

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Along with the Water

Intergenerational Conflict, Interracial Cooperation, and
the 20th Century Japanese American Citizens League

By

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Abstract

In the decades following the attainment of naturalization rights for first generation (Issei) Japanese Americans in 1952, the Japanese American Citizens League gradually shifted from a focus solely on Japanese American interests to a concern for marginalized Americans of all ancestries. Centering on the period from 1952-2002, this paper seeks to examine the factors at play as this evolution occurred, ultimately pinpointing a generational shift in the organization's leadership, from second generation (Nisei) to third generation (Sansei), as the primary impetus. Utilizing the JACL's newspaper, the *Pacific Citizen*, as a main primary source base, this paper is presented with the intention of pushing the temporal boundaries of Japanese American history, which has largely been confined to the years before, during, and immediately after incarceration. In 1992, as the JACL's fight for redress and reparations for incarceration officially came to a close, the organization was faced with the difficult task of determining what its function would be when there appeared to be no issues specific to the Japanese American community, a situation that in many ways mirrored the position JACLers of 1952 had encountered after naturalization rights for Issei had been secured. With Sansei who had come of age during the Civil Rights Movement at the helm, the course the organization was ultimately pushed down would be quite different from that which the Nisei had chosen to follow in the years after 1952. Yet such a new direction and purpose would only be solidified after the culmination of an intergenerational conflict over differing political ideologies that would begin in the 1960s and last over two decades.

**Black, White and Yellow
(Nisei: The Quiet
Americans–Yellow?)**

If,
 Black is the steelhead trout
 That fights against the rushing water
 To spawn its eggs of freedom
Then,
 White must be the cascading water
 That tumbles down
 From the Sierras of injustices
And,
 Yellow must be the deadwood
 That flows along with the water
 That ends up at the quiet pool.

- Mas F. Shono, 1970
Pacific Citizen

Introduction

In December of 1953, with the 1954 biennial convention just months away, Japanese American Citizens' League member Roy Nishikawa contemplated what the convention theme, "New Horizons," would mean for an organization that, with the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, had accomplished all of the major policy goals that had been outlined at the first convention following incarceration, held six years prior. In an article for the JACL's newspaper, the *Pacific Citizen*, he wrote, "Looking ahead, perhaps, the time has now come ... when JACL can concern itself not less with persons of Japanese ancestry but more with Americans of all ancestry."¹ Three years later, at a 1956 convention with the theme of "Changing Perspectives," this progressive call to action would be cemented as a component of the league's national platform in the form of a mandate dictating that the organization "on local and regional levels, should do all it can to develop a better understanding of the problems of other racial and minority groups."²

Today, all it takes is a brief glance at the most recent issues of the *Pacific Citizen* to realize that the JACL has come a long way towards realizing the intent formalized in the 1956 mandate. The June 2020 headline "Gambatte for Black Lives Matter!"³ and articles outlining and discussing ways in which Japanese Americans can support the movement and act in solidarity underscore an organization that is willing to look beyond the concerns of the Japanese American.⁴ In addition to engaging in efforts such as the push for African American reparations with H.R. 40, the JACL also frequently works in coalition with other Asian American groups and

¹ Roy Nishikawa, "New Horizons," *Pacific Citizen*, December 18, 1953, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1953), Section C, p. 2.

² Jerry Enomoto, "Shades Drawn for last time on 14th Biennial," *Pacific Citizen*, December 21, 1956, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1956), Section A, p. 2.

³ "Gambatte" can mean something along the lines of "do your best" or "work hard."

⁴ *Pacific Citizen*, June 26-July 16 2020, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 2020).

has recently partnered with Tsuru for Solidarity, an organization made up of “Japanese American social justice advocates working to end detention sites and support front-line immigrant and refugee communities that are being targeted by racist, inhumane immigration policies.”⁵

However, despite the promising language of their 1956 mandate, throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century, members and leaders within the JACL remained reluctant to look beyond the Japanese American community as it does today. Reflecting on his tenure, when he had spoken out against calls by members to fight against *all* human rights issues, regardless of whether or not they affected Japanese Americans, Shigeki Sugiyama, the 1974-76 president of the JACL, remained firm in his belief that “certainly JACL needed to work with other organizations, but I felt its primary concern was its own constituency and its own community.”⁶

This sentiment was echoed by another president, K. Patrick Okura, who recalled that, as the Civil Rights Movement was gaining momentum in the 1960s, “it was the feeling of a great majority of our chapter leaders that what the blacks did was their business, their problem.”⁷ In 2020, the JACL classified the killing of George Floyd as ‘front page news,’ yet 65 years prior it had had nothing to say about the murder of Emmett Till, provoking the question: what factors were at play as the JACL expanded its focus beyond the Japanese American community and how and when did this shift occur?

In order to attempt to answer this question one needs to first examine factors within the JACL that may have preoccupied their attention, narrowing their focus to the Japanese American community. While many changes have occurred within the JACL over the decades, one claim

⁵ “JACL Statement Submitted to House Judiciary in Support of HR 40,” *jacl.org*, March 2, 2021, <https://jacl.org/statements/jacl-statement-submitted-to-house-judiciary-in-support-of-hr-40>. “Statement on Behalf of Tsuru for Solidarity,” *jacl.org*, May 20, 2020, <https://jacl.org/statements/statement-on-behalf-of-tsuru-for-solidarity>.

⁶ Bill Hosokawa, *JACL: In Quest of Justice*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 333.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

that would never disappear completely is the argument that if the JACL doesn't possess the resources to address issues within the Japanese American community, it should not be expending time and energy looking beyond it. Running alongside this claim was the notion, frequently touted in the years following 1952, that with Issei naturalization rights secured there were no longer any more Japanese American-specific issues and, thus, no need for a Japanese American Citizens League engaged in politics when it could be serving an important role as a social or community service organization.

Beginning as early as the 1950s, some individuals both within and outside of the JACL would often voice the opinion that Japanese Americans had finally 'attained equality' in the United States. While others disagreed, the resonance this sentiment had amongst Japanese Americans can be linked to the dissonance that arose from the reasoning of those within the community who drew a line between issues that were specific to the Japanese American community and issues that the Japanese American community faced that were also shared with other minority groups. While issues such as fair housing and employment, segregation, and anti-miscegenation affected sections of the Japanese American community, they were not viewed as 'Japanese American issues' and were thus, at times, brushed off as battles not to be fought by the Japanese American community. This is not to say that the JACL was not involved in such struggles for civil liberties: they were, but not to the same extent that the organization delved into policies that they considered to be the central thrust of their policy goals.

From the end of incarceration up through the present, there have only been two issues which have fully absorbed the resources and attention of the JACL, both of which were specific to the Japanese American community: (1) securing naturalization rights for Issei and (2) redress and reparations for all who suffered the injustices of evacuation and incarceration. Evidencing a

lack of any substantial civil rights-focused push within the JACL for over a decade following the 1952 attainment of Issei naturalization rights, JACL giant, Mike Masaoka, would concede in 1969 that one of the JACL's projects from that year had been the "first major legislative effort sparked by the JACL since the early fifties."⁸ Indeed, the 1969 "effort to strike off the statute books the so-called concentration camp authorization law" that Masaoka was referring to would not garner close to the amount of attention that the 1952 battle had received and is not even mentioned on the official timeline of the JACL's political activities that can today be found on the organization's website.⁹ The only issue that would come to hold the same level of unifying and driving power as the 1952 fight would be the redress struggles of the late 1970s and the 1980s, which one JACL member speculated "may be the last issue that the JACL will fight that had a national focus,"¹⁰ an observation that naturally led to a question the organization had been attempting to answer since 1952: what is the function of the JACL when there are no issues specific to the Japanese American community?

In 1952, after the JACL had accomplished all of the goals it had set out to tackle six years prior, members and leaders were left to determine what to do next, a dilemma that would come to haunt the organization throughout the rest of the century. Should it be a social organization for Japanese Americans, or a group dedicated to educating the rest of the country about the Japanese American experience, or should it continue to pursue civil rights in a way similar to how it had worked to secure naturalization for the Issei? Should the JACL work on behalf of members only, or just Nisei, or just Japanese Americans?¹¹ What about new immigrant Japanese Americans,

⁸ Mike Masaoka, "'69 Inaugurates new Pacific Era," *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1969 (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1969), Section A, p. 2.

⁹ "JACL History," *jacl.org*, <https://jacl.org/history>.

¹⁰ Randolph Shibata, "JACL: What to do, where to go?," *Pacific Citizen*, December 1996, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1996), Section B, p. 13.

¹¹ Issei: first generation, Nisei: second generation, Sansei: third generation, Yonsei: fourth generation, Gosei: fifth generation, Rokusei: sixth generation.

were they to be included within the JACL's focus? Ultimately, the JACL would be unable to settle on a singular purpose or goal until redress captured its attention and even then, it would only find a temporary reprieve from having to address such difficult questions. This, however, leaves one to wonder what then occupied JACL efforts between 1952 and the late 1970s when redress took the spotlight. And why did the JACL begin to engage in interracial coalition building and cooperation after their success in attaining redress?

When I asked a former national director and president of the JACL for his thoughts on the latter question, his answer, after a quick moment of thought, was that it was 'generational.' As I delved into my research, I figured that there was no way that the answer to such a question could be so simple, and it wasn't. Yet he was not wrong; a generational shift within the membership and leadership of the JACL was the underlying reason for the ideological changes that have made the JACL the organization it is today. However, without understanding the differences between the political and social dispositions of the Nisei and the Sansei who were at the center of this generational shift and why such differences came to be, one cannot fully appreciate the ways in which the JACL has changed.

