At the recent 56th JACL National Convention in Las Vegas at the Paris Hotel & Casino, the JACL National Council adopted R-1, a Resolution in Support of Immigrant Communities Targeted by ICE, co-sponsored by the Greater Los Angeles JACL and the Twin Cities JACL chapters *(see "JACL Is Change," Aug. 14, 2026, pacificcitizen.org/jacl-is-change/)*.

In February 2026, after recalling the presence of more than 100 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles in August 2025, I called the president of Twin Cities JACL, Vinicius Taguchi. Having known Minnesota went through the fatal shootings of Nicole Good and Alex Pretti by ICE, we decided on that first call that a resolution was necessary. We contacted the JACL Social Justice Action Committee, and within two weeks, it had 18 chapters supporting us. (Thank you to committee members Naoko Fujii, Carol Kawase, Dan Mayeda, Peggy Nagae and Natsu Saito for helping us write the resolution.)

At the place in Little Tokyo where scores of Japanese Americans gathered in 1942 to be bussed to concentration camps, more than 100 ICE officers swarmed JANM during a news conference by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, which resulted in one arrest.

I personally joined protests beginning in August 2025, when ICE began staging on Terminal Island, the site of a former Japanese fishing village where 3,000 Japanese Americans were removed during World War II. After relentless protests, ICE departed Terminal Island in February 2026.

Then, in January 2026, a brutal ICE arrest occurred in front of the Miyako Hotel on First Street in the heart of Little Tokyo.

Vinicius and I wanted the best person to present the resolution at the convention. There was only one choice: Don Tamaki, senior counsel at the law firm of Minami Tamaki LLP. He was on the legal team that overturned *Korematsu v. United States*.

Don made an inspiring plea. "The Twin Cities and Greater L.A. JACL chapters deserve high praise for the resolution before you as does the National JACL for timely condemning the thousands of militarized federal agents descending upon urban and rural America to terrorize law-abiding residents reminiscent of what happened to us. As Japanese Americans, we have the moral standing to powerfully sound the alarm waking the nation that history is repeating itself. Let's pass this resolution."

We received several amendments at the resolution meeting at the convention. One presented by Sebastian Carbajal, Pacific Southwest youth representative, was especially well-received because it's important that JACL chapters have a plan of action regarding an ICE arrest or deportation: "BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in a timely manner, that all JACL chapters have a plan to follow up if an individual from outside the organization were to reach out to a local JACL chapter for assistance regarding an ICE arrest or deportation. Said chapter would provide support, whether that be in the form of reaching out to a local representative or reaching out to another organization more prepared to handle said situations."

I'm very proud of all the convention delegates that voted unanimously to pass the resolution. JACL now has a resolution that takes a stance on this critical immigration issue.

As the resolution states: "We remember that during World War II, over 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry — immigrants as well as United States citizens — were detained and incarcerated for years without individualized charges, hearings or meaningful due process under the Alien Enemies Act, Executive Order 9066 and related authorities."

In closing, I'd like to quote a couple of excerpts from the resolution.

"NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the National Council of the Japanese American Citizens League that we issue a statement calling on the Congress of the United States to ensure immigration enforcement practices that are accountable, transparent and consistent with constitutional and human rights standards, including specifically the establishment of a clear, enforceable national use-of force standard governing the actions of immigration enforcement agents, as well as state or local officers enforcing immigration law, and imposing civil and/or criminal liability for agents and officers who violate such standard or the Constitution; requiring officers to display visible identification, use body cameras and prohibit masked enforcement, absent documented necessity to ensure officer safety in particular situations; and prohibiting immigration enforcement entry onto private property without a judicial warrant; and

"BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the statement to Congress issued by the National JACL calls for the prohibition of detention or searches based on race, ethnicity, national origin, language ability or accents, workplaces or perceived immigration status; and the protection of detainee rights through individualized judicial hearings, adequate medical and mental health care, appropriate language assistance, elimination of family separation, public reporting of deaths and abuses and independent inspections of all facilities;"

(Note: The entire text of R-1 may be read at https://tinyurl.com/3y-6hzzj4.)

Mitchell Matsumura is the president of the Greater Los Angeles JACL and a member of the Pacific Citizen Editorial Board.





* 2026 JACL NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS *

ESSAY TOPIC: This year's scholarship recipients were asked to respond to the following question:

'Japanese Americans today occupy a distinctive place in America's evolving landscape of race and identity, being shaped by a history of injustice and a present marked by visibility and influence. In a time of growing division and inequality, how can the Japanese American community stand in solidarity with other marginalized groups while also reflecting on its own position within these broader dynamics?'

EDITOR'S NOTE: *All student responses reflect those that were submitted to the Pacific Citizen by the respective JACL Scholarship Committees.*

FRESHMEN



George Fujii
JACL Chapter: Stockton
Recipient of the Masutaro Kitani Scholarship
Intended Major: Biochemistry

Notables:

George Fujii plans to study biochemistry in college. At the Stockton JACL chapter, he regularly helps set up the chapter's annual Day of Remembrance and serves as a candle bearer during the ceremony. An AP Scholar with Distinction ranked second of 660 students on his school's Principal's List, he also earned California's State Seal of Biliteracy in Spanish and placed third in the AAUW Inspirational Woman Writing Contest for an essay about his grandmother's experience as an Issei immigrant. Fujii captained his freshman/JV basketball team before playing varsity through a CIF Division 1 State Finals run and NorCal Division 1 championship and also served as captain of the varsity lacrosse team. He has served as president of the Buddhist Church of Stockton's Young Buddhist Assn. (after terms as vp, treasurer and activities chairperson) and trained more than eight years at the Oakland Kendo Dojo's Stockton location, placing top 3 individually at both the Oakland Kendo Annual Taikai and the AUSKF Jr. Nationals.

Personal Statement:

"It is quintessential, as bearers of the scars of an appalling past, that the Japanese community advocates for the silenced voices of marginalized, persecuted groups such as the Latino American community to ensure that the violations done unto the Japanese American community are never repeated or allowed to occur again.

"As a Japanese Mexican American, the parallels between the incarceration of Japanese Americans and current targeting of Latino Americans is of particular concern for myself, as being raised by my immigrant grandparents has instilled in me the importance of appreciating diversity and utilizing these diverse perspectives to shape an empathetic, compassionate society.

"The Japanese American community must honor the legacy of its spirited history through protecting marginalized and silenced voices, through standing in solidarity and union with these marginalized communities and through the compassionate perspicacity and unshakable fortitude in the face of adversity, which has persevered throughout myriads of endeavors."



Nina Ichikawa
JACL Chapter: Portland
Recipient of the CWO-4 Mitsugi Murakami Kasai Scholarship
Intended Major: Undecided
School: The University of Southern California

Notables:

Nina Ichikawa is attending the University of Southern California while she decides on a major. A recent JACL member, she brings to the organization leadership experience as the only student member of the Tualatin City Board's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Advisory Committee and served as vp of Tualatin High School's student council. She also served as an ASB officer, Key Club secretary and Future Business Leaders of America communications officer. In addition, she danced competitively with the Tualatin High School Dance Team, which won the 2025 OSAA 6A Traditional State Championship. In the summer of 2024, she worked as a paid high school intern filmmaker and marketer for NW Documentary through Saturday Academy. She also volunteers as a Pet Partners therapy dog handler, SAT math tutor and with the immigrant-support organization With Love Oregon.

Personal Statement:

"In more recent times, I have noticed that Japanese Americans are often not recognized as a distinct minority on scholarship, job or internship applications. . . . Recognizing and confronting these myths is essential for the community to ensure our voices are heard authentically and to contribute meaningfully to broader social justice movements.

"Personally, I have actively supported minority communities beyond racial lines through my involvement as the only student member on the Tualatin City Board's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Advisory Committee. Our work includes creating and passing proclamations that acknowledge and celebrate all identities and cultures.

"By educating others, listening deeply, advocating collaboratively and reflecting on our own position, the Japanese American community can help build a more inclusive and compassionate society. . . . Together, our solidarity can be a powerful force for change, reminding our country that its strength lies in the unity and dignity of all its people."



Satoshi Isayama
JACL Chapter: San Jose
Recipient of the Takashi & Yuriko Moriuchi Scholarship
Intended Major: East Asian Studies and Economics
School: New York University

Notables:

Satoshi Isayama hopes to study East Asian Studies and economics at New York University. As a San Jose JACL chapter historian and editor since 11th grade, he interviews descendants of Japanese Americans incarcerated under the Alien Enemies Act during WWII and researches Department of Justice case files to produce profiles supporting an American Civil Liberties Union amicus brief challenging the law's use to deport Venezuelan immigrants. He also produces video segments for the San Jose Japantown community TV channel and photographs the chapter's annual Day of Remembrance candlelight procession. At Stanford's Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, he assists with podcast production on East Asian politics, and he was selected as one of 23 students nationally for Stanford's SPICE China and Reischauer Scholars Programs. Isayama also captains Peninsula Robotics (raising $350K-plus for the team), edited Palo Alto High's newspaper *The Campanile*, co-founded the research magazine *Breakthrough* and serves as a docent at the Japanese American Museum of San Jose.

Personal Statement:

"When I later visited the Japanese American Museum of San Jose, I understood clearly what was missing. Instead of being bombarded by textbook facts, I learned of stories of a young girl choosing to bring her violin to camp out of her belongings. . . . Executive Order 9066 was painted not as a date, but as the day when thousands of Japanese Americans saw their homes emptied and their futures rewritten.

"The most significant moment came when I gave a presentation connecting the wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans to the present-day use of the Alien Enemies Act against Venezuelan immigrants. I discussed how the same legal architecture was used, but to a different target group. . . . [This] confirmed what I had come to believe, which is that history memory is a tool for reading the present.

"Solidarity, I've learned, begins not with speaking the loudest but with remembering and inviting others to remember alongside us."



Braxton Kimura
JACL Chapter: San Jose
Recipient of the Paul & Katherine Ohtaki Scholarship
Intended Major: Biomedical Engineering
School: The University of California, Berkeley

Notables:

Braxton Kimura will pursue biomedical engineering at the University of California, Berkeley. A roughly two-year JACL member, he previously served as co-president of the Japanese Cultural Community Club at Bellarmine College Preparatory. Kimura is founder and president of Beyond the Shell, a national food allergy awareness nonprofit that has earned him wide recognition, including FARE's National Young Leader Award and features on ABC, NBC and in *Fortune*; he was also the subject of the NBC-featured documentary "The Last Bite." At Pinewood School, he served as ASB Treasurer, holds the school's 100-meter dash record and was captain of both the basketball and track and field teams, while also working as a business analyst intern and a congressional intern for the Sam Liccardo campaign.