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Through much of the second half of the twentieth century, the JACL was primarily a Nisei organization. Nisei were the leaders of the organization, the presidents, the national directors, the national board members, the chapter presidents, the publication editors, and the members. Indeed, the award which is today referred to as the 'Japanese American of the Biennium' was once called the 'Nisei of the Biennium.' These Nisei were by no means

monolithic in their political leanings; some were stark conservatives while others were more radical. But the general makeup of the JACL's Nisei was slightly to the right of center and the reason for this can be traced to the experiences of the Japanese American community and the JACL before and during the years of incarceration.

Leading up to incarceration, the JACL, still a new organization at that point, would be the prime mover behind the Japanese American community's widespread cooperation in evacuating their homes, a position that it would receive criticism and, at times, bitter hatred in the decades that would follow. The JACL's predecessor organization, the American Loyalty League, founded in 1919, had been created in order "to provide Japanese Americans with a vehicle for exercising their obligations and defending their rights as citizens," yet also, as the name implies, "as a way of emphasizing loyalty to the United States"¹² in an era when trust in immigrants from Asia was by no means a given. Those who founded the JACL, some of whom were former Loyalty League members, shared a similar reverence and respect for such values and thus, when the US government began forcing Japanese Americans to leave the West Coast, they faced the difficult decision as to whether loyalty meant obeying the federal government's glaringly unjust orders. Ultimately, they would choose to comply with the government in an effort to further demonstrate their loyalty and pushed the rest of the Japanese American community to do the same. As historian Matthew Briones notes, "with the exception of [Jimmie] Omura and [Lincoln] Yanai," two lone dissenters, "the entirety of the Bay Area Nisei community ... accepted the JACL rationale and decided to willingly volunteer for evacuation as a gesture of goodwill and community self-preservation."¹³ Yet once Japanese Americans were living in the camps and

¹² Bill Hosokawa, *JACL: In Quest of Justice*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 25-26.

¹³ Matthew M. Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow: A Cultural History of 1940s Interracial America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 82 (ebook).

began to realize the full, horrifying scope of their situation, they started to turn against the JACL for leading them in, accusing leaders like Mike Masaoka of “‘selling them down the river’”¹⁴ and at times resorting to violence in displays of their frustration. However, this did not deter Masaoka, national secretary of the organization and in many ways its de facto leader at the time, from pushing the Japanese American community to demonstrate their ‘Americanness’ even further.

During incarceration, Masaoka would push for the establishment of a Nisei fighting unit to serve overseas in the war effort, seeking to allow Japanese Americans to further “demonstrate their loyalty through military service.”¹⁵ In her work *The Color of Success*, historian Ellen Wu has argued that Japanese Americans’ military service during World War II would go on to form the basis for a political ideology that would define the JACL throughout the first decades following the US victory. Attempting to capitalize on claims of heroic Americanism that the brave Nisei soldiers had bought with blood overseas, the 1950s would see JACL leaders wage “an extensive public relations campaign anchored by the figure of the Nisei soldier, an intentionally crafted archetype of Japanese American manhood that foregrounded the notion of martial patriotism.”¹⁶ These efforts would ultimately be successful as Nisei sacrifices lent credence to Japanese American calls for civil rights and bolstered the acceptability of Japanese Americans within the white communities that many settled in following incarceration. Indeed, Nisei efforts to assimilate into mainstream middle class white America were so successful, Wu

¹⁴ Mike Masaoka, Bill Hosokawa, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka: An American Saga*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987), p. 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁶ Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 73.

argues, that they would eventually give rise to the Model Minority myth, a stereotyping narrative that some within the JACL actively worked to perpetuate.

In choosing to cooperate with the government during incarceration and then further demonstrating their loyalty through the push for a Nisei fighting unit, the JACL had chosen to adopt an understanding of the American sociopolitical landscape in which dissent and protest were not seen as a legitimate and effective means for the Japanese American community to advance and move beyond the stigma Japan's wartime actions had placed on them. Following the years of incarceration, the JACL would not stray from this disposition with Mike Masaoka even strongly affirming in his memoirs that throughout his time with the organization, "what we accomplished was achieved 'through the system.'"¹⁷ In validating such a stance, Masaoka, writing in 1987, would point to the substantial economic and social progress that the Japanese American community had seen since the years of incarceration. Indeed, while scholars have pointed out the 'glass ceiling' Japanese Americans have faced in spite of such progress, progress that can by no means be solely attributed to the JACL's efforts, Japanese Americans had come far enough that by the 1970s America was beginning to talk about how Japanese Americans were "outwhiting the whites."¹⁸

When asked to explain how the Japanese American had reached the point of being the 'model minority,' most Nisei within the JACL during the twentieth century would agree with Masaoka, citing the ways in which they had kept their heads down and worked hard to get where they were, never complaining and never protesting regardless of what injustices were thrown at them. Indeed, Bill Hosokawa, one of the most prominent Nisei within the JACL and perhaps its

¹⁷ Mike Masaoka, Bill Hosokawa, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka: An American Saga*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987), p. 23.

¹⁸ Paul Brinkley-Rogers, "'Outwhiting the Whites,'" *Pacific Citizen*, December 22-29, 1972, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1972), Section D, p. 1.

greatest proponent of this bootstrap narrative, would go on to title his book covering the second generation's success *Nisei: The Quiet Americans*, a choice which would lead to widespread conflict within the organization when it was published in 1969.¹⁹ Yet while some Nisei fell on the side of the debate that objected to the use of the word 'quiet' to describe the Nisei, the greatest cries of protest came from their Sansei children who argued that the title only served to perpetuate a myth of timid and subservient Japanese Americans, a stereotype especially volatile at a time when it could be easily coopted as a point of contrast against the increasingly militaristic stances some African Americans were taking towards civil rights.

While today Japanese American generational distinctions have become less concrete due to immigration and intergenerational marriages, throughout much of the twentieth century they held much more weight, especially to Nisei parents within the JACL raising their Sansei children to become the future of the organization. However, the future the Sansei brought with them wasn't necessarily the future that their parents had anticipated. Many Sansei would ultimately come of age during the 1960s, an era that saw the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and, by the end of the decade, the emergence of Black Power, ethnic pride, and anti-war movements. Developing their political consciousness in this time of change, many Sansei would come to be dissatisfied with the passive 'work-within-the-system' ideology they ascribed to their parents. As they saw their peers take to the streets to protest injustice within the American system, these Sansei began to question why their parents had not protested incarceration and had seemed to stand idly by throughout the first years of the Civil Rights Movement. The frustration such questioning spawned would ultimately give rise to an intergenerational disconnect that lasted throughout much of the rest of the century.

¹⁹ Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1969).

By the turn of the century, while the Nisei who were still alive didn't necessarily agree with their now middle-aged Sansei children's political leanings, tempers had at least died down from the boiling point they had reached during the 1970s. This was thanks in no small part to the redress movement, which had brought Nisei and Sansei together in common cause. Throughout the years of the movement, Sansei finally had the chance to hear the Nisei explain the choices they had made during the years of incarceration firsthand, a touching experience for many Sansei who had been asking Nisei to open up about the war years since they were children. However, while such experiences allowed Sansei to gain an understanding as to why their parents had the political dispositions they did, they by no means made the Nisei more receptive to the political dispositions of the Sansei.

During the 1970s, Nisei who had earlier attempted to prepare the Sansei to take over the JACL began actively working to keep Sansei out of positions that would allow them to wrest control of the organization and determine its policy platforms. It would not be until the latter stages of redress and the years that followed its attainment in the 1990s that the Sansei would finally come to control the organization. By then, the Sansei had lost much of the fiery zeal that had led them to clash heads with the Nisei in the 1960s and 70s, yet so had the mainstream Civil Rights Movement. Radical groups such as the Black Panthers had dissolved and black conservatives such as Thomas Sowell and Clarence Thomas were having their day in the limelight as a debate over affirmative action ignited the country. However, regardless of whether or not they still embraced the more aggressive political tactics they had as youths, many Sansei continued to carry with them the same ideals they had in the 1960s and 70s: a dissatisfaction with America's systemic racism, an appreciation for ethnic pride and an Asian American

identity, and the belief that minorities suffer *together* under the American racial hierarchy and, thereby, ought to work together.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Nisei of the JACL, for the most part, never adopted a new political ideology. The JACL, however, did and the reason it did so is because by the end of the twentieth century the JACL was no longer Nisei: it was led by Sansei who had come of age during an era in which the youth of the country had begun to question the American socio-political order. These Sansei would, in turn, pass down their political values to their own children, many of whom make up the members and leaders of the JACL today. While many from this newer generation may not carry with them the same driving anger that some of their parents held on to in the 1960s and 70s, they were nonetheless raised in a world that has been shaped by the actions of their parents' generation and, thus, carry with them a foundational understanding of what is and isn't acceptable within the realm of social justice that resides much to the left of their Nisei grandparents.

Since the 1990s, when the Sansei finally came to hold a steady hand in steering the JACL's direction, the organization has worked more and more with other Asian American groups and groups outside of the Asian American community. Indeed, as early as 1991 members within the JACL were calling on the organization to make moves to combat Arab American discrimination with the understanding that the geopolitical climate in the Middle East could affect innocent immigrants at home just as US and Japan relations had affected the Issei and the Nisei in the twentieth century. The adoption of this framework of thinking, whereby other minority groups' experiences are interpreted and understood through the lens of Japanese Americans' own historical experiences, can in many ways explain why the current leaders of the JACL feel a responsibility to be involved in the fight for African American reparations given that

they had been successful in achieving reparations through redress themselves. With most Nisei having passed on, the JACL today is primarily composed of Sansei, Yonsei, and even Gosei and Rokusei and, while the organization has never abandoned the Nisei imperative to work ‘within the system,’ the differing political ideologies of these new generations have pushed them towards different goals as they have worked within these parameters.

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In mapping out the Japanese American experience, much of the scholarship that has been produced has tended to focus on the years before, during, and immediately after incarceration, with the second half of the twentieth century often serving as an afterthought or an epilogue. Even Jere Takahashi’s *Nisei/Sansei*, a study founded on a number of interviews conducted with Nisei and Sansei in an attempt to delineate their differing and changing ‘political styles,’ is primarily confined to the 1960s and 70s.²⁰ Thus, in presenting this work, it is my intention to push the temporal boundaries that Japanese American history has confined itself to in order to examine how the intergenerational conflicts of the twentieth century shaped the Japanese American and Asian American communities of today.

The sociopolitical landscape that Japanese Americans operate within today is vastly different from the world that Issei and Nisei navigated in the twentieth century and, had my research stopped anywhere short of the 1990s, I am of the belief that I would have been unable to fully understand the ever-shifting trajectories that made the JACL what it is today. While there have always been those within the JACL who have claimed that the organization is

²⁰ Jere Takahashi, *Nisei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American identities and politics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

representative of the Japanese American community, and an even greater number of individuals both within and outside it that have disagreed, I nonetheless would argue that as a ‘Japanese American organization,’ the JACL offers a unique and valuable lens through which to view the Japanese American experience due to the fact that, regardless of which side the JACL was on in each of the Japanese American community’s many conflicts, it was near-impossible for it to avoid any given issue or interest that captured the attentions or passions of the community as a whole.

In tracing and analyzing the evolution of this organization and its relation to the Japanese American community and other communities, I utilized memoirs, dug through a few folders of files from the Chicago JACL’s chapter archive, and drew on internet sources such as the organization’s official website. However, the source that served as the foundation of my research was the *Pacific Citizen*, the organization’s newspaper. The “voice of the JACL, its hopes and expectations,”²¹ the *Pacific Citizen*, in an era before the advent of the internet, was described by one member as “the only media through which the rank-and-file members have been able to communicate with each other.”²² Indeed, even in the last years of the twentieth century, the value of the *Pacific Citizen* was still recognized, with another member referring to it as “the ‘glue’ that informs and holds the membership together.”²³ In tapping the *Pacific Citizen*, I utilized the weekly issues at times, but my main source of information was the annual Special Holiday issues.

²¹ Clifford Uyeda, “Pacific Citizen Board,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1985, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1985), Section A, p. 59.

²² Abe Hagiwara, “Assessment of 1960-70 Planning Commission Report at Mid-Point,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1964, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1964), Section A, p. 10.

²³ Harry Kajihara, “Redress: It was a team effort,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1992, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1992), Section C, p. 6.

Each year in December, the *Pacific Citizen* put out a much longer issue that ranged anywhere from 40 to 144 pages. These issues contained a number of different features depending on the era, from chapter reports, short stories, editorials and op-eds, to officer reports from JACL officials such as the president and national director. Mike Masaoka and Bill Hosokawa could be found writing at least one article in almost every holiday issue published while they were alive, with Masaoka often offering a report and breakdown of the organization's operations during the year and Hosokawa offering his 'old guard' takes on the current state of the JACL, the community, and the US sociopolitical climate. Never missing a year, the holiday issue gave both general members and higher-ups a chance to reflect on JACL actions, or inaction, from the previous year and voice their opinions about where the organization should go in the years to come. Each gave a picture of the triumphs and trials of the year and offered a window into the many controversies and conflicts that stirred the JACL and the community it attempted to work on behalf of. It is for this reason that these issues served as the main primary source for my research as I sought to understand the evolution of the group whose voices it was intended to represent.

The period between 1952-2002 served as the primary focus of my research and was, coincidentally, the years that Harry Honda served as the editor of the *Pacific Citizen*. The year 1952, when Honda took the reins from previous editor Larry Tajiri, was also the year that the JACL completed all of the objectives it had settled on at its 1946 national convention and, for the first time, was faced with the question of 'what's next.'

While some might argue that decades are an arbitrary way to delineate time periods and eras, that hasn't stopped mainstream America, JACL members included, from artificially imposing unique understandings on each decade and its characteristics. A new decade often

symbolized a time for new beginnings, a time for reorientation, and a chance for JACL members to attempt to define what the purpose of the organization would be for the next ten years; and it is for this reason that I have sectioned the body of my work by decade, beginning with the 1950s.

Throughout the 1950s, the JACL worked to put into practice the newly won right of naturalization for Issei, doubled down on perpetuating the ‘Nisei soldier’ narrative that had helped them achieve such rights in order to secure their identity as loyal Americans in the eyes of their white neighbors and fellow Americans, and simply tried to enjoy life and build families and communities after having had so much taken from them during incarceration. For the JACL and the US as a whole, the 1960s was an era of change and turbulence. From Martin Luther King Jr.’s peaceful protests to the angered militancy of the Black Panthers, the 1960s saw demonstrations from African Americans fighting for civil rights, youth standing up against war in Vietnam, and peoples of numerous race groups seeking to find an ethnic identity and pride. It was also the decade that gave birth to a division between the Nisei and their Sansei children over differing interpretations of the legitimacy and morality of the American political system. During the 1970s, this division deepened as Sansei, some a part of the Asian American movement, looked deeper into the past and found themselves disappointed with their Nisei parents, who they believed had submitted to the system rather than fight it as they perceived themselves to be doing. Within the JACL the potential for change would arise when JACL Nisei giants Mike Masaoka and Mas Satow stepped away from the organization to let a Sansei national director take the reins, but this change wouldn’t last long as he would be pushed out of the organization by the remaining old guard who didn’t want to see such change. This schism would only begin to heal as the redress movement got underway, though it would not get into full swing until the 1980s.

While much happened for the JACL in the 1980s, for the most part redress was its sole concern, a drive that would work to unify Japanese Americans yet also drove a wedge between the JACL and the broader civil rights community as their single-issue focus diverted their attention from other important issues of the time. Perhaps the greatest change within the JACL, however, was that the Sansei were finally filing into leadership roles at the national, district, and chapter levels of the organization, setting it up for the shifts that would occur during the 1990s. The fight for redress was officially over by 1992 and the age-old question of ‘what’s next?’ once again resurfaced. However, this time, the individuals answering the question were the same individuals who had criticized the Nisei for not offering the ‘right’ answer to the same question in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. As such, the 1990s saw JACL begin to work towards expanding their coalition building within the Asian American community and with other communities of color and the gay and lesbian community, fighting on behalf of affirmative action and against hate crimes in an attempt to regain the place in the civil rights community that it had lost.

By 2000, Sansei were in many of the top positions in the JACL, including the national director chair they had been pushed out of in the 1970s and it was because of the air of change they brought with them that the JACL would be one of the first civil rights groups to respond in defense of Arab and Muslim Americans following the attacks of September 11th, a catastrophe that in many ways evoked a memory of Pearl Harbor. In 2003 the JACL would celebrate its 75th anniversary and perhaps unsurprisingly, it had still not determined exactly what its purpose is, with members asking what goals the organization ought to pursue, whether or not its existence was still necessary, and what was next. Today it is unclear whether the JACL has answered any of these questions, yet it is still here and is led by a group of individuals who share a set of

foundational beliefs and experiences vastly different from those who attempted to answer these questions over half a century ago.

The 1950s: Making ‘Hakujin’ Friends

In 1952, following their victory in the fight for naturalization rights for Issei, the members and leaders of the JACL were for the first time faced with the task of determining what was next for the JACL. However, not all the members wanted to chart the same path.

Some believed that having this one right secured by no means meant that equality had been achieved for Japanese Americans and that the JACL still had a substantial amount of work to do to put Japanese Americans on an equal footing with their white peers. But if that was the case, then how ought the JACL work towards equality? Members debated whether they should focus on securing further legislation at the national level or focus on their local communities, using service to gain respect and acceptance for Japanese American families amongst white Americans so that they could attain equality not just on paper but in the eyes of their neighbors.

Others believed that Japanese Americans had achieved equality and could now begin to utilize JACL resources in working to help Americans of other race groups. This viewpoint could at times mesh well with those who believed that equality had not been attained thanks to issues that affected all minority groups, including Japanese Americans, such as employment and housing discrimination. However, some viewed their newly attained equality as a chance to take a step back from the political arena and relax by shifting gears towards becoming a purely social organization that would allow them to enjoy their new freedom and build communities.

Ultimately, this debate would go on throughout the decade, leading one member in 1957 to argue that convention themes such as ‘New Horizons’ and ‘Changing Perspectives’ “have only pointed

out the vacuum in our national program created by the successful attainment of our major goals,” warning that if the organization did not soon find a new sense of purpose it would “become nothing more than a hail-fellow-well-met type of fraternal organization.”²⁴ Yet, despite intermittent cries from both leaders and members within the organization to turn towards a push for civil rights, this was a more or less accurate description of the role the JACL filled during the 1950s.