Personal Statement:

"The Japanese American community has the opportunity to stand in solidarity with other

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marginalized groups by turning remembrance into long-term action. Solidarity does not have to be limited to moments of crisis or one-time events. It can grow through the ways we shape our schools, our institutions and our everyday community spaces.

"Reflecting on our own position is important. The 'model minority' stereotype can sometimes create distance between Japanese Americans and other communities of color. . . . Thoughtfully considering how we use our visibility and influence, including encouraging Japanese Americans to pursue leadership roles in civic life and public service, may allow us to contribute more actively to shared progress.

"Solidarity is not only about honoring our past. It is also about how we choose to move forward together."



Wyatt Kindred
JACL Chapter: Seattle
Recipient of the Patricia & Gail Ishimoto Scholarship
Intended Major: Biology
School: The University of Utah

Notables:

Wyatt Kindred plans to study biology at the University of Utah. A relatively new JACL member, he has focused his community involvement on Woodinville High School and the Seattle area: He progressed through ASB leadership from freshman representative to executive vp, co-presided over a 50-member Key Club and served as school coordination officer for the National Honor Society, earning a four-year Give 100 Award for logging 100-plus service hours annually. Kindred is also a competitive ski cross and alpine racer of 15 years, placing 7th and 9th at the USASA National Ski Cross Championships (2024, 2025) and second at the 2025 British Columbia Ski Cross Provincials. He has volunteered more than 200 hours at the EvergreenHealth Information Desk, presented roughly 15 social justice and cultural awareness workshops across more than 10 schools as a Northshore Student Justice Collective presenter and grew his school's AAPI Club from about 15 to 40-plus members as he rose from social media manager/secretary to vp. He has also attended Obon for 15 years and practiced taiko for four.

Personal Statement:

"Our history is shaped by injustice, yet today we are often seen as fully assimilated and successful. That position we hold doesn't truly represent our journey.

"We have stereotypes about being a model minority. People think that we are successful for no reason, completely ignoring the past discrimination. . . . The success we often receive also shadows the struggles of other marginalized communities and minorities.

"In our political climate, where injustice is hidden behind walls, we can't just accept it. Injustice for one group doesn't stop there; it affects justice for everyone. We need to stand strong when speaking out against discrimination."



Eva Kurima
JACL Chapter: San Diego
Recipient of the Henry & Chiyo Kuwahara Scholarship
Intended Major: Biology
School: University of California, San Diego

Notables:

Eva Kurima plans to study biology at the University of California, San Diego. In San Diego, Kurima serves as co-president of the San Diego JACL Junior Board of Directors, where she leads outreach initiatives aimed at expanding youth membership. She has volunteered with the chapter since elementary school and represented San Diego at the 2024 JACL National Convention in Philadelphia. Kurima designed and managed a GoFundMe campaign that raised $10,000 for a memorial to Japanese American veterans at Miramar National Cemetery and has spoken at SDJACL galas in front of 250-plus guests, including San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria and the Consul General of Japan in Los Angeles. Beyond JACL, she is principal flutist and piccolo soloist with the San Diego Youth Symphony, founder of Sisters Achieving Global Empowerment (SAGE) Connections and a three-sport athlete — water polo team captain, varsity swimmer and flag football wide receiver — at Sage Creek High School.

Personal Statement:

"As a Japanese American, I carry a last name that connects me to a history shaped by incarceration and resilience. At the same time, I move through classrooms, orchestras and athletic fields with opportunities that many communities of color are still fighting to access. This contrast . . . has profoundly shaped how I understand identity and responsibility in America today.

"For Japanese Americans to stand in true solidarity with other marginalized groups, we must begin with self-examination. Solidarity requires acknowledging how proximity to socioeconomic mobility and conditional acceptance have shaped our current position. . . . Solidarity cannot exist if one group's perceived success is leveraged to deny another's opportunities.

"By committing ourselves to amplifying marginalized voices and resisting narratives that put communities against one another, Japanese Americans can honor their ancestors not only by remembering what was taken from them but also by helping dismantle the systems that continue to harm others."



Otoha Masaki
JACL Chapter: Twin Cities
Recipient of the Shigeki 'Shake' Ushio Scholarship
Intended Major: Neuroscience
School: The University of Minnesota Twin Cities

Notables:

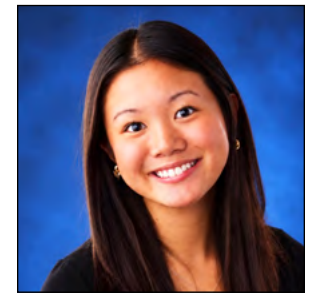
Otoha Masaki intends to study neuroscience at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. A second-year JACL youth member with the Twin Cities chapter, she has used the chapter's newsletter resources — including its "Know-Your-Rights Cards" — to bridge JACL with Student Organized for Anti-Racism (SOAR) at her high school amid recent ICE activity in Minneapolis. Masaki is an IB Diploma candidate who holds Minnesota's Global Biliteracy Seal (Working Fluency/Platinum) in Japanese, and she led a youth data analyst internship with the St. Louis Park Schools Department of Assessment, presenting findings on racial disparities in education to university faculty and district staff. She also represented 380-plus students on her school's Principal Advisory Committee, serves as one of two youth members on the St. Louis Park Human Rights Commission and was a Youth Advisory Council member for Minnesota's 5th District under Congresswoman Ilhan Omar.

Personal Statement:

"As someone who has undergone both Japanese and American history education, this issue particularly stands out to me. . . . I believe that because I have had the honor to undergo both the American and the Japanese schooling systems, I can better understand ongoing microaggressions that are inflicted on Japanese Americans.

"Because of the similarities that the ICE detention center has with the conditions in the Japanese American internment camps, and the unfair racial profiling done in both situations, it has deeply resonated and made me attentive to the issue we are handling.

"The Japanese American community is unique as it has great potential in bridging divides. By not ignoring the trauma of the past and instead fueling it forward for future commitment to social justice, we can become powerful tools in the fight against injustice."



Gabriella Matsushita
JACL Chapter: Chicago
Recipient of the Hanayagi Rokumie Scholarship
Intended Major: Biology, Health Sciences or International Studies
School: University of California, Los Angeles

Notables:

Gabriella Matsushita is hoping to study biology, health sciences or international studies in college. After moving from Los Angeles to Chicago, she found community amongst the Chicago JACL, Japanese American Service Committee and her fellow Asian American peers at school. She can be found supporting one of the many programs with JASC, mainly as a teacher's assistant in the Tampopo Class for toddlers. During her junior year of high school, through her love of origami that she gained from her Baachan, she started Origami for Good, a service-based group that shares cultural inclusivity and positivity through handmade origami. This is all in addition to her many other extracurricular activities she took part in, including basketball, ballet, soccer and tutoring.

Personal Statement:

"In many of my history and English classes throughout high school, we dove into World War II and Japanese American history. I began to see my personal experience as an Asian American in a predominantly white high school within a broader context. My family has endured exclusion and injustice, from the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII to decades of rebuilding lives in unfamiliar cities.

"Starting Origami for Good not only allowed me to serve members of my community but also opened conversations about heritage and service. . . . Unification is the root of my club, and this experience has demonstrated the importance of connecting with other marginalized groups to strengthen one another. By centering a Japanese tradition in an inclusive setting, I sought to model a form of cultural pride that was invitational and inclusive. Solidarity, I learned, begins with showing up as your authentic self while simultaneously remaining open to others' experiences. . . .

"Origami reminds me that honoring my heritage means using the resilience of the Japanese American experience as a bridge rather than a boundary to connect other marginalized groups with one another to create a society rooted in unification. In an era of growing division, our community can model what it means to remember injustice without weaponizing it, to embrace visibility without diminishing culture or history, to transform the past into a foundation for a collective future."



Toshiko Mealy
JACL Chapter: Seattle
Recipient of the Paul & Katherine Ohtaki Scholarship
Intended Major: Kinesiology
School: Western Washington University



Notables:

Toshiko Mealy intends to study kinesiology at Western Washington University. A four-year JACL member, she runs the Seattle JACL's Instagram account and regularly volunteers at the chapter's Cherry Blossom Festival, mochitsuki and Day of Remembrance events. At Newport High School, she was named Newport Knight for four consecutive years (2022-25) — an honor recognizing the student who best represents the school's values — track and field athlete of the year and served as cross-country team captain. She is also a Sinfonia cellist and student leader in the Newport orchestra program. Outside of school, Mealy represented the Seattle KISHU Club at the Wakayama Kenjinkai Next Generation Leaders Meeting and was honored for representing Wakayama/Washington Women in the Kenjinkai at the club's 120th anniversary celebration.

Personal Statement:

"Recently, I visited the Poston incarceration camp in Arizona where my namesake (my great-grandmother, Toshi) was held. . . . I learned that the local Colorado River tribes like the Mohave, Chemehuevi, Hopi and Navajo frequently interacted with the Japanese American community while interned. Tribal leaders helped teach them how to farm the dry desert land. . . . In return, Japanese Americans would trade crops with them. The two groups shared food and goods, but more importantly, they shared empathy. Even 81 years later, that kindness was never forgotten."

"My great-grandmother, Toshi, became an owner of a hair salon, and my great-grandfather, Joe, ran an optical laboratory. They joined the JACL in Cleveland, setting roots for generations to come. To me, they embody *Okage-sama de*. Because of them, I am what I am today. . . . We need to use our position to amplify other minorities' calls for rights."



Audrey Nishida
JACL Chapter: Venice-West Los Angeles
Recipient of the Deni & June Uejima Scholarship
Intended Major: Science, Technology and Society
School: Dartmouth University

Notables:

Audrey Nishida intends to study science, technology and society in college. Although not yet formally active in JACL, she has worked independently to preserve Japanese American history and hopes to get involved with the chapter in college. She is the founder of Project Heirloom, an AI-powered platform that lets students hold virtual conversations with survivors of Japanese American incarceration, which has reached more than 1,000 students across 21 countries; she also helped bring George Takei to speak at her school and moderated his interview in front of the student body. Nishida's app "Memory Lane," a digital memory-book tool for seniors facing memory loss, earned her the Atherton Award as one of 15 young entrepreneurs recognized internationally. She is a student researcher with the UCLA Medical & Imaging Informatics Group, co-founder and president of the STEM outreach club STEMulate, a three-time First Team All-League varsity tennis captain and one of 11 national fellows in the Dear Dreamer Fellowship through MIT's entrepreneurship program.

Personal Statement:

"In 1942, more than 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry — two-thirds of whom were American citizens — were forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated by their own government. Over the dinner table, my grandparents shared memories of being displaced from their home in Los Angeles and imprisoned behind barbed wire in Arizona.