Reflecting back on the first years coming out of the camps, Bill Hosokawa assessed the relative ‘quietness’ of the post-war Nisei as being due to the fact that “we have been so completely wrapped up in our personal problems – rearing families, making a living, meeting mortgage payments, taking part in church and localized civic projects.”²⁵ With many Japanese Americans forced to start from scratch after having lost their homes, their businesses, and their savings during the evacuation, it is understandable that, in the first years after incarceration, many had few preoccupations other than simply getting by and surviving. In the years before incarceration had pushed the organization into the sociopolitical spotlight of the community, the JACL had been “more or less a social organization”²⁶ and in many ways that was what it would continue to be in the first decade after incarceration, as least as far as the individual chapters were concerned.

From barbeques to banquets, JACL chapter reports of the 1950s were filled with events that allowed Japanese Americans to have a brief respite from the toils of rebuilding their lives and provided them with an opportunity to connect with a community of individuals who had

²⁴ Kango Kunitsugu, ““Where Do We Go From Here?,”” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20, 1957, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1957), Section A, p. 7.

²⁵ Bill Hosokawa, “Japanese-American Relations: Worthy Partners for Building Peace,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23-30, 1966, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1966), Winter Quarterly Section, p. 5.

²⁶ Roy Nishikawa, “Focus on the Future,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20, 1957, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League), Section A, p. 2.

shared in the hardships of incarceration.²⁷ While Mike Masaoka would grumble about the “apathetic and indifferent” members of the Japanese American community whom he referred to as “‘free-riders,’ the social parasites who subsist upon the works of the relatively few JACLers,”²⁸ even within the JACL most general members wanted to focus on enjoying their freedom and saw the JACL as a means of doing so. With many in the Nisei generation having taken the opportunity to start families in the relative stability of resettlement, most chapters also began to organize woman’s auxiliaries and hold activities for the younger Sansei generation. Some even went as far as to establish sub-organizations within the JACL for the youth, such as the Detroit chapter’s “Detroit JACL Teen Club,”²⁹ a prototype for the Jr. JACL chapters that would arise in the 1960s as more and more Sansei were reaching their teen years. In doing so, the Nisei sought to provide their children with the tools to gain acceptance in a world which only a decade prior had imprisoned them simply for being of Japanese ancestry. Ultimately, this effort took on a broader form in the extensive work chapters did within their own local communities in order to secure their standing as ‘average Americans.’

Most, if not all, Japanese Americans, felt that incarceration had largely been the product of their fellow Americans’ distrust and, in order to ensure that a similar questioning of their ‘Americanness’ would never again arise, JACL chapters went to great lengths to gain respect within their respective communities and neighborhoods. In line with the advice the War Relocation Authority and white Christian outreach missionaries living in the camps had given Japanese Americans as they left the camps, once they resettled in white communities their first

²⁷ For one example, see *Pacific Citizen*, December 18, 1953, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1953), Section A, p. 21-23.

²⁸ Mike Masaoka, “Assurance of Future Lies in Responsible Organization,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23, 1955, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1955), Section B, p. 28.

²⁹ Detroit Teen Club Girls Won’t Forget Their Hayride,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19, 1958, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1958), Section B, p. 19.

goals were “to make ‘hakujiin’ (white) friends, live inconspicuously, and ‘learn to take it,’”³⁰ something JACL members especially took to heart. In taking up such a task, JACL chapters across the country did all they could to become the perfect ‘good neighbors,’ holding blood drives, community picnics, and designing a wide array of service projects to put their best foot forward in their new homes. Thanks to these efforts, by as early as 1956, sentiments echoing one Cortez chapter member’s proud declaration that “as an example of [the] esteem in which JACL is beginning to be held in this community, it has received bids for membership from our Caucasian neighbors,”³¹ could be commonly found within the pages of the JACL’s newspaper. Yet some of this newfound acceptance was also thanks to projects that Masaoka and the JACL were engaging in behind the scenes as they worked to perpetuate and capitalize on the wartime service of the Nisei soldiers.

In 1953, on the front page of the *Pacific Citizen*’s Special Holiday issue could be found a picture of a young Nisei, Hiroshi Miyamura, shaking hands with President Eisenhower after becoming the first Japanese American to be awarded the Medal of Honor.³² While he had served in the Korean War rather than the Second World War, this recognition of Miyamura’s service was simply an extension of the public relations campaign the JACL national office had been engaged in since World War II had ended. While individual chapters engaged in local commemorations of Nisei service, Masaoka and the leaders of the JACL were focused on much grander celebrations of their wartime sacrifices, with the most successful effort being the 1951

³⁰ Anne M. Blankenship, *Christianity, Social Justice, and the Japanese American Incarceration during World War II*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), p. 182.

³¹ Helen Yuge, “One Chapter (Cortez) so well esteemed members unafraid to push fund drives,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 21, 1956, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1956), Section B, p. 13.

³² “Hershey Miyamura: The Best of Niseidom,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18, 1953, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1953), cover page.

film, *Go For Broke*, on which Masaoka consulted and the JACL widely promoted.³³

Dramatically recounting the heroism of the Nisei soldier for the big screen, *Go For Broke* allowed the JACL to “refresh the memory of Nisei wartime heroism”³⁴ in order to further assure white Americans that the Japanese Americans that had moved into their communities over the past few years were just as patriotic and loyal as they were. However, as Ellen Wu has noted, the process of fostering a positive image of Japanese Americans using Nisei service was not merely an end in itself; it was also used as a means of securing the league’s more pressing political goals.³⁵

Referred to by Masaoka as his “most important achievement,”³⁶ the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act allowed the Issei, whose status as ‘enemy aliens’ had been used as justification for their incarceration, to finally become naturalized citizens after years of being denied the right to. In attaining such rights, the JACL had skillfully employed “the tried-and-true strategy of generations of veterans seeking reciprocity from the federal government,”³⁷ with Masaoka doing all he could to instill in Congress an appreciation for the stories of deserving Issei parents, including his own mother, who had lost sons fighting against fascism overseas.³⁸ While in confidential reports to JACL officers, administrative assistant Richard Akagi would express his concern and frustration over the criticism the JACL received from “liberals” that were put off by some of the less progressive features of the bill, he, Masaoka, and the rest of the

³³ Mike Masaoka, Bill Hosokawa, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka: An American Saga*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987), p. 216.

³⁴ Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 89.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁶ Mike Masaoka, Bill Hosokawa, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka: An American Saga*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987), p. 363.

³⁷ Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 94.

³⁸ Mike Masaoka, Bill Hosokawa, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka: An American Saga*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987), p. 13.

JACL national office remained true to the belief that as imperfect as the legislation may have been, the attainment of Issei naturalization rights far outweighed the potential downsides.³⁹

Thanks in great part to his dedicated work, Masaoka would arrive at the 1952 JACL national convention to be met with a crowd of JACL members waiting to congratulate him on the bill's passing and, after a fair share of celebrating, determine where the organization ought to go from there.

Though a substantial amount of work would still need to be done throughout the rest of the 1950s to aid in facilitating the naturalization of the Issei now that Congress had granted them the ability to do so, the JACL would spend just as much time during the decade attempting to define what "New Horizons," the theme of the 1954 national convention, actually meant.⁴⁰ While social activities, community projects, and public relations tended to win out at the chapter level, a number of other alternative efforts were put forward as avenues that JACL might pursue. One of the most noteworthy and, at times, the most controversial, was the possibility of using JACL members' status as Americans of Japanese ancestry to work to ensure amiable relations between the US and Japan. In discussing this, some within the JACL would argue that, given the fact that "the ups and downs of US-Japan relations has a direct bearing on the welfare of the Nisei in the United States,"⁴¹ it would be in the JACL's best interest to work to ensure such relations were friendly, while others cited the line of reasoning that saw too close a relationship with Japan as the reason Japanese Americans had been incarcerated a decade prior when international relations had soured. Initially, the JACL responded by issuing a vague statement in 1954 that it would

³⁹ "Confidential Letter to 'Chapter Presidents and National Board and Staff,'" *Japanese American Citizens League Anti-Discrimination Committee Washington Office*, (Chicago JACL Chapter Archive, unorganized), p. 4-5.

⁴⁰ Roy Nishikawa, "New Horizons," *Pacific Citizen*, December 18, 1953, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1953), p. Section C, p. 2.

⁴¹ Kango Kunitsugu, "'Where Do We Go From Here?,'" *Pacific Citizen*, December 20, 1957, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1957), Section A, p. 7.

only become involved in international relations when they had a direct bearing on the lives of Japanese Americans,⁴² though in 1958 it would backpedal slightly with a new statement which recognized that the previous policy had been “too restrictive, passive and negativistic”⁴³ and announced the creation of a committee on international relations that would review whether or not the JACL should be involved in any given issue. Ultimately, the creation of this commission wouldn’t amount to much more than the 1954 statement had as far as organizational actions went, standing simply as a token to appease those within the organization who had been criticizing its inaction. However, at the same time, it also served to bolster the JACL’s reputation in another realm of American politics that members of the organization were substantially more united behind: anticommunism.

Having been founded as a social organization, only to be thrust into a more ‘political’ role during the evacuation, the JACL was consistently reluctant throughout the 1950s to branch out into any realm of American politics that might divide the membership or garner enemies from either end of the political spectrum. In fact, section two of the JACL constitution’s second article explicitly stated that the organization “shall be non-partisan and non-sectarian and shall not be used for purposes of endorsing candidates for public offices, nor shall it engage in any other political activity whatsoever, except when the welfare and/or civil rights of persons of Japanese ancestry shall be directly affected.”⁴⁴ Yet, as an organization also dedicated to ensuring the continued perception of Japanese Americans as loyal citizens, the JACL found itself in a unique position when tasked with addressing communism, a political concern, albeit one which,

⁴² “Council Adopts Policy Statements Against Communism, Int’l Relations,” *Pacific Citizen*, September 10, 1954, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1954), p. 2.