"Inspired, I founded Project Heirloom, an educational initiative that uses AI-powered interactive video to let students engage in virtual, conversational experiences with firsthand accounts of people who lived through Japanese American incarceration. . . . In a post-lesson survey, over 80 percent of students reported feeling more compelled to reflect on fairness and civil rights in today's society.

"This is what solidarity looks like in practice: It begins with remembering and honoring our history and then extending its lessons outward. . . . Separated, we may feel powerless against systems of injustice, but united by shared histories of struggle and resilience, marginalized communities have the power to create lasting, large-scale change."



Maya Ostermann
JACL Chapter: Chicago
Recipient of the Henry & Chiyo Kuwahara Scholarship
Intended Major: Biomedical Engineering
School: Duke University

Notables:

Maya Ostermann will study biomedical engineering at Duke University, having been accepted under Early Decision status with a 4.0 GPA at York Community High School. Since December 2023, she has interned for the Chicago JACL chapter under Becky Ozaki, where she wrote a cover story on the history of the JACL Chicago chapter building for the Chicago JACLer newsletter and built a unified chapter membership database. At the 2025 Chicago Day of Remembrance event at the Chicago History Museum, she was selected to read Executive Order 9066 aloud. Ostermann also serves as concertmaster and board co-president of the York Symphony Orchestra and co-president of Girls in Business Club and is the founder of "Climbing Is for Everyone," an initiative that has raised over $1,000 to bring free rock-climbing access to 60-plus underserved youth in the Chicago area. She has also conducted biomedical engineering research at the University of Iowa and is a U.S. Presidential Scholars candidate with a perfect ACT score.

Personal Statement:

"Tying a perfect bow around my yukata, I often reflect on the way small, intentional actions ripple outward, shaping experiences beyond myself. . . . I see this mirrored in the work of the Japanese American community today, building solidarity with other marginalized groups while navigating the legacies of its own history of incarceration and discrimination.

"Through my research on Japanese American incarceration, I have met survivors like Roy Kurotsuchi, tracing the threads between their lived experiences and the collective memory of a community. . . . By listening closely to these stories, I have learned that advocacy begins with attention: recognizing silences, valuing what is unsaid and creating spaces where historically marginalized voices can be heard.

"Ultimately, advocacy must be informed by history. The Japanese American community's reflective engagement — considering its own positionality while elevating the voices of others — can model a form of unity that is thoughtful, accountable and sustainable."



Kate Sato
JACL Chapter: San Mateo
Recipient of the Joseph Kato Scholarship
Intended Major: Economics and International Relations
School: University of Chicago

Notables:

Kate Sato will study economics and international relations at the University of Chicago. For two years, she has served as a junior intern for the San Mateo JACL chapter, supporting community outreach and historical preservation events and helping run the chapter's children's "Kids Klub," including daifuku-making and gyotaku fish-painting activities. At Aragon High School, she served as a student board representative for the San Mateo Union High School District, co-concertmaster of the Peninsula Youth Orchestra and founding president of the Project Pantry Club. Beyond school, Sato is a finalist in the San Mateo OCA Speak and Lead with Pride speech contest, an intern with the San Mateo API Caucus and the Norman Mineta Summer Academy and president of the San Mateo Jr. YBA/Young Buddhist Assn. She also holds a shodan (first-degree black belt) certification in shodo, Japanese calligraphy.

Personal Statement:

"I owe much of what I know about my Japanese American history to my parents. As a Yonsei, my grandfather and his family were interned at Rohwer, Ark. My grandfather relocated to Chicago after the war, and my father was born.

"Seeing my passion and eagerness to continue learning about Japanese American history, my teacher asked me to proctor a school-wide live Q & A session with Dr. Satsuki Ina. . . . She shared about her family's incarceration experiences with our school, and I had the opportunity to ask her more about how

JACL CHICAGO CHAPTER
Japanese American Citizens League

JACL CHICAGO CONGRATULATES OUR NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS:

Gabby Matsushita
Maya Ostermann
Daniel Sanji
Kate Sato

JACL CHICAGO CONGRATULATES OUR CHAPTER SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS:

Hyo Amano
Gabby Matsushita
Addyson McGarry
Maya Ostermann
Daniel Sanji
Emiko Tahara
Emma Wilkinson
Ava Yatabe
Thomas Yatabe



she discovered the story of her family's past and the struggle she has with sharing it with future generations.

"So, I believe solidarity first begins with education. People need to know what they are fighting for or against. . . . I believe there is nothing more powerful than hearing an account of how that period of history not only affected the Isseis and Nisseis but also the trauma and hardship that was passed down to the following generations."



Kira Sato
JACL Chapter: Portland
Recipient of the Kenji Kasai Scholarship
Intended Major: Undecided
School: University of San Francisco

Notables:

Kira Sato is attending the University of San Francisco while she decides on a major. For three years, Kira Sato has been an active member of Unite People, the social justice youth group affiliated with JACL's Portland chapter, serving as co-vp and now co-president, where she attends monthly JACL board meetings as student liaison, organizes fundraisers for the group's annual pilgrimage to the Minidoka incarceration site and helps clean the Japanese American Historical Plaza. She is a National Merit Scholar Finalist and 2026 U.S. Presidential Scholars Program candidate who presided over her school's Japanese Culture Club for two years, hosting a mochi-pounding demonstration with the local Utsukikai group. Sato is writing and illustrating a historical-fiction graphic novel based on her great-great-grandfather Tetsuo Oi's WWII-era incarceration at Sand Island, Hawaii, supported by an art mentor and a grant from the Japanese American Museum of Oregon; she spoke about the project on a Tadaima panel with the Japanese American Memorial Pilgrimages in November 2025. She has also volunteered for two years with Ikoi No Kai, a senior meal program.

Personal Statement:

"Like Russell Yamada, I'm choosing to keep the stories of my ancestors alive. . . . I found out that my great-great grandfather, Tetsuo Oi, had been arrested and incarcerated at Sand Island. I was touched by the incredible perseverance of my ancestors and was inspired to honor them through a book.

"Instead of bowing our heads after World War II, leaders in our community and government shared their personal stories of incarceration to push forward Japanese American redress. The stories they told created a positive impact for the Japanese American community, and the ones we share today can give support to other groups in the same way.

"Back then, we didn't have a voice, but now, we cannot waste what we experienced and learned: We must become the vocal minority. Let's use our stories to push back against contemporary unjust forces that are spreading the same flavor of prejudice that incarcerated our own community."



Courtney Seiji
JACL Chapter: Eden Township
Recipient of the Takashi & Yuriko Moriuchi Scholarship
Intended Major: Animal Science
School: The University of California, Berkeley

Notables:

Courtney Seiji plans to study animal science at the University of California, Berkeley. She has been part of the Eden Township Japanese Community Center her entire life and became vp of the Eden Youth Group in 10th grade, where she redesigned the group's marketing materials and doubled attendance at the center's Annual Appreciation Lunch. In 2024, she began an internship preserving the oral histories of the center's seniors, including an interview with Keiko Clark, and created a YouTube channel to share those stories publicly. At Castro Valley High School, Seiji was a two-time All-League volleyball libero and West Alameda County Conference League Champion, vp of the UNICEF Club (which raised $2,000 for Ukrainian children) and an intern at Dublin Veterinary Hospital with 140-plus hours of service.

Personal Statement:

"Japanese Americans have a complex reality shaped by the trauma of injustice during World War II and also by current narratives of economic and educational success. . . . For Japanese Americans to finally regain control of their narrative, rather than allowing the public to decide, we must actively tell our stories, elevate diverse voices in our community and connect our historical experiences to present-day issues of civil rights and inequality.

"Civil rights activists such as Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi and Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga demonstrate qualities of resilience and unwavering commitment to justice. . . . Their actions prove that Japanese Americans were not merely passive victims of injustice but active participants in the struggle for civil rights.

"By telling our full and honest story, Japanese Americans can not only restore agency to our community but also strengthen the broader fight for equality."



Audrey Shiono
JACL Chapter: Downtown Los Angeles
Recipient of the Kyutaro & Yasuo Abiko Scholarship
Intended Major: Japanese/East Asian Studies, Neuroscience or Cognitive Science
School: Cornell University

Notables:

Audrey Shiono is considering Japanese/East Asian Studies, neuroscience or cognitive science at Cornell University. She is the founder of Let's Talk Story Club, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that pairs youth volunteers with more than 450 Japanese American seniors to document their life stories in memory books — work recognized on "Good Day L.A." and recently expanded to Latino seniors through a Spanish-language companion project, "Tomemos Un Cafecito." A 12-year kendo practitioner, she organized the first-ever "Women in Kendo" demonstration at the Japanese American National Museum with support from the U.S. Women's Team. Shiono has also completed paid research internships at City of Hope through the CIRM SPARK program (selected from 2,000-plus applicants) and with ThinkNeuro, studying neurodegenerative disease. At Portola High School, she served as ASB clubs commissioner, was a four-year varsity basketball starter, founder and president of the Japanese cultural club "Tomo" and a California State Ambassador for Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership.

Personal Statement:

"I remember Obaachama wincing at the bitter memory of being rounded up and sent to the Tule Lake concentration camp. Hearing about her experience made me think about the responsibility that my generation has to respond to injustice today. After Obaachama passed, I wished I had preserved her stories; her history; her legacy. Inspired, I created the Let's Talk Story Club.

"Last year, crossed out on my AP U.S. History quiz was my answer: '442nd Infantry Regiment.' The question: 'Identify a military factor that led to WWII Allied victory.' How could the most-decorated military unit in U.S. history be the wrong answer? In this moment, I saw how the histories of marginalized groups can be erased.

"Today, I see parallels between my ancestors' experiences 80 years ago and the Latino community. . . . Regardless of race or identity, we need to work together to protect and preserve our stories of hardship and courage, especially in the face of injustice."



Alaina Szeto
JACL Chapter: Washington, D.C.
Recipient of the Sam & Florice Kuwahara Scholarship
Intended Major: Biology-Related Major
School: Wellesley College

Notables:

Alaina Szeto plans to pursue a biology-related major at Wellesley College. A brand-new JACL member, she hopes to get more involved with the organization in college. At Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, she served as captain of the varsity gymnastics team — earning All-State honors, a *Washington Post* All-Met Honorable Mention and three-time team MVP — and was co-president of DoneWithGuns, a club that educates peers on gun violence and firearm safety. She also competes for the Arlington Aerials travel gymnastics team, where she has set some of the nation's top floor scores, and volunteers as a coach for neurodivergent and physically disabled gymnasts through Adaptive Gymnastics. Szeto is a Presidential Scholars Program candidate and National Merit Finalist.

Personal Statement:

"For me, being Japanese cannot be separated from the years my great-grandparents spent trapped behind barbed-wire fences during the WWII internment camps. The passion I feel about this injustice lives in my veins: my way of honoring those who lived through it.

"My best friend for the past decade is blind and albino. . . . Walking alongside her showed me that even in a world deemed 'inclusive' and 'accessible,' our society in America is still a far cry from integrating disabled people and the marginalized into our world. . . . With my blind friend in mind and remembering the injustice faced by my great-grandparents, we partnered with a group called Disabled Disrupters to advocate for Virginia bill HB 1806, which establishes emergency protocols for disabled students. This past July, HB 1806 was signed into law with bipartisan support.

"As a Japanese American, embracing my Japanese roots and values, such as compassion, hospitality, intentional design and solidarity, has allowed me to stand with and advocate for other marginalized groups."

UNDERGRADUATE



Elyse Fujii
JACL Chapter: Stockton
Recipient of the Dr. Thomas T. Yatabe Scholarship
School: University of California, Davis

Notables:

A longtime JACL Stockton member, Elyse Fujii has participated and volunteered for many events such as Day of Remembrance, Picnic Day and holiday gatherings. One of the main volunteer opportunities she had was acting as a candle bearer for the Day of Remembrance event held at the Buddhist Church of Stockton, which allowed her to directly participate in the honoring of the Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during WWII. Fujii will be studying biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of California, Davis.

Personal Statement:

"In order to support other marginalized communities, it is a necessity that the Japanese American community speaks out against the injustice currently happening in the United States. Individuals can walk out in support of minorities facing persecution, against wars that massacre innocents and against those in power that perpetuate hatred and fear on a national level.

"Joining peaceful protests shows community support and puts pressure on those in power to

make change, as well as encourages community members to learn about current events and struggles faced by minorities. On a local level, the community can partner with other organizations to advocate for better policies and rally support for minority groups. The Japanese American community is in an advantageous position in how tight-knit the community itself is and how well the community can advocate for themselves. With this intercommunity support, the Japanese American community has the resources to help others [and] the ability to go out and demand justice for all those who are in need of support.

"Like in the past, Japanese Americans must fight against injustice and secure the rights of the people that are put at a disadvantage. As a group that has gone through the same unjust events faced by many today, the Japanese American community understands the injustice that is persecution and knows the consequences of this form of hatred. . . . As a minority group, the Japanese American community must stand alongside other minority groups to push back against current injustice to ensure this persecution of minorities does not perpetuate further to our future."



Lauren Iwamiya
JACL Chapter: Washington, D.C.
Recipient of the Alice Yuriko Endo Scholarship
School: Howard University

Notables:

Lauren Iwamiya started out her involvement as a participant in the NY/SC EDC Youth Retreat to the Philadelphia Asian American Film Festival in 2023. Since then, she has been involved in and currently serves as the JACL D.C. chapter youth co-chair, National Youth/Student Council at-large youth representative and is a JACL D.C. chapter virtual museum educational consultant. Iwamiya also was a 2024 JACL Kakehashi participant. She is currently enrolled at Howard University and is majoring in History and mathematics.

Personal Statement:

"On Feb. 19, 2026, the day [that] marked the 84th anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066, I had the privilege of attending the Smithsonian National Museum of American History's Day of Remembrance, which held a screening and discussion of the JACL Honolulu chapter's film 'Removed by Force.' This documentary explored the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans in Hawaii after the attacks on Pearl Harbor and their fight for recognition and redress. I left the screening and ensuing discussion with a renewed vigor and optimism for young people like myself to find new possibilities to create change.

"The Japanese American Citizens League Washington, D.C. chapter recently published their graphic novel exploring heritage, immigration, incarceration and taking action called 'But, Where Are You REALLY From?' I have the privilege of working with current and retired teachers to create a virtual museum supplement for the graphic novel. . . .

"Japanese Americans today occupy a distinctive place in America's evolving landscape of race and identity, shaped by a history of injustice and a present marked by visibility and influence. . . . Through education and reflection about our own, as well as other communities' experiences, we build foundations for mutual understanding, cross-cultural community and solidarity."



Austin Joyce
JACL Chapter: Wasatch Front North
Recipient of the Henry & Chiyo Kuwahara Scholarship
School: University of Utah

Notables:

Austin Joyce has been a member of the Idaho Falls chapter for four years and has served as both a Wasatch Front North youth representative and Intermountain District Youth Council board member since 2025. She is currently co-president of the Japanese American Student Assn. at the University of Utah, while majoring in biochemistry and also serving as a member of the Asian American Student Assn. In addition, Joyce practices Nihon-buyo and shodo, and she has been involved with the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple Young Buddhists Assn. since 2018.

Personal Statement:

"From the targeted surveillance of religious minorities to the dehumanizing descriptions surrounding asylum seekers, echoes of 1942 are disturbingly present. By drawing direct parallels between the incarceration of our ancestors and the actions taken against these marginalized groups today, the Japanese American community can break down the flawed mindset of 'bettering the country' that is used to justify this mistreatment. This act of remembering and comparing serves as a powerful tool in bolstering action, proving that distinguishing the people around us as 'others' serves as a recurrent threat to democracy.

"One specific action the JA community can take is further politically advocating to get the Neighbors Not Enemies Act approved, as it not only supports and validates JA experiences but also prevents the government from enacting similar injustices on other marginalized groups. Although the JACL has done much for this act as an organization, I believe that calls for support to respective senators on a chapter basis could bolster action. Additionally, by having chapters throughout the country participate, the greater Japanese American community could apply pressure to catalyze the legislative process. And through calling for support, more information about these injustices and the history behind it is further disseminated throughout JACL members.

"True solidarity and support requires the abandonment of the 'model minority' idea. Being a Japanese American not only means remembering the past but also taking action to protect the rights we fought so hard to regain, ensuring that the legacy of those who suffered in the camps are honored through proactive resistance against modern oppression and silencing."



Campbell Kato
JACL Chapter: Salt Lake City
Recipient of the Daniel & Irene Iritani Scholarship
School: Westminster University

Notables:

Campbell Kato is a very active member of the Salt Lake City chapter. She is the founder and president of Westminster University's JACL Club, which brings awareness about JACL to students at the university. In addition to her work on campus, Kato also is a youth intern for the Salt Lake City chapter and serves on the district level as a youth representative for the Intermountain District Council.

Personal Statement:

"Japanese Americans today occupy a unique position within the evolving landscape of race and identity in the United States. Shaped by a history of exclusion, incarceration and resilience, the community now exists in a space of greater visibility and influence. This duality of past injustice and present possibility requires both a responsibility and an opportunity to act in solidarity with other marginalized groups.

"Solidarity begins with acknowledging shared histories. The incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II is not an isolated event but part of a broader pattern of systemic injustice experienced by many communities of color. Recognizing these parallels allows Japanese Americans to build meaningful connections with other groups facing discrimination today, whether through immigration policy, racial profiling or economic inequality.

"At the same time, the Japanese American community must reflect on its current position. Often perceived through the lens of the 'model minority' myth, Japanese Americans can be placed in a complicated position, benefiting from proximity to privilege while still carrying the legacy of marginalization. This perception can obscure ongoing challenges within the community and create barriers to solidarity if left unexamined.

"To move forward, it is essential to reject narratives that divide communities and instead embrace coalition-building. This involves active engagement: supporting advocacy efforts, amplifying underrepresented voices and participating in cross-cultural conversations. It also requires introspection, understanding how privilege and access operate within the community and using that awareness to advocate for equity. . . .

"The strength of the Japanese American community lies not only in its resilience but also in its willingness to stand alongside others. By honoring its history while



actively engaging with the present, the community can play a meaningful role in advancing justice and equity for all."



Simon Kutz
JACL Chapter: New York
Recipient of the Michio & Namiko Suzuki Scholarship
School: Princeton University

Notables:

From December 2022-July 2024, Simon Kutz served as the Midwest District Council youth chair. After that, he served as Eastern District Council youth representative in the NY/SC, where he founded the District Youth Board. He has attended a couple of JACL National Conventions, including the most recent 2026 gathering, where he ran successfully for the position of national youth representative. He hopes to be more involved once he graduates from Princeton University and moves to a larger city. Kutz is majoring in public and international affairs.

Personal Statement:

"Japanese Americans occupy a distinctive and somewhat uneasy position in the United States today. It can be difficult to reconcile a history of being victims of state injustice and discrimination with a present perception of being an integrated and successful ethnic group. However, this duality does not need to remain an uncomfortable standpoint.

"While the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II emphasizes how fragile our civil liberties can be, the movement for redress demonstrates how communities can organize together to create a political movement out of historical wrongs.

"As a Japanese American that does not have a connection to the history of incarceration camps, I joined the JACL to advocate for civil rights for all minority groups, and I find the history of Japanese Americans incredibly important in advancing the JACL and similar organizations' legitimacy and momentum into a new era.

"By fighting against tangible threats that [affect] the everyday lives of groups of people, the JACL and similar organizations can effectively build coalitions and galvanize support from various minority groups, including from a broader swath of Japanese Americans. . . . Further including all Japanese Americans and coalition-building with other groups can advance and protect minority rights without abandoning the memory of historical injustices. In a time where these basic freedoms are under attack, the work of mobilizing groups to unite is important and can progress Japanese Americans' understanding of our place in America's rapidly changing politics and society."



Halie Matsui
JACL Chapter: Berkeley
Recipient of the Saburo Kido Scholarship
School: University of California, Berkeley

Notables:

Halie Matsui is an active member of the Berkeley chapter and serves as the Berkeley NSU representative to the Berkeley chapter board. Matsui also serves as a committee member for the Connecting Across Generations and Civil Rights committees. In addition to community involvement, she also volunteers at the Women's Cancer Research Center at UCSF.

Personal Statement:

"The Japanese American community is complex, nuanced and dynamic. Recognizing this truth must begin with ourselves, not as individuals in isolation but as participants in an evolving collective shaped by history, memory and responsibility. Our greatest strength lies in collaboration, in conversation and in the worn, knowing voices of those who came before us.

"Remembrance is not passive reflection; it is an active refusal to allow the past to be smoothed over, sanitized or repeated. Solidarity is a physical and visible commitment and a willingness to stand beside others, especially when it is difficult. And the futures worth building will require more imagination and more courage than we have yet allowed ourselves.

"For many, connection to the Japanese American community is not immediate or clearly defined. For some, it exists in fragments such as in family gatherings, annual Obon festivals or quiet traditions that do not yet reveal the full scope of a larger collective history. It is only through deeper engagement with history, with elders and with shared spaces that the breadth of this community becomes visible. . . .

"Grounded in the guidance of our elders, committed to ongoing learning and willing to act with consistency and visibility, the Japanese American community has the capacity to contribute meaningfully to broader movements for justice. Our history demands that we remain vigilant against repetition. Our present position requires that we stand in solidarity with those facing injustice now. And our future depends on our willingness to imagine and build something more expansive than what currently exists."