⁴³ Shig Wakamatsu, “Policy Statement of JACL on International Relations,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19, 1958, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1958), Section A, p. 5.

⁴⁴ “JACL Constitution,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19, 1958, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1958), Section C, p. 26.

during the 1950s, was tied directly to questions of American patriotism and loyalty. Fortunately for the JACL, taking a stand against communism would ultimately prove to be much less divisive than choosing to get involved in US/Japan relations.

At the same time that the debate over US/Japan relations was dividing the organization, the JACL would receive no criticism from the members for issuing an official statement in 1954 reaffirming its “unalterable opposition to all forms of totalitarianism, including both fascism and communism.”⁴⁵ Indeed, some who supported the idea of involvement in US/Japan relations even used the organization’s staunch anticommunist stance as a point of leverage, arguing that Japan needed to be protected as the “forward bastion of American defense”⁴⁶ against communism. However, even as the statement recognized the “real external and internal menace of the international communist conspiracy,” it also condemned “the use of ‘smears,’ guilt by association, hate propaganda, fear mongering, arbitrary presumption of guilt without trial and other un-American activities in an effort to combat communism and subversion.”⁴⁷ In doing so the JACL was able to bolster its patriotic image while also critiquing the dangerous McCarthyite tactics of the early 1950s that evoked memories for Japanese Americans of the atmosphere of hatred and distrust that had pushed them into the camps only a decade prior. While supporters may have argued that communism was a threat so universal as to make combatting it a nonpolitical issue, the JACL’s statement against communism also demonstrated the flexibility of the organizations approach to ‘political’ issues, a characteristic that would be further tested by some members’ calls for a focus on civil rights.

⁴⁵ “Council Adopts Policy Statements Against Communism, Int’l Relations,” *Pacific Citizen*, September 10, 1954, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1954), p. 2.

⁴⁶ Sam Ishikawa, “Can’t Find 100% Anti-American in Japan,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 17, 1954, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1954), Section A, p. 13.

⁴⁷ “Council Adopts Policy Statements Against Communism, Int’l Relations,” *Pacific Citizen*, September 10, 1954, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1954), p. 2.

While all civil rights struggles are not matters of race and all political debates are not matters of civil rights, within the discourse of the 1950s JACL an engagement in politics was often directly conflated with and interpreted as involvement in racial politics. Indeed, when in 1957 Mike Masaoka contemplated what ‘kind’ of organization the JACL ought to be, in suggesting the possibility of the JACL as a “political action” type organization, his outline for such a group was limited to “a ‘civil rights’ organization” that would “become more active in the forefront of municipal, state, and national efforts to eliminate all racial discrimination, segregation, and humiliation.”⁴⁸ Yet given that the JACL was an ethnic organization with a constitution specifically prohibiting *partisan* politics, such a narrow disposition was by no means out of pocket. The question that remained, however, was whether or not the members of the JACL were willing to get on board with an organization committed to such ‘political’ actions.

As Roy Nishikawa’s 1953 call for the organization to begin concerning itself with the plights of Americans of *all* ancestries illustrates, there was a section of the JACL that believed that since the organization was able to find success in securing rights for Japanese Americans there was no reason it should confine its resources and efforts to aiding such a small community, especially when they seemed to be moving ever closer to holding rights equal to those of white Americans. While such conclusions would not amount to much beyond a formal commitment by the organization to “do all it can to develop a better understanding of the problems of other racial and minority groups,”⁴⁹ the JACL did take some small steps towards interracial cooperation during the 1950s. When speaking on the JACL’s commitment to civil rights for all Americans, the organization’s most frequently cited proof of such activity was that the JACL was “a charter

⁴⁸ Mike Masaoka, “‘What Is Past Is Prologue,’” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20, 1957, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1957), Section A, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Jerry Enomoto, “Shades Drawn for last time on 14th Biennial,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 21, 1956, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1956), Section A, p. 2.

and continuous since 1948 member of the National Leadership Conference on Civil Rights,”⁵⁰ a group that historian Cheryl Greenberg refers to as “the most significant civil rights coalition of the era.”⁵¹ Beyond this membership and the submission of an amicus brief in the *Brown v. Board of Education* school segregation case, however, much of the JACL’s talk of working to obtain civil rights for all Americans remained just that. While some members pointed to the need for fair employment and fair housing legislation, the JACL would not act on such inclinations until the 1960s, though there were a number of reasons that can be offered to explain such inaction.

Had there been sufficient interest in working towards the expansion of civil rights for all Americans, finances would have played a limiting role for an organization that often struggled to fund its own operations. At the 1958 national conference, the JACL would indeed adopt a formal policy that stated that the organization would “within the limits of our resources and facilities, and mindful of the primary purpose of our organization, participate in the mutual effort to assure to all Americans equal treatment and consideration in and under the law.”⁵² However, such limits were often quite narrow when, as the 1955 national treasurer described, “the problem of raising adequate finances” to even keep the organization afloat was “a chronic one.”⁵³ At times resources were so limited that the organization had to contemplate “whether the JACL should continue to be a service organization for all persons of Japanese ancestry or whether it would be

⁵⁰ “JACL’s Impressive Role during filibuster recount,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1964, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1964), Section A, p. 5.

⁵¹ Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 123.

⁵² “Watchdog role keeps eye on hard-won rights,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19, 1958, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1958), Section C, p. 6.

⁵³ Roy M. Nishikawa, “The Proposals to Meet Chapter Quotas Discussed,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23, 1955, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1955), Section B, p. 6.

for members only”⁵⁴ let alone an organization that would look beyond the problems of Japanese Americans.

Although there were members and leaders within the JACL interested in working for the extension of civil rights to all Americans, their desires were often outweighed by a larger section who preferred to confine the attention of the organization to Japanese Americans. In attempting to explain this phenomenon, one chapter president argued that the “indifference of many Nisei” could be chalked up to “a misplaced complacency that all issues peculiar to Japanese Americans have been solved and assimilation is just about complete.”⁵⁵ However, his willingness to even broach such an issue was a characteristic that many of his fellow chapter presidents did not share. Indeed, throughout the decade Mike Masaoka would repeatedly chastise chapters for their ‘apathy’ in his annual reports, decrying the fact that “local programming adn [sic.] local concerns have, to a large extent, replaced the national drive and sense of urgency.”⁵⁶ Yet some members weren’t simply passive, they actively justified their inaction.

With the social and economic success that some Japanese Americans were beginning to see, the first traces of bootstrap narratives could be seen percolating within the JACL during the 1950s. Frustrated by what they perceived as “unwarranted cries of racial discrimination not justified by the facts,”⁵⁷ individuals such as John Aiso believed that minorities, Japanese Americans included, needed to focus on improving themselves rather than decrying the actions of racist whites if they wanted to make any progress within the American system. By placing the

⁵⁴ Elmer Smith, “Did You Know?,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23, 1955, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1955), Section C, p. 27.

⁵⁵ George Kyotow, “Return of the Prodigal – 1959,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 25, 1959, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1959), Section B, p. 18.

⁵⁶ Mike Masaoka, “Assurance of Future Lies in Responsible Organization,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23, 1955, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1955), Section B, p. 28.

⁵⁷ John F. Aiso, “Probing Discrimination,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18, 1953, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1953), Section C, p. 5.

impetus for racial harmony on racial groups suffering under white discrimination, other members such as Lawrence Nakatsuka echoed Aiso's sentiment, pointing to a "minority complex"⁵⁸ that kept Japanese Americans from attaining progress in sociopolitical arenas. Taking a different tack, some sections of the organization, such as the Chicago chapter, simply argued that an aggressive civil rights course was the wrong direction, writing in 1959 that "the JACL program should place emphasis on general civic education and information rather than on pressure group-like activities,"⁵⁹ an attitude that in many ways foreshadowed the Nisei's stance on the more militant factions of the Civil Rights Movement in the decade to come.

While on rare occasions some chapters engaged in activities that had some semblance of a civil rights thrust, for the most part they remained caught up in the current of their local communities as they attempted to fit in and gain acceptance. As a result, dissatisfied with what they interpreted as 'apathy' on the part of the general membership and the fact that by the end of the decade, members of the JACL still had not solidified around one distinct course of action or purpose, leaders within the JACL decided to establish a planning committee that would pool the input of all JACL chapters in order to propose a direction that the organization would follow going into the 1960s. At the top of the committee's "10 Major Recommendations For '60-'70 Decade," was a directive that echoed Nishikawa's proposal: "1. JACL needs to develop a greater commitment as an organization on matters of civil rights and international relations."⁶⁰ While, ultimately, international relations wouldn't receive much attention within the JACL until the 1980s trade war with Japan, a debate over civil rights would eventually come to dominate

⁵⁸ Lawrence Nakatsuka, "Hawaii's Nisei at the Crossroads," *Pacific Citizen*, December 17, 1954, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1954), Section A, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Ruth Kumata, "Setting Out Sights," *Pacific Citizen*, December 25, 1959, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1959), Section C, p. 10.

⁶⁰ "Ten Major Recommendations For '60-'70 Made," *Pacific Citizen*, December 23, 1960, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1960), Section C, p. 1.