Luke Wong
JACL Chapter: Fresno
Recipient of the Shigeru Nakahira Scholarship
School: Yale University

Notables:

Luke Wong is a longstanding, active member of the Japanese American communities in Fresno, Calif., and New Haven, Conn. He has collaborated with the JACL, Nikkei West and Densho as part of large-reaching oral history and cultural preservation projects, and he is currently a student at Yale University pursuing research in Asian American advocacy while majoring in ethics, politics and economics.

Personal Statement:

"Japanese Americans occupy what scholars sometimes call a 'model minority' placement in American racial hierarchy. It is a placement that comes with real material advantages and a quiet, persistent danger. The danger is this: Proximity to whiteness, whether economic, institutional or cultural, can make a community forget what it cost to get there and forget who is still waiting.

"The internment camps are not ancient history. They are living memory. My grandmother ate mush inside one. And yet, the political temptation, especially as Japanese Americans have gained visibility and relative influence, is to treat that history as a closed chapter rather than an ongoing obligation. I don't think we have that option.

"When I worked at the Hanami Initiative . . . what I found was that the $2.4M investment gap facing Japanese American districts was not an isolated phenomenon. It was one expression of a broader pattern: public capital flowing toward stadium revitalizations, away from K-12 infrastructure and public health, in communities of color across the board. Japanese Americans, Black Americans, Latino Americans and Pacific Islander communities were being shortchanged by the same structural decisions. The mechanism did not distinguish. Our advocacy shouldn't either.

"This is the case for solidarity rooted in analysis rather than guilt. Japanese Americans are not the most marginalized group in America today. . . . But we have a documented history of targeted state violence, a sophisticated legal and organizational infrastructure built to fight it and a community network with genuine institutional reach. Those are resources. The JACL has spent decades building exactly the kind of credibility that makes cross-coalition work possible. The question is whether we use it.

"We know what it looks like when a government decides an ethnic group is a threat. We know what the legal architecture of racialized persecution looks like from the inside. That knowledge is directly relevant to what is happening to Muslim Americans, to undocumented communities, to anyone navigating the gap between citizenship on paper and protection in practice. My grandmother did not teach me about the camps so that I would feel bad. She taught me so that I would know what the world is capable of and know it early enough to do something about it."

GRADUATE



John Lubianetsky
JACL Chapter: St. Louis
Recipient of the Kenji Kajiwara Scholarship
School: American University

Notables:

John Lubianetsky has been an active youth member of the St. Louis chapter for the past 12 years. He has participated in the Kakehashi Project twice, once virtually in 2021 and again in person in 2024. He has won many awards for his accomplishments in the areas of global and international studies focusing on East Asia, East European and Eurasian studies.

Personal Statement:

"The distinct social and historical position of Japanese Americans provides a foundation for supporting and working in solidarity with marginalized groups to demand change against social inequalities and injustices. From my perspective, I consider the collective Japanese American memory to be at the heart of any form of progressive solidarity. Memory binds the collective identities of the Japanese American community and reminds us of our position within the broader context of American social justice.

"Solidarity relies on the unity of many people to accomplish shared goals. Memories of history, struggle and experience form the foundation that justifies the necessity of solidarity between diverse groups of individuals. Memory transcends time and personal experiences, helping to form collective understand-



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Shigeru "Shig" Nakahira Memorial Scholarship

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> ings and identities. As Japanese Americans, our collective memory is impactful and informed by the context of the collective fight for civil liberties in the United States.

"This collective memory is why the JACL's condemnation of the United States federal government's invocation of the Alien Enemies Act in 2025 is not only morally right but also necessary. For example, if Japanese Americans could not stand in solidarity with Venezuelans being deported without due process under the same law used to facilitate the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans, our community would not only resign itself to moral cowardice but also cheapen our collective identity. We would signal acquiescence toward a state that consistently seems to learn the wrong lesson as another generation suffers discrimination based on nationality and fear. Inaction would negate the lived experiences of our predecessors and undermine the aspects of resisting injustice and inequality that have become embedded in what it means to be Japanese American.

"Collective memory spurs action against these specific forms of injustice, making solidarity with disaffected groups a natural conclusion. These actions are necessary not only because standing in solidarity with marginalized groups is not only often morally correct, but it is also what informs Japanese Americans' position within these broader social dynamics.

"This dynamic is occurring as our collective memory of being Japanese American goes through a process of substantial change. The memories of the oldest generation of Japanese Americans, who lived through incarceration, stood with the Civil Rights Movement and negotiated redress, are slowly fading. More than ever, Japanese Americans must exercise our collective memories before intangible and irreplaceable knowledge is lost forever. We must exercise these memories, not only out of affection for families, friends and members of our communities but also to ensure that we do not become complacent with how things are or will become."



Daniel Sanji
JACL Chapter: Chicago
Recipient of the Dr. Newton K. Wesley (Uyesugi) Scholarship
School: Northwestern University

Notables:

Daniel Sanji joined the Chicago chapter in 2019 and participated in the 2022 Kansha Project cohort, where he traveled to Little Tokyo in Los Angeles and completed a National Park Service project at the Manzanar Concentration Camp, where he helped in the camp's restoration. In 2024, he received a national scholarship award and participated in Camp Daikon, a two-day retreat hosted by the Chicago chapter on Japanese American identity and activism. He also participated in the Kakehashi Project in 2025, and he went on to join the Kansha Alumni Leadership Board that year as part of the fundraising committee. Most recently, Sanji supported the 2026 Chicago Day of Remembrance event held at the Chicago History Museum, where his 2022 Kansha culmination project was displayed. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in social psychology, M.S. in social psychology and M.S. in applied statistics at Northwestern University.

Personal Statement:

"My own critical approach to social injustice was influenced by learning about my own family's history of incarceration during World War II and the broader history of incarceration of Japanese Americans in the U.S. As a Gosei (fifth-generation) Japanese American and descendent of internees of Jerome and Rohwer concentration camps, I know all too well that stereotypes of Japanese Americans as 'enemy aliens,' or perpetual foreigners, were levied strategically during WWII, culminating in the dispossession, displacement and detention of over 120,000 Japanese Americans in concentration camps in the U.S. interior.

"I am also intimately aware of how depictions of Japanese Americans as model minorities have been recruited to a similar effect to sow divisions between Japanese Americans and other racial minority groups. Such depictions first emerged during the Civil Rights Movement by white academics to describe post-war success among former Japanese American internees.

"In fact, the term 'model minority' comes from a *New York Times* op-ed penned by white sociologist William Petersen to describe Japanese Americans in 1966. Such success, he reasoned, was evidence that Black Americans fighting for civil rights, who he referred to as 'problem minorities,' did not experience racism.

"As a member of JACL Chicago, I am proud to have been a part of initiatives within JACL that are already engaging in critical historical education and consciousness-building for the next generation of Japanese Americans. The Kansha Project is JACL Chicago's flagship program, founded in 2011, that connects young Japanese Americans in the Chicagoland area through an educational pilgrimage to Manzanar concentration camp, where they participate in various activities to teach them the history of incarceration and its connection to inequality today. In order for organizations like JACL to respond to growing inequality, we must continue to invest in programming like this in our chapters and at the national level."



Katie Spreitzer
JACL Chapter: Arizona
Recipient of the Chiyoko & Thomas Shimazaki Scholarship
School: Arizona State University

Notables:

Katie Spreitzer's background is in sustainability and public policy, which led her to first get involved with JACL through the Kakehashi Project in 2024. Her experience there led her to attend chapter and national programs, in addition to Kakehashi alumni webinars hosted by the Japan Information Cooperation Center (JICE) and the Japanese government. Besides being involved in the community, she's also heavily involved on campus through various organizations and keeps connected to cultural activities through karate and cooking traditional foods alongside her mom.

Personal Statement:

"Japanese Americans have a unique opportunity to spread awareness about past injustices and continue to uplift marginalized communities experiencing discrimination. From the influx of Pokémon players to the matcha craze to the prized conbini, Japanese culture has quickly overtaken Western societies. This keen interest in Japanese goods and services was not always appreciated, especially before the 2000s. The public once shunned Japanese Americans, forced to remain in Japanese internment camps until they were deemed safe and accepted by society. After this harsh and inhumane treatment, Japanese Americans have continued to expand their identities, connect with other marginalized communities and seek to ensure that other communities do not face the same demoralizing treatment.

"Unfortunately, the current discrimination against the Latino and Latina population has shown us that we cannot take that freedom for granted. Not only are they being subjected to various 'ICE' internment camps, which subject them to inhumane abuses, but they have been forced to leave their home, the United States, to seek shelter in other countries. From racial targeting to public shame, the Latinx community is currently experiencing the same harmful and vicious treatment that Japanese Americans once experienced 80 years ago. The humanitarian atrocities that we are currently seeing in communities of color are a reminder that it is our collective responsibility as an influential marginalized community to support those who are experiencing these racial hardships.

"The Asian community in America has also experienced racial discrimination recently during the Covid-19 pandemic. . . . With such a large number of Asian people reporting their racial harassment, it was up to the greater American community to address those fears and unnecessary threats to these harmless individuals. . . .

"As previously mentioned, the Japanese American community is in a unique position to support communities that are being targeted due to their race or ethnicity. Given our history as a marginalized group, we have the opportunity to showcase these current and ongoing racial discriminations to the broader American community. . . .

"The Japanese American community has the opportunity to speak out against the cruel atrocities currently being committed against a marginalized group, an experience that is not that far removed from this community. Given the influence, wealth and growth of Japanese culture in America, this community must support other minority communities experiencing the racial discrimination that this group once harshly experienced. America has various cultures and values that should be celebrated and honored. Without speaking out against abuses toward other marginalized groups, the future of the Japanese American community may also be subject to the dangerous and demoralizing treatment it once experienced. To stand up for minority communities currently experiencing these hardships is to stand up for all minorities until racial discrimination is eradicated from the United States."



Parker Suzuki
JACL Chapter: Mt. Olympus
Recipient of the Rev. John H. & Asako Yamashita Scholarship
School: University of Utah

Notables:

Parker Suzuki's first involvement with JACL began in 2025, where he served as a youth representative for the Mt. Olympus chapter. From there, he was appointed to the Intermountain District Council JACL youth board. He continues his involvement with JACL by "championing greater youth involvement" and working with the Japanese American Student Assn. at the University of Utah, where he sees a deep connection with JACL and where his primary goal is to bridge the two organizations. He is attending the University of Utah, where he is majoring in computer science (MS).

Personal Statement:

"Solidarity, to me, is not a symbolic gesture. It is showing up. It is educating ourselves about histories that are not our own with the same seriousness that we want others to bring to ours. It is using the platforms and organizations we have, including JACL and student groups like the Japanese American Student Assn., to amplify voices that are being ignored or suppressed. It is being honest about the ways our community has at times benefited from proximity to whiteness in ways that other communities of color have not and reckoning with what that means.