American and, in turn, JACL political discourse for much of the 1960s. However, given that Nishikawa's suggestion was by no means representative of any general consensus within the organization, civil rights would go on to provoke just as much a debate *between* JACL members as it would in the broader American society.

The 1960s: The Nisei vs. Civil Rights

When *Pacific Citizen* editor-in-chief Harry Honda suggested that the JACL theme for 1964 might be "The Nisei vs. Civil Rights,"⁶¹ he most certainly did not mean to evoke the image of Nisei JACLers fighting *against* civil rights, instead meaning to refer to the ways in which some Japanese Americans were working alongside the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, to an extent, his suggested theme offered a fitting way to describe the decade of the 1960s for some sections of the JACL. Although *In Quest of Justice*, a JACL-sponsored history of the organization published by Bill Hosokawa in 1982, has little to say about the era of the Civil Rights Movement, it does contain one telling quotation from K. Patrick Okura, who served as president from 1962-64 and recalled that "it was the feeling of the great majority of our chapter leaders that what the blacks did was their business, their problem."⁶² By the 1960s, Japanese Americans' efforts to assimilate had been largely successful with many finding a comfortable lifestyle in the middle class, giving rise to a general sense of apathy amongst Nisei who viewed 'rowdy' demonstrations for civil rights as nothing more than an easy way to jeopardize all that they had worked for. In 1979, Mike Yaki, a Nisei, would decry the fact that during the 60s the "JACL did

⁶¹ Harry Honda, "Ye Editor's Desk," *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1964, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1964), Section A, p. 2.

⁶² Bill Hosokawa, *JACL: In Quest of Justice*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 317.

not make common cause with the Blacks in their attempts to secure equal rights.”⁶³ Yet, at the time, it would be the Sansei, whom the Nisei had been delicately preparing for political participation, that would come to take the most passionate stance against the JACL old-guard and their distaste for the increasing militance of civil rights advocates.

One remark that was staggeringly popular amongst JACL Nisei during the 1960s when speaking on the status of the Sansei generation, was the broad generalization that the Sansei were lucky enough to live lives “unclouded by discrimination.”⁶⁴ Sidestepping the fact that many Asian Americans, individuals of Japanese ancestry included, still faced discrimination in the 1960s, many Nisei nonetheless felt that the Japanese American had largely come to see the day of equality in the country thanks to years of quiet hard work. In making such statements, Nisei such as Bill Hosokawa relied on broad claims that, “we are no longer forced to live in the squalid segregation of American ghettos ... we are welcomed to the churches of our choice and privileged to attend the best schools of an enlightened land ... [and] above all we have won unquestioned acceptance on the basis of our individual God-given abilities.”⁶⁵ Though such appraisals of Japanese Americans’ status were nothing new to the 1960s and were by no means representative of the entire Japanese American population, as the socioeconomic position of Japanese Americans in the United States continued to rise through the 1960s, these sentiments began to hold more weight than they had the decade prior. While some, such as Jerry Enomoto, chairman of the JACL youth committee in 1961, contrastingly believed “that we have not

⁶³ Mike Yaki, “Nikkei Impressions of Nikkei America After a Long Absence,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 21-28, 1979, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1979), p. 49.

⁶⁴ Kumeo Yoshinari, “San Diego Here We Come,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 24-31, 1965, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1965), Section A, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Bill Hosokawa, “The Broader View,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 22, 1961, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1961), Section A, p. 2.

reached the enviable state in our nation, wherein everyone is indeed equal,”⁶⁶ pointing to discrimination Japanese Americans still faced in housing and employment, the fact that Mike Masaoka declared one 1969 JACL project to be “the first major legislative effort sparked by the JACL since the early fifties,”⁶⁷ was perhaps evidence of the fact that at least no issue had been *perceived* as threatening the Japanese American community enough to provoke the JACL into meaningful action. There were, however, a small number of JACL members who had begun to react to events and discrimination occurring outside of their own racial community.

On August 28, 1963, thousands of Americans came together to participate in an event, organized by Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, known as the March on Washington and made famous by Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech. Amongst the throngs of people could be found thirty Japanese Americans from the JACL, including Mike Masaoka and then-president Patrick Okura, who described the march as “one of the most moving and significant experiences in my half century of living.”⁶⁸ Yet, for many within the JACL, August 28th was just another Wednesday. Indeed, while some individual members, such as Bill Marutani who was a part of the Freedom Rides, took the initiative to engage in other events that dovetailed with the Civil Rights Movement, the JACL did not make any substantial effort to officially support the movement beyond participating in the March on Washington and maintaining its membership in the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, actions which satisfied even the more ardent civil rights proponents of the organization in the belief that they had done enough to show

⁶⁶ Jerry Enomoto, “Initiative of Intermountain Jr. JACLers Hailed,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 22, 1961, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1961), Section B, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Mike Masaoka, “’69 Inaugurates new Pacific Era,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1969 (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1969), Section A, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Patrick Okura, “’63: the big year for human rights,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1963 (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1963), Section A, p. 1.

their support.⁶⁹ In fact, even the decision to participate in the march had itself been enough to spark controversy within the organization.⁷⁰

Before appraising the limited action of those who may have truly been interested in engaging in further demonstrations of support for the movement, however, it is important to first consider the role that distance played. Although the JACL did have twelve chapters to the east of Omaha by 1960, the rest of its eighty-three chapters were located in the western half of the country, with forty-seven chapters and the national headquarters located in California, as opposed to only one chapter below the Mason-Dixon Line in Washington DC.⁷¹ Following the wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans, Dillon S. Myer and the War Relocation Authority engaged in a program to move Japanese Americans out of the camps and disperse them throughout the country in a manner that would facilitate acceptance and assimilation. Yet while thousands of Japanese Americans who had been incarcerated would end up returning to Western states such as California, Utah, and Colorado, and others established new communities in Northern states such as Illinois, New York, and New Jersey, of the few Southern states who did see an increase in Japanese populations between 1940 and 1950, numbers stayed below one hundred new residents.⁷² Thus, by the time civil rights proponents were coming together in the East to fight for civil rights with protests, marches, sit-ins, and bus rides, the majority of the Japanese American population was, on average, still a few thousand miles away in an era when cross country travel was still prohibitively expensive and burdensome. However, despite this

⁶⁹ John Tateishi, *Redress: The Inside Story of the Successful Campaign for Japanese American Reparations*, (Berkeley: Heyday, 2020), p. 228.

⁷⁰ Lillian Kimura, "Memories of JACL," *Pacific Citizen*, December, 2003, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 2003), p. 59.

⁷¹ Cameron Molyneaux, "Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) History and Geography 1929-1970," Mapping American Social Movements Project, https://depts.washington.edu/moves/JACL_map.shtml.

⁷² Jessica Sashihara, "Dispersion of the Japanese American Population in the United States after Internment," GIS at Tufts, https://sites.tufts.edu/gis/files/2018/05/Sashihara_Jessica_DHP207_2018.pdf.

roadblock, the JACL and some of its more active members did manage to find some ways to get involved in the fight for civil rights, albeit not through direct action.

Though the JACL had struggled to determine what kind of organization it was throughout the 1950s, never settling upon one answer, in 1965 president Kumeo Yoshinari proposed that “since the JACL is primarily oriented as an educational body,” the JACL would only go so far as to provide helpful information to members interested in pursuing social justice and that it was up to them to “utilize this knowledge on a personal basis to engage himself in the crusade.”⁷³

Although such a broad statement seemingly dismissed both years of debating the JACL’s purpose and the possibility of the organization itself to function as a force in the fight for civil rights, during the 1960s the JACL did end up getting involved in a Supreme Court battle against anti-miscegenation law and a legislative fight for fair housing. While the JACL’s participation in *Loving v. Virginia* was largely limited to JACL legal counsel Bill Marutani’s cooperation with the defense’s team, understandable given the nature of judicial fights, the organization’s push against California’s proposition 14, which would nullify the 1963 Rumford Fair Housing Act, was a widespread chapter-level effort that even got the organization’s Omaha chapter involved.⁷⁴ However, for the most part, when individual members and leaders within the organization called for further participation in working toward civil rights for all, it would be the chapters that once again stood in their way.

At the dawn of the 1960s, Mas Satow, the JACL’s national director, would begin his first report of the decade with a chastisement of “some” chapters who, in “the absence of any highly

⁷³ Kumeo Yoshinari, “San Diego Here We Come,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 24-31, 1965, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1965), Section A, p. 2.

⁷⁴ Harold Gordon, “Individual choice in marriage not a concern for state,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 22-29, 1968, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1968), Section A, p. 1. “Omaha’s Secret: Wholehearted Participation,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1964, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1964), Section B, p. 3.

dramatic national program,” had begun “floundering” with “a few even questioning the necessity of maintaining themselves.”⁷⁵ With finances continuing to be a limiting factor for the organization throughout the decade, the national office turned to the chapters to lead the charge for civil liberties yet were time and time again disappointed by their failure to act.⁷⁶ After a year in which chapter participation in cooperating with civil rights efforts had been described by one national officer as “spotty,”⁷⁷ in 1963 the national office would send out an official memorandum to chapters meant to provide guidance on acting in solidarity with the Civil Rights Movement that, among other directives, pressed on chapters to “participate with all groups and support local, state, and regional programs of legislative and administrative objectives that will aid in attaining equality of opportunity for all.”⁷⁸ However, even with an official memorandum, most chapters would continue to ignore the national office’s pleas.