"At the same time, solidarity requires that we stay rooted in our own story. I do not think we serve other communities well by erasing or minimizing what Japanese Americans have been through. The power of our community's voice comes precisely from that history.

"When a Japanese American stands up and says, 'We have seen this before,' that carries weight. It carries the weight of Topaz, of Manzanar, of families who lost everything and still chose to rebuild. We should speak from that place, not despite it.

"For the next generation, the work is both internal and outward facing. Internally, we need to keep visiting sites like Topaz, keep telling these stories and make sure young Japanese Americans understand where they come from.

"Externally, we need to show up for others with the same conviction that we hope others would show up for us. History has taught us, painfully, what happens when communities are left to fight alone.

"The dust at Topaz did not just remind me of the past. It reminded me that the ground we stand on is never as stable as it seems, and the only way forward is together."

>



Michael Tanaka
JACL Chapter: Seattle
Recipient of the Minoru Yasui Scholarship
School: University of Southern California

Notables:

Michael Tanaka was selected as a Daniel K. Inouye Fellow and worked in public policy and advocacy for JACL in Washington, D.C. His involvement in JACL began as a participant in the 2018 Kakehashi Project and lead to his participation in the JACL National Convention as a mentorship grant recipient. Tanaka is currently involved in working with the office of Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal to strengthen the ties between the office and the Seattle JACL chapter.

Personal Statement:

"Japanese Americans occupy a complex position within America's racial landscape. Our community is shaped by a profound history of state-sanctioned injustice, yet today, we are often perceived as integrated, successful or even insulated from the forms of racial violence and exclusion faced by other marginalized groups. This duality demands both reflection and responsibility.

"In a moment of deepening inequality and polarization, Japanese Americans have a fundamental obligation to stand in solidarity with other marginalized communities by grounding our advocacy in historical memory, rejecting conditional belonging and committing to justice that extends beyond our own community. The experience of incarceration remains a central touchstone for the Japanese American identity. It is a reminder that citizenship, loyalty and assimilation have never guaranteed protection from racism or state violence.

"For me, this understanding has been shaped both personally and professionally. Living and working in Japan as a Japanese American forced me to confront the limits of identity defined by external validation and conditional acceptance. That experience clarified the importance of defining my identity for myself. Returning to the United States to work in public service and policy advocacy for JACL National, I saw firsthand how systems of power continue to privilege some voices while excluding others. Working in D.C. showed me that solidarity is not symbolic; it is structural. It requires advocating for equitable access to resources, representation in decision-making and policies that address root causes rather than surface disparities.

"The Japanese American community's role should never be to position itself as uniquely virtuous or victimized but as deeply interconnected. Our history teaches us that injustice against one group threatens the dignity and safety of all. By embracing a vision of solidarity rooted in memory, equity and self-determination, Japanese Americans can contribute meaningfully to a more just and inclusive society. In doing so, we affirm that our identity is not defined by proximity to power or exemption from harm, but by our willingness to stand alongside others in pursuit of dignity, justice and shared humanity."



Emily Torres
JACL Chapter: Berkeley
Recipient of the Railroad and Mine Workers Scholarship
School: Columbia University or Weill Cornell

Notables:

Emily Torres became a member of the Berkeley JACL chapter through her involvement in the UC Berkeley Nikkei Student Union, where she was tasked to reach out to the chapter for candle lighters in preparation for its Day of Remembrance event. With the chapter's guidance, she helped organize her NSU's first post-pandemic pilgrimage to Manzanar, among other initiatives. After graduating, she became further involved with the Berkeley JACL chapter and currently serves on the Civil Rights Committee. Torres was most recently nominated for the chapter's Youth Leadership Award. She is pursuing a graduate degree in molecular and cell biology.

Personal Statement:

"As a Japanese Mexican American, questions of identity and race have never been simple for me. I occupy multiple communities simultaneously, each with its own history and its own relationship to privilege and marginalization. This complexity is not unique to my experience. It sits at the heart of what it means to be Japanese American today, and it is what compels me to think seriously about solidarity, privilege and responsibility.

"One of my deepest convictions is that apathy is the surrendering of agency. For progress to be made for all marginalized communities, the Japanese American community must speak up and actively support others. Further, true solidarity requires more than statements of support. It requires honest self-reflection about where we stand relative to others.

"The history of Japanese American internment also compels us to speak out about modern injustices based on race happening today. When immigration enforcement separates families, forcibly relocates communities and targets people based on suspicion and perceived foreignness rather than individual wrongdoing, it echoes the logic behind Executive Order 9066. Japanese Americans were removed from their homes and communities and incarcerated by a government that deemed them a threat based on ancestry and fear. To witness similar forces operating today and remain silent would be a betrayal of everything the redress movement stood for.

"It is imperative that the Japanese American community cautions against apathy toward others and guard against being pitted against other marginalized groups in ways that serve neither community. History has shown that privilege is not permanent, and progress for any community depends on its allies showing up. The Japanese American community has the history, the precedent and the moral foundation to be a powerful force for solidarity. The question is whether we choose to use it."



Emi Yamasaki
JACL Chapter: SELANOCO-Orange County
Recipient of the Henry & Chiyo Kuwahara Scholarship
School: University of Connecticut

Notables:

Emi Yamasaki became actively involved with the JACL as an undergraduate student at the University of California, Irvine. As a member of Tomo No Kai at UCI, she collaborated and worked closely with the SELANOCO JACL chapter. In June 2025, she joined the JACL EDC District Council youth board and is currently serving as a board member. Yamasaki was recently part of the Kakehashi Project delegation to Japan. She is attending the University of Connecticut and is majoring in higher education and student affairs.

Personal Statement:

"For the Japanese American community, a major factor in our historical marginalization has come from the World War II incarceration camps. Our positionality as Americans that looked like the enemy has brought us to understand war in a way that not many other communities have experienced.

"Additionally, values like *gaman* somehow got twisted in the dominant narrative to become what we now label the 'model minority' myth, a fallacy that pits us and Asian American communities against other communities of color. In being perceived as a 'successful' minority, there is a semblance of power that we bear over other communities, whether we want to or not. This position we hold in society can create division when not thoughtfully considered in the modern context. However, it is important to remember that this power dynamic has been created for white benefit and is meant to divide when we try to unite.

"As such, when attempting to achieve solidarity with other marginalized groups, it is important for us to lead with our history but also recognize that the advocacy that has worked for us may not work for other communities. For example, reparations may have been the resolution our community sought out and fought for at the time, but we cannot impose that as the ultimate solution to other groups seeking compensation for the harm caused to their communities. In our own fight for justice, we also must recognize how we may be perpetuating harm in other communities as well, such as navigating historical preservation of the camps on Native land. Solidarity is brought about by



true allyship, which requires active listening and knowing what role we need to play to push a unified front.

". . . In solidarity, I bring *gaman* and my authentic self to the table and listen to community needs and how I can uniquely support other communities beyond my own. In these graduate school experiences, I have learned to navigate my different roles in different spaces, which I hope to bring back to the greater Japanese American community.

"As an aspiring higher education professional, I see education as a form of advocacy and continuously ensure that I am centered in my values of cultural understanding and uplifting and supporting the success of marginalized students on campus."

CREATIVE ARTS



Stephanie Rowe
JACL Chapter: Washington, D.C.
Recipient of the Henry & Chiyo Kuwahara Scholarship
School: Florida State University

Notables:

Stephanie Rowe is a co-author of the 2024 educational resource and graphic novel "But, Where Are You REALLY From?" Since the release of the graphic novel, she has participated in giving presentations about the novel and its development at various events. Before the graphic novel, Rowe volunteered for a couple of years at the Washington, D.C. chapter's Mochitsuki events and at the JACL National Convention held in D.C. She also was a participant in the Kakehashi Project in 2016. Rowe is pursuing a studio art MFA at Florida State University.

Personal Statement:

"The darker parts of Japanese American history (exclusion, incarceration, discrimination, etc.) align and reflect with many facets of what other marginalized groups are facing in American society today. There is a strong link between past injustices and present inequalities that position the Japanese American community as vital participants in the ongoing struggle for justice. I believe that one of the best ways to approach and support these groups is to spread awareness and inform the general public about what has occurred in the past and how it came to happen, so that we, as a society, can do our best to ensure that history does not repeat itself.

"It is imperative that the Japanese American community offers our unwavering assistance/support to affected groups by acting as advocates for equality and human rights for people of all backgrounds. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, such as participating in protests that focus on immigration detention, unjust policing and biased surveillance, as well as educating our communities on a myriad of levels (whether personally, locally and so on). We have to show solidarity by committing every day to being active participants through listening and showing up for causes that reflect JACL's belief in civil and human rights.

"I aspire for my art to act as a meeting place where stories, memories and identities intertwine. I hope to critically engage viewers through the associations they draw through interpretations, shared reflections and imagination. Through this process, I believe that an open dialogue can be unearthed where connections can surface; a place where our differences can become bridges to connect us instead of boundaries."

DENTISTRY



Stella Hong
JACL Chapter: San Francisco
Recipient of the Dr. Kiyoshi Sonoda Scholarship
School: UCSF School of Dentistry

Notables:

Stella Hong is a new member of the San Francisco JACL chapter and recently completed her undergraduate studies at John Hopkins University in 2025. At this year's JACL 15th Annual Films of Remembrance, she had the opportunity to complete the 'Japanese American Experience Education,' and she looks forward to becoming more involved with the chapter when she moves to the city in the fall to attend the UCSF School of Dentistry to pursue a degree in molecular and cellular biology.

Personal Statement:

"In November 2020, at the height of the presidential election, I interned for Gil Cisneros, calling constituents about Covid-19 policies and health-care access. Most calls were quick. One stayed with me. An older Japanese American woman told me she had stopped going outside alone. Her Korean friend had been yelled at with slurs at a grocery store. Since then, even routine errands felt unsafe. 'I've lived here for decades,' she said, 'and I've never felt like this before.' I put aside my script and just listened.

"Asian communities have different histories, but in moments of fear, those differences collapse. What remains is a shared vulnerability. Recognizing that is the starting point for solidarity. Solidarity, though, is not abstract. It requires specific actions.

"First, learn history and ask better questions. Japanese American incarceration is not just a past event. It shows how quickly fear can turn into policy. Understanding that history, alongside the histories of other marginalized groups, makes it easier to recognize when similar patterns reappear. It also means asking: How did communities respond? When did they show up for each other? Japanese American activists supported the Civil Rights Movement and later spoke out against policies targeting Muslim and immigrant communities. That is what solidarity looks like in practice.