In attempting to explain the enduring nature of the Nisei’s seemingly apathetic disposition towards civil rights, many JACLers cited the same preoccupation with social activities that had frustrated more active members during the 1950s. Indeed, after “visiting chapter upon chapter,” the JACL’s 1963 youth chairman would inform *Pacific Citizen* readers that he had become “gravely concerned and quite sensitive” after coming to the conclusion that “too many individuals look upon JACL as only a place to meet socially and/or gain recognition through participating in local activities.”⁷⁹ While some leaders such as Mike Masaoka were

⁷⁵ Masao Satow, “National Director’s Report: 1959-1960,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23, 1960, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1960), Section C, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Abe Hagiwara, “Assessment of 1960-70 Planning Commission Report at Mid-Point,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1964, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1964), Section A, p. 10.

⁷⁷ Abe Hagiwara, “‘60-’70 Planning Commission cites advance in youth,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 21, 1962, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1962), Section B, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Patrick Okura, “‘63: the big year for human rights,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1963, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1963), Section A, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Jack Mayeda, “Relive – In Our Youth,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1963, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1963), Section A, p. 18.

willing to concede that certain chapters lacked “sufficient manpower”⁸⁰ to have any substantial impact on issues of national scale, other larger chapters simply weren’t interested in getting involved in civil rights issues. Amongst 1960s chapter reports, instances of chapter leadership voicing sentiments such as the Seattle chapter, that in 1963 wrote in its annual report that issues such as “housing, employment opportunities, education, public accommodation, [and] immigration” were “not just Negro problems,”⁸¹ were few and far between. The reason for such indifference, recalled Patrick Okura, was that a significant number of members believed that “we shouldn’t get involved in the civil rights movement” and that African Americans “should improve their lot in the same way we had.”⁸² To some members’ dismay, the ‘bootstrap’ narratives that Okura referenced would gain an increasing amount of traction amongst Nisei as certain factions within the Civil Rights Movement began to drift more and more towards militancy in the latter half of the 1960s. However, also playing a substantial role in reinforcing some Nisei’s perception of their own successes as the direct product of their hard work and unquestioning faith in the American system was the Japanese American Research Project (JARP), an endeavor initiated in 1962 that set out to document the Nisei’s stories, ultimately further narrativizing them along the way.

During his time as the JACL’s Washington representative, Mike Masaoka would publish an annual writeup reflecting on the past year. In 1966, four years after the JARP had begun its work, he would confidently report that the project “should exercise an ameliorative influence on

⁸⁰ Mike Masaoka, “Idaho, Washington Campaigns,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1964, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1964), Section A, p. 11.

⁸¹ Elmer Ogawa, “From Jackson St. to City Hall,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1963, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1963), Section B, p. 9.

⁸² Bill Hosokawa, *JACL: In Quest of Justice*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 317.

the present Negro crisis and perhaps contribute to the quest for future successful integration.”⁸³

As members across the country did their part to contribute to the project by digging up local and family histories to send to the researchers, many would come to a similar conclusion, arguing that the stories they found of diligent Japanese Americans keeping their heads down ought to serve as a model for the ‘less successful’ minorities of the country, an understanding of Japanese American achievement that Ellen Wu pinpoints as some of the earliest traces of the ‘model minority’ myth. In doing so, the JACL also capitalized on the opportunity to bring attention back to the Nisei soldier, highlighting “Nisei’s ‘outstanding’ service in World War II and Korea” as “further testimony to their parents’ exemplary standards of family life.”⁸⁴ Ultimately, this rising appreciation for the success many Japanese Americans had achieved in pursuing the ‘American Dream’ and the belief that it was accessible to all given enough dedication and hard work go a long way in explaining why, by 1964, certain members within the JACL were beginning to wonder whatever happened to the directives of the 1960 planning committee.

Writing four years after the committee had published its ‘major recommendations,’ at the top of which had been the call to focus on civil rights, Abe Hagiwara disgruntledly admonished the JACL for the fact that “no critical appraisal was ever made, no provocative question was ever raised, no new officers at local and district levels seem to know anything about it, and no progress report was ever officially requested.”⁸⁵ Despite the increasing presence of a widespread national movement for civil rights, by the halfway point of the 1960s decade, most JACL chapters had allowed any attempts to participate to fall to the wayside. Even National Director,

⁸³ Mike Masaoka, “1964-66 Washington Office Report: JACL Role in Advance of Japanese Americans Assessed at 25-Yr. Mark of Nisei Representative,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23-30, 1966, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1966), Section B, p. 21.

⁸⁴ Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 162.

⁸⁵ Abe Hagiwara, “Assessment of 1960-70 Planning Commission Report at Mid-Point,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1964, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1964), Section A, p. 10.

Mas Satow, who often attempted to remain optimistic if critical about the organization's civil rights work, conceded in 1966 that "frankly, our National Civil Rights program has not been given the impetus anticipated."⁸⁶ Satow, and a select few Nisei within the JACL, however, were not alone in chastising the organization for its apparent apathy.

By the late 1960s, many Sansei had now become young adults and some began to join other sectors of the American youth that were starting to angrily critique what they saw as a disconnected and faulty understanding of the world steering the discourse and thinking of their parents' generation. Whereas many of the 'Greatest Generation' saw a 'good' fight against communism abroad in Vietnam and a 'bad' fight in the form of an increasingly militant civil rights movement at home, some Baby Boomers, Sansei included, saw a misguided and immoral fight abroad and an unjust war being waged against African Americans at home. Officially, the JACL did its best to stay as far as possible from such divisions, waiting until 1971 to issue a statement calling for withdrawal from Vietnam⁸⁷ and specifically "cautioning JACL chapters on making [a] stand for or against [the] student strike at San Francisco State"⁸⁸ conducted by the Third World Liberation Front in 1968. However, that didn't stop individual members from taking passionate stands in favor of one side or the other.

While in 1968, during a speech given at a veterans' reunion, Bill Hosokawa would emphasize the need to continue fighting in Vietnam, noting that "it troubles me when I hear well-meaning Americans protesting that we have sacrificed enough,"⁸⁹ one of his more placid

⁸⁶ Mas Satow, "National Director's 1964-66 Report: General Aims of JACL Valid Yet After 36 Years With All-Time Membership High, Budget Met," *Pacific Citizen*, December 23-30, 1966, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1966), Section B, p. 14.

⁸⁷ "Chronology," *Pacific Citizen*, December 24-31, 1971, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1971), Supplement, p. 12.

⁸⁸ "Chronology," *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1969, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1969), Supplement, p. 12.

⁸⁹ Bill Hosokawa, "Mission Accomplished, Mission Incomplete...", *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1968, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1968), Section C, p. 11.

condemnations of protestors, some Nisei within the JACL were more receptive to the cries of the youth. In contrast to the views held by some leaders, such as Mike Masaoka, who was quick to dismiss civil rights protestors' words by arguing that "violence is too often the outcome of aggressive protest,"⁹⁰ Jerry Enomoto, president from 1966-70, challenged Nisei "to take the trouble to understand what lies behind the violent civil rights turbulence of today,"⁹¹ and listen to, rather than brush off the outrage and dissent expressed by their children. However, this task became more difficult when, as Masaoka observed, "Black nationalism and separatism seemed to have replaced integration as the goal of many Negro leaders,"⁹² – the same leaders who some Japanese American youths were taking cues from in the late 1960s.

For JACL Nisei who frequently ascribed their economic and social mobility to the Nisei virtues of being "peaceful, hardworking, [and] self-reliant,"⁹³ with many having fought for their country even as it treated them unjustly, it was incomprehensible to see a new generation, especially one that lived 'without discrimination,' protesting and rioting against the US state and its actions at home and abroad. Indeed, in the same 1965 article in which Bill Hosokawa would speculate that "at last, the Negro is approaching his goals of equality," he would also be swift to point out that "most Nisei didn't spend a great deal of time bemoaning their misfortune in being born different."⁹⁴ In the eyes of many Nisei, 'violent' protests delegitimized any reasonable calls for social and political change given that they believed they had brought about change without

⁹⁰ Mike Masaoka, "Washington JACL Office Activities slow down in '67-'68," *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1968, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1968), Section D, p. 1.

⁹¹ Jerry Enomoto, "For Understanding and Motivation," *Pacific Citizen*, December 22-29, 1967, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1967), Section A, p. 2.

⁹² Mike Masaoka, "Washington JACL Office Activities slow down in '67-'68," *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1968, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1968), Section D, p. 1.

⁹³ William Hosokawa, "For Better Americans in a Greater America," *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1968, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1968), Supplement, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Bill Hosokawa, "From the Frying Pan," *Pacific Citizen*, December 24-31, 1965, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1965), Section A, p. 2.

such action. Conversely, it was equally incomprehensible to many Sansei that their parents had never taken to the streets to protest the hardships and injustices they had been forced to endure.

As historian Marilyn Young has argued, unlike their parents, who were taught to believe that “the intentions of the United States are always good,” many young Americans during the 1960s were beginning to see “racism and poverty ... as endemic, the social system ... as inherently unfair to minority groups ... and the Cold War as at least as much an American as a Soviet creation.”⁹⁵ Amongst this younger generation could be found many Sansei, a number of whom would join the Asian American movement, inspired by the Black Power movement, that was beginning to gain steam in the late 1960s. Given that a group of Asian Americans, Sansei included, were at the center of the 1968 Third World Liberation front strikes at San Francisco State University calling for the inclusion of ethnic studies in university curricula, Japanese Americans within and outside of the JACL used the building tension on campus as an opportunity to weigh in on Sansei’s increasing ‘militancy.’ While in 1967 he had called for Nisei to attempt to understand the anger of their Sansei children, when speaking on the student strike in 1968, Jerry Enomoto would argue that “when people use the very tactics they deplore others using to gain their ends, the limit should be drawn and drawn firmly,” and question “whether the protesting groups want to make constructive gains, or issue challenges, create violent confrontations and ultimately destroy the university.”⁹⁶ In the same year of the strike, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, and the fact that the organization’s official chronology for the year contained no mention of his death but rather an entry that read “Apr. 6 – several Japanese American businesses in Washington, D.C., looted and vandalized in weekend

⁹⁵ Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), p. 27 & 243.

⁹⁶ Jerry Enomoto, “Neutrality: An Impossible Stance,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1968, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1968), Section A, p. 1.

riot after Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination,"⁹⁷ largely summed up the Nisei's unfavorable, or at least disengaged, views on the latter stages of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and the militant actions for social justice they saw many Sansei being drawn into. However, while the JACL did what it could to officially avoid the tangle of such intergenerational division, when the JARP published the first project of its research in 1969, it would find itself helplessly drawn in headfirst.

Written by old guard giant Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* was in many ways a one-sided JACL success story that one critic noted came "at the very moment Sansei activists are asking: what have we been integrating into? Into a nation conducting a politically and morally bankrupt war against Vietnamese people in the name of freedom and democracy?"⁹⁸ While the use of the word 'quiet' drew the ire of many given its allusion to the bootstrap narratives so often used to criticize and delegitimize 'louder' calls for social justice and change, individuals also took issue with the content of the book, with another critic, Mary Tani, vehemently objecting "to the 'JACL 'powers' ... purport[ing] to represent Americans of Japanese ancestry thus stereotyping all in the image of JACL' along with its undemocratic elision of Issei, female, and 'non-JACLer' perspectives."⁹⁹ Indeed, there were even those within the JACL who took issue with Hosokawa's choice of title, with the organization's Ethnic Concerns committee threatening to go so far as to boycott the book if the title was not changed.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, the book would ultimately be published with 'quiet' still in the title and, in even as late as the 1980s, Hosokawa would remain unshaken in his belief that those who

⁹⁷ "News Capsules: 1968," *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1968, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1968), Supplement, 23.

⁹⁸ Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 179.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁰ "Chronology," *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1969, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1969), Supplement, p. 12.

had pushed to change the title were engaging in “censorship,” insisting that “the adjective was not offensive, but rather, accurate and appropriate, and any other interpretation of the facts would be revisionist history.”¹⁰¹

As the decade came to a close, the controversy over *Nisei* revealed that the intergenerational division that was sweeping the nation would need to be addressed within the JACL if the organization was at some point going to be passed down to the Sansei. Yet, as the 1970s would show, the chasm between the Nisei and Sansei understanding of the American system had grown to be too wide for some Nisei to feel truly comfortable and willing to do so.

The 1970s: A “New” JACL?

As Mike Masaoka announced his departure from the JACL in 1970, after over two decades as the organization’s Washington representative, he recognized that “the times have changed ... there are new voices and new leaders, and they are entitled to be heard and to assume the responsibilities of leadership.”¹⁰² However, even as he and longtime national director, Mas Satow, officially stepped away from the organization the following year, the ‘new’ JACL leaders would still be compelled to work within the divided social landscape that these two pillars of the JACL had seen emerge in their final years with the organization. As the 1970s progressed, members of JACL would witness the conflict between Nisei and Sansei come to a head as protesting and militancy among younger members increased. In his penultimate annual report, Masaoka also recorded his grumbling prediction for this “new era” as one in which “the very achievements that made us proud” would be “subject to inquiry and even protest.”¹⁰³ This

¹⁰¹ Bill Hosokawa, *JACL: In Quest of Justice*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 314.

¹⁰² Mike Masaoka, “East Coast history of Japanese to be distinctive contribution,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1970, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1970), Section B, p. 8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

perhaps foreshadowed the dawning of a shift towards the reconsideration of the Nisei soldier and those Nisei who had resisted the draft during incarceration, a group who had been largely ostracized by many within the JACL and the broader Japanese American community. However, before such a reinterpretation of the past could occur, it first needed to be demystified for a generation whose parents had largely chosen to keep quiet about it.

Although, unlike the average Japanese American family, the JACL had never been timid in talking about the years of war and incarceration, it did tend to keep its focus within the narrow borders of the valiant and dutiful Nisei soldier narrative. As such, when JACL Nisei looked back on the history of the Japanese American community, “the model of valor for Nisei were the men of the 442nd who proved their loyalty and courage far beyond necessary,” a “Seattle newspaperman” observed, his words reprinted in the *Pacific Citizen*. Speaking to the youth who were continuing to examine and reevaluate Japanese American history with increasing scrutiny, the same newspaperman came to the defense of their Nisei parents who “felt the necessity – just as you do – of proving their own individual worth, but they had to prove it in a different way.”¹⁰⁴ However, after years of being in the dark about the history of their families and their people, it was difficult for many Sansei searching for a sense of ethnic pride in the midst of the Asian American movement to discover that most Nisei had done nothing to protest the wartime injustices they had been subjected to through incarceration. Thus, when the JACL’s Nisei leaders’ official call to end the Vietnam War came in 1971, it was surely a sight for sore eyes amongst the organization’s Sansei. Yet when Mike Masaoka, the Nisei who had facilitated the war-time cooperation that so many Sansei took issue with, left the next year, it failed to provide as much change as some Sansei may have hoped.

¹⁰⁴ Darrel Houston, “‘Color me real,’ say PNW Asians,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1970, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1970), Section C, p. 2.

In 1972, Dave Ushio, a Sansei, took over as the JACL's national director, a groundbreaking change given his generation, and one that seemed to signal that the JACL might truly be entering a 'new era', as Masaoka had predicted. In handing over the reins to a Sansei, Masaoka believed himself to be willingly letting go of power in a manner that would be "acceptable to all those who want JACL to become more involved in the great 'revolutionary' problems and programs of the day, especially to the younger and more articulate of our critics."¹⁰⁵ However, Ushio's time as national director would be marred by controversy from the get-go after he immediately lost Masaoka's support for choosing to take the national director's role rather than the Washington representative position Masaoka had been grooming him for. Without Masaoka to curry the favor of the organization's Nisei 'old-guard' on his behalf, Ushio's days were numbered, as while "many chapters now [had] Sansei presidents and board members," the national board consisted of only "one third Sansei,"¹⁰⁶ meaning that those Nisei most reluctant to submit to the authority of someone outside of their generation retained the power to rebuke and challenge it. And rebuke and challenge it they did.

Throughout his stint as the national director, Ushio made a number of efforts to 'modernize' an organization that had for decades been somewhat of a 'mom and pop' operation. In doing so, he received some support yet would ultimately go a step too far when he asked the 'mom' of the JACL, Chiz Satow, Mas Satow's wife and the individual who had singlehandedly kept the JACL's records for years, to step down in order for a full team to take her place. This bold action would go on to give rise to extensive ire from "old-time JACLers" who "were

¹⁰⁵ Mike Masaoka, "The final Masaoka Report," *Pacific Citizen*, December 22-29, 1972, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1972), Section B, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Raymond Uno, "The Homestretch," *Pacific Citizen*, December 24-31, 1971, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1971), Supplement, p. 1.

uncomfortable with change and resented Ushio for being its agent.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, after a few years of silent indignation following Ushio’s betrayal of his trust, even Masaoka began to directly criticize Ushio’s leadership, at one point even putting forward a proposal that the Sansei ought to just start their own organization and leave the JACL.¹⁰⁸ However, it was not just the older generation that came to view Ushio as both inept and unfit to lead.

Despite being a Sansei, Ushio was by no means a ‘radical.’ Indeed, in explaining why he chose to go for the national director’s spot against Masaoka’s advice, he would years later claim that he was worried that, if he didn’t, the national director might be a “radical activist, a ‘power to the people’ type. I couldn’t live with that.”¹⁰⁹ While Ushio did wish to be on the “cutting edge of social and political change, taking a strong advocacy position on all human rights issues,”¹¹⁰ he would begin his time with the JACL by clashing with other Sansei within the organization over how such change should be brought about.

By the time Ushio was in office, many American youth, Sansei included, had become increasingly disillusioned with the ‘American system’ and the racism that seemed to permeate it. Thus, it was of little surprise when the leaders of the JACL’s Pacific Southwest district office, which a year prior had been chastised for hanging posters of “Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Cesar Chavez, and a Black Panther leader or two,”¹¹¹ resigned in protest after Ushio had beaten the more left-leaning Sansei, Alan Nishio, in the initial election for the national director’s chair. As the encyclopedia, *Japanese American History*, documents, the campaign “was seen by many as a

¹⁰⁷ Bill Hosokawa, *JACL: In Quest of Justice*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 332.

¹⁰⁸ Mike Masaoka, “Mike Masaoka Offers Two Alternatives: Should JACL still be all things to all peoples?,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1974, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1974), Section B, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Bill Hosokawa, *JACL: In Quest of Justice*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 328.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

choice between change (Nishio) and the status quo (Ushio).”¹¹² Indeed, at the National Council meeting set to determine who would take the seat, Warren Furutani, one of the leaders from the Pacific Southwest office, would argue that “the JACL staff had to work with blacks, Chicanos and whites and ‘Dave does not have this experience.”¹¹³ However, years later in 1982, Bill Hosokawa would make the claim that, ultimately, Ushio would work to steer “JACL on an activist course that paralleled Warren Furutani’s despite differences