"Second, stay consistently involved. One-time support is not enough. Join community organizations, volunteer across cultural groups and build relationships before a crisis happens. These connections make it possible to respond quickly and meaningfully when issues arise.

"Third, speak up. During the rise in anti-Asian hate, many people advocated for their own communities. Solidarity means doing the same for others. Call out harmful rhetoric. Support policies that expand access to care and resources. Use your voice to amplify issues that may not directly affect you. Silence allows the same patterns to continue."

LAW



Ryan Gasha
JACL Chapter: SELANOCO-Orange County
Recipient of the Thomas T. Hayashi Scholarship
School: University of California, Irvine — School of Law

Notables:

Ryan Gasha has held various roles starting at his local chapter by attending monthly board meetings in 2022. He became more involved after being selected to attend the 2022 JCA-OCA Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. He was elected as the director of public relations, which turned to a position as the Tomo no Kai liaison for the SELANOCO board. He later became co-president, then president, and he currently serves as the vp and membership chair for the chapter. While being active in the local chapter, Gasha started in 2024 with the Pacific Southwest District as the PSW District Council NY/SC youth representative, which then led him to become secretary and membership chair for the PSW District board. He also served on the 2026 JACL National Convention Membership/Credential Committee and Constitution/Bylaws Committee.

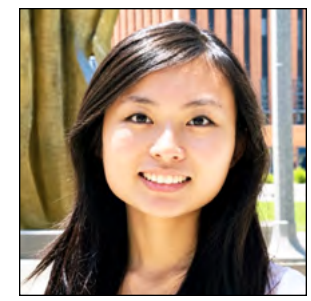
Personal Statement:

"The United States is, fundamentally, a nation of immigrants. Few groups can legitimately claim otherwise. Much of the xenophobic rhetoric seen in this country often comes from individuals or groups several generations removed from their own immigrant origins. This refusal to acknowledge their roots, no matter how distant, can become a basis for exclusion, discrimination and xenophobia. For that reason, I strongly believe recognizing a community's immigrant background is key to building solidarity, especially with newer immigrant communities.

"Ultimately, JACL, and the JA community as a whole, needs to view its history in the U.S. as tied to the immigrant experience. I believe such an approach would not only honor JA history in the United States but also allow us to maintain an open forum for other marginalized groups. The JA community can stand in solidarity with other marginalized groups by framing its identity through this lens, regardless of how removed some of its members may be from the initial immigrant experience.

"There are obvious limitations to this approach. There are non-immigrant marginalized groups like the LGBTQ+ community, Native Americans and arguably the African American community who have an extremely atypical migration experience. However, I believe this solidarity between immigrant communities is just the first step in the right direction toward a broader solidarity across different forms of marginalization."

PERFORMING ARTS



Kara Yokoyama
JACL Chapter: National Associate
Recipient of the Aiko Susanna Hiratsuka Scholarship
School: University of Southern California

Notables:

Kara Yokoyama has been a member of the National Associates JACL for two years and has attended

» See SCHOLARSHIP on page 15



A NATIONAL GUIDE TO NOTABLE COMMUNITY EVENTS

CALENDAR

NCWNP

Nikkei Dogs Fundraiser
Sacramento, CA
Oct. 17; 5:30-8:30 p.m.
Buddhist Church of Florin
7235 Pritchard Road
Price: $12 Adults; $6 Ages 4-12
Come and enjoy grilled and teriyaki hot dogs, chili, rice, cupcakes and drinks at this all-you-can-eat fundraiser benefitting the Florin JACL Scholarship and Youth Programs.
Info: Order tickets by Oct. 9 by emailing karenyamamoto@sbcglobal.net or rickuno54@gmail.com.

Watsonville Buddhist Temple's 120th Anniversary
Watsonville, CA
Oct. 24
Watsonville Hongwanji Buddhist Church
423 Bridge St.
Price: Free
This special service will include the *Kieshiki* ceremony where members can receive their Buddhist name, the *Eitaikyo* service and a celebration luncheon.
Info: Visit www.wbtemple.org.

Waku Waku Japanese Culture Workshop
Stockton, CA
Oct. 24; 10 a.m.-1 p.m.
Buddhist Church of Stockton
2820 Shimizu Dr.
Price: Free
This workshop, hosted by the Stockton JACL, French Camp JACL and Lodi JACL, will offer a Japanese culture experience for kids through storytelling and hands-on activities. This workshop is funded by a JACL Legacy Fund Grant.
Info: Email egirxbass@yahoo.com or text (707) 357-1236.

PSW

JACL Riverside General Meeting, Elections & Light Lunch
Riverside, CA
Nov. 7; Noon-3 p.m.
Arlington Public Library, Community
9556 Magnolia Ave.
Join the chapter for an afternoon of community, connection and fellowship. Guest speaker is Glen Tanaka of Tanaka Farms in Irvine, Calif., who will speak about his work with Kansha History Project and Project Uketsugu in preserving the legacy of the Issei and Nisei farmers.
Info: RSVP by Nov. 7 to Michiko Yoshimura at michyosh677@gmail.com or call (951) 313-3279.

Historic Wintersburg Sushi and Sake Fundraiser
Huntington Beach, CA
Nov. 7; 5-7 p.m.
St. Wilfrid's Episcopal Church
18631 Chapel Lane
Price: $100 Early Bird (Before Oct. 10); $125 General Admission (Deadline Oct. 31)
This event is presented by the Historic Wintersburg Conservancy to benefit Historic Wintersburg, site of one of the first Japanese American churches in Orange County and the last one standing. It represents an irreplaceable part of JA history.
Info: To RSVP and purchase tickets, visit https://givebutter.com/historic-wintersburg-2026-fall-fundraiser.

PNW

Bellevue College's Japan Week
Bellevue, WA
Oct. 10
Bellevue College
3000 Landerholm Circle S.E.
Price: Free
The college campus will be open to the community to help celebrate this 10th annual cultural event. Attendees can also view the "Hiroshima-Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Exhibit," on loan from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in Japan.
Info: Visit https://studentweb.bellevuecollege.edu/japan-week/.

IDC

2026 Japanese Cultural Bazaar!
Colorado Springs, CO
Oct. 24; 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
PPUW Family Success Center
1520 Verde Dr.
Price: Free Admission and Parking
All are welcome at this family-friendly event to explore authentic Japanese goods, connect with local vendors and discover traditional crafts and unique gifts.
Info: To register for free, visit https://www.japanamerica.org/event-6746693/ Registration.

MDC

Kansha Project Go Go Go! 15th Anniversary & Reunion
Chicago, IL
Oct. 18; 1-4 p.m. CST
Kamehachi Northbrook
1320 Shermer Road
Price: $75-$150 Tickets
Come reconnecct, celebrate community and support the future of the Kansha Project. Honorees are Bill Yoshino and Pat Harada.
Info: To RSVP, visit https://bit.ly/kansha15th.

Twin Cities JACL Chrysanthemum Banquet 80th Anniversary
St. Paul, MN
Oct. 24; 5:30 p.m.
Minnesota Humanities Center
Price: $40 Member; $50 Nonmember; $30 Student
This year's celebration banquet will feature special guest Tamlyn Tomita and a special slide show to commemorate the chapter's 80 years.
Info: To register, email angelseyf@gmail.com.

EDC

Second Annual Japan-America Friendship Festival
Newport, R.I.
Oct. 17; 10-4 p.m.
Touro Park
5 Touro Park St. W
Price: Free
Celebrate culture, connection and community, complete with food, taiko drumming, martial arts performances and activities for kids.
Info: Visit https://www.jasne-janafa.org.

'Stories on the Planet: Asagi Maeda'
Brockton, MA
Thru Nov. 8
Fuller Craft Museum
455 Oak St.
Price: Admission by Donation
This exhibit features the wearable art of Japanese metalsmith Asagi Maeda, who creates miniature sculptural worlds designed to be worn on the body using materials such as wood and plexiglass.
Info: Visit https://fullercraft.org. ■

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Events in the calendar section are listed based on space availability. Place a 'Spotlight' ad with photos of your event for maximum exposure.
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AMERICAN HOLIDAY TRAVEL

2026 TOUR SCHEDULE.

CHRISTMAS MARKET CANADA HOLIDAY TOUR (Carol Hida). . . . . Dec 1-7
Vancouver City Tour, Grouse Mountain Skyride, Shipyards Christmas Market, Ferry to Victoria Island, Butchart Gardens, High Tea at Fairmont Empress Hotel, Victoria Christmas Market & Fair, Van Dusen Festival of Lights.

2027 TOUR SCHEDULE (Preview)

FANTASTIC FLORIDA & KEYS HOLIDAY TOUR (Carol Hida) . . . . . Mar 11-18
Miami, Ft Lauderdale, Everglades National Park, Homestead, Key West, Marathon Key, Hemingway Home.
JAPAN SPRING COUNTRYSIDE TOUR (Ernest Hida). . . . . Apr 4-15
Tokyo, Niigata, Sado Island, Kanazawa, Amanohashidate, Tottori, Kyoto.
JAPAN HOLIDAY CRUISE . . . . **Rescheduled to 2028** . . . . . Apr 8–25
Tokyo, Yokohama, Amaezaki, Osaka, Kochi, Fukuoka, Sokcho(S.Korea), Kanazawa, Sakata, Aomori, Otaru, Hakodate, Yokohama. Holland America Cruise.
NATIONAL PARKS & CANYONS HOLIDAY TOUR (Carol Hida). . . . . Apr 25-30
Las Vegas, Hoover Dam, Mob Museum, Grand Canyon West & Skywalk, Mesquite, Bryce Canyon, St. George, Zion National Park.
TULIP FESTIVAL & GREAT LAKES HOLIDAY TOUR (Carol Hida). . . . . May 6-14
Chicago, Grand Rapids, Holland Tulip Festival, Mackinac Island, Green Bay, Milwaukee.
KOREA HOLIDAY TOUR (Ernest Hida) . . . . . May 11-24
Seoul, Bullet Train to Busan, Jeju Island, Jeonju, Nami Island, DMZ, few K-Drama sites.
GRANDPARENTS-GRANDCHILDREN JAPAN TOUR (Ernest Hida). . . . . .Jun 20-30
Tokyo, Atami, Hiroshima, Kyoto. Craftmaking hands-on experience.
HOKKAIDO SUMMER HOLIDAY TOUR (Ernest Hida). . . . . July 11-23
Furano Asahikawa, Wakkanai, Rishiri Island, Sapporo, Noboribetsu, Lake Toya, Hakodate, Tokyo.
DANUBE RIVER CRUISE (Carol Hida). . . . . Aug 22-Sep 4
Budapest, Bratislava, Vienna, Weissenkirchen, Linz, Passau, Vilshofen, Prague. AmaWaterways Cruise Line.
JAPAN AUTUMN COUNTRYSIDE TOUR TOUR (Ernest Hida). . . . . Oct 14-27
Kyushu, Shikoku.
OKINAWA HOLIDAY TOUR (Ernest Hida). . . . . Nov 12-22
Okinawa, Ishigaki Island, Iriomote Island, Taketomi Island.

For more information and reservations, please contact:

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News Briefs

N.Y. Times Exec Slain; Calif. Couple Arrested

Shouyong Zhang and Shili Chen, both 77, of the Bay Area town of Dublin, Calif., have been arraigned on numerous charges after they were arrested following allegedly ambushing and shooting to death their son-in-law, Jonathan McKinsey, 40, on the afternoon of Sept. 26 at Dublin Sports Grounds. He was the *New York Times'* director of engineering for its games department. Zhang and Chen are the parents of McKinsey's wife, Candice Jang. They had three children together before beginning divorce and child-custody proceedings. According to published reports, the elderly couple are alleged to have each taken turns shooting McKinsey in the venue's parking lot. McKinsey and Jang, who were married in 2011, had a relationship that involved suicide attempts by McKinsey and allegations that McKinsey had struck their then-6-year-old son in the face.

Asian Hall of Fame Reveals 2026 Inductees

Former Dodgers pitching ace Hideo Nomo was among the Class of 2026 Medalists for the organization's upcoming event on Nov. 5 in Los Angeles. Joining Nomo: Miky Lee, Centennial Medal of Lifetime Achievement; Sophie Chang, Humanitarian Service Medal of Honor; and Lynn and Steve Valbuena, Rich Le Roy and Sabrina Castaneda, Heritage Excellence Medal. Inductees are Dave Lu, managing partner, Hyphen Capital; Dr. Charles Huang, founder and chairman, Pasaca Capital Inc.; Frank Buckley, KTLA 5 news anchor; Jessica Sanchez, 2025 winner, "America's Got Talent"; Jerry and Charlene Lee, philanthropists; Kitty Lo, chair, MHG; Lisa Lu, cinema trailblazer; Maggie Tseng, founder and CEO, TAO; Rosé of Blackpink, Simran Baidwan, Emmy-winning executive producer; Din Tai Fung, Global Family Legacy inductee; TSMC, Corporate Tech inductee; Dennis Quaid and Robert Vargas, goodwill ambassadors; and LAPD Detective Sharon Kim, Advocacy Prize. Serving as master of ceremonies will be KCBS anchor Suzie Suh.

— P.C. Staff

SCHOLARSHIP » continued from page 13

JACL National Conventions since 2016. In 2022, she performed Nihon Buyō at the convention hosted in Las Vegas. She began training in traditional dance when she was 3 and is currently a part of the Bando Ryu Kyō no Kai. Yokoyama is also a part of the Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu Karate in Little Tokyo, where she has helped seniors and women with self-defense workshops. In addition, she has served on the Nisei Week Festival Foundation since 2018 and volunteers at the *Pacific Citizen* newspaper. She is attending the University of Southern California to pursue a MS in stem cell biology and regenerative medicine.

Personal Statement:

"We are once again seeing people taken away from their homes and being targeted based on their appearance. Feelings of trust and care within communities are now being replaced by fear and uncertainty, creating a confusing reality for younger generations, who wonder why they must hide who they are in a place they believed they were free to be themselves.

"Establishing open discussion between the Japanese American community and other marginalized groups by creating safe spaces can bring our communities closer.

"Places like Little Tokyo, which was once the gathering place where Japanese Americans were forced to assemble before being sent to the World War II internment camps, has evolved into a community that connects with other communities like Boyle Heights.

"Through these shared experiences, these spaces create opportunities for solidarity and mutual understanding to take action against injustices.

"Increased media coverage is also important to raise awareness of this injustice. Even if it may not immediately lead to policy changes, it has the power to reach the hearts of everyone watching. Change will be stirring in the next generation to understand that this is not the world we should be living in.

"We are seeing the past repeating itself in the present, bringing a sad reminder that lessons were not learned. Although we cannot change the dreadful past, we have the power to use its lessons to help others during these difficult times. Sharing resources, stories and lending our voices will strengthen our bonds and support for one another."

STUDENT AID



Cristina Diaz
JACL Chapter: Arizona
Recipient of the Abe & Esther Hagiwara Scholarship
School: University of Arizona College of Medicine — Phoenix

Notables:

Cristina Diaz has been involved with the JACL from a young age, beginning with the San Jose chapter and eventually the San Diego and Arizona chapters while attending college. She was a recent Kakahashi participant. Diaz graduated from the University of California, San Diego, with an MS in biology and will be pursuing a doctorate of medicine at the University of Arizona College of Medicine — Phoenix.

In MEMORIAM

(Note: Boldfaced, blue names in the PDF version are active hyperlinks.)

Arakaki, Nancy, 99, Honolulu, HI, April 26.



Endo, Linda Kay, 63, Clearfield, UT, Jan. 6.



Enomoto, Mary, 96, Cerritos, CA, May 9.

Enomoto, Patricia Toyoko, 67, Tallahassee, FL, Jan. 4.

Hamabata, Paula, 75, Kaneohe, HI, Aug. 3.



Higaki, Ann Yayoe, 94, Glenview, IL, Aug. 15.

Hirabayashi, Midori, 109, San Mateo, CA, June 4.

Ikeda, Matsue, 97, Kailua Kona, HI, July 31.

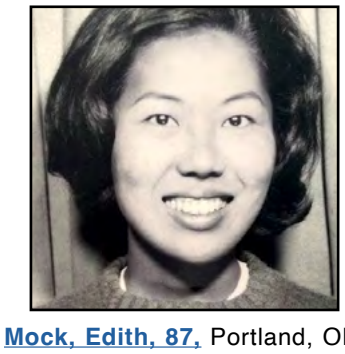


Maeda, Tom Takashi, 97, Gardena, CA, Sep 18.

Matsuo, Thelma, 98, Honolulu, HI, Aug. 31.

Matsuura, Ruth, 96, Mountain View, HI, Sept. 21.

Morita, Sumie, 97, Lodi, CA, Sept. 10.



Mock, Edith, 87, Portland, OR, Aug. 21.

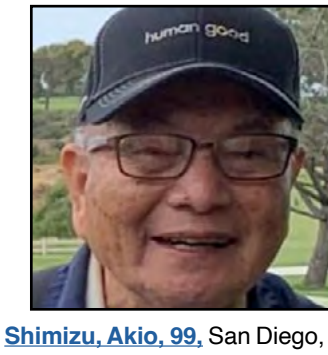
Nagai, Keiko, 100, Los Angeles, CA, May 6.

Nagai, Michael, 81, Fairfield Township, OH, June 28.



Osaki, Etsuko, 95, Portland, OR, Sept. 14.

Oshiro, Richard, 87, Bothell, WA, Aug. 17.



Shimizu, Akio, 99, San Diego, CA, Sept. 8.

Takei, Henry H., 88, Los Angeles, CA, July 29.

Tanaka, Wanda Soi Wun, 79, Diamond Bar, CA, Aug. 28.

Terada, Dawn, 80, Lomita, CA, Aug. 2.

Uchiyama, Robert 'Bob,' 91, San Jose, CA, Sept. 8. ■

PLACE A TRIBUTE

'In Memoriam' is a free listing that appears on a limited, space-available basis. **Tributes** honor your loved ones with text and photos and appear in a timely manner at the rate of $25/column inch.

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Gerald Fukui President

Personal Statement:

"I grew up in a multicultural and multigenerational household. My siblings and I are mixed-race Japanese and Cuban American, and we spent much of our childhood with our grandparents, both Sansei originally from Hawaii. From my interactions within both the Japanese American community and Latino community, I witnessed firsthand how alike both groups are: the emphasis on family, preserving cultural heritage and resilience in the face of oppression.

"The Japanese American community holds a unique space in our nation's history due to our community's forced relocation and subsequent internment during World War II. This injustice in the name of national security was later unfounded, as Japanese Americans were not the 'threat' to the United States that they were initially labeled. However, this historical injustice must be continued to be shared and denounced, as we currently see similar tactics being utilized against other immigrant populations in the current day.

"I believe the Japanese American community has an obligation to speak out against injustices in all forms to ensure that what previously happened to our community does not repeat itself. While there were few in number, there were indeed others who supported Japanese Americans during the time of the internment camps. For instance, there are stories of white American families who helped protect the businesses and homes of Japanese Americans who were forced into the internment camps and later returned their property to their owners once they were released from the camps. However, these instances were not as common, and coupled with wartime prejudices and perceptions, there was not as much public support against the treatment of Japanese Americans at the time.

"Today, we as a community can do more to become the protectors and advocates for others that our community did not have during the internment camps. The JACL has already done so with [its] vocal denouncement of government tactics and ICE raids targeting these vulnerable populations and can continue to promote equity through protests and pushes for policy changes."

Joshua Lang
JACL Chapter: Eden Township
Recipient of the Dr. George Goro & Nettie Muramoto Scholarship
School: Occidental College



Notables:

Joshua Lang first started his involvement with JACL through Eden Township chapter events. His early exposure through the Eden Township community introduced him to JACL's mission of cultural preservation and community building, which sparked his joy for service and leadership. He is currently attending Occidental College, where he is majoring in economics and math.

Personal Statement:

"I have tried to support other minority communities while continuing to grow my knowledge of my roots and that of other cultures and ethnicities. Growing up in the Bay Area's diverse community, surrounded by a family deeply connected to Japanese American culture, inspired me to found Occidental College's Nikkei Student Union in early 2026. Through NSU, I've connected with more Japanese American peers and culture enthusiasts than ever, exploring our role in carrying traditions forward. We collaborate with groups like the Black Student Union, Latinx Student Union and other Asian organizations on events and activities, a step toward standing together amid growing division and campus inequities.

"Working with these clubs, conversations about deportation with the Latinx community, Black violence and issues in the Middle East came up naturally. Having conversations with club members whose family and friends are directly affected reminded me of the challenges my ancestors faced: being forcibly removed from homes, loyalty being tested and AAPI violence during Covid. . . . But now, by understanding our past trauma and having been assimilated into the country for generations, staying silent is not an option, especially in the digital age.

"Using our voices to support minority groups facing similar struggles gives us initiative to stop history from repeating itself. Our generation has the backing and platforms of visibility our ancestors didn't. Their sacrifices gave us the ability to speak up.

"Recognizing these parallels through my college experience and the diverse body of Japanese Americans we now have has created an interconnected web of multiethnic backgrounds. This gives direction in how we as a community can stand in solidarity with others while continuing to stay rooted in our culture. As a Japanese Chinese American leading Oxy NSU, I see our assimilation-driven diversity as our greatest asset for building lasting coalitions with other marginalized groups." ■



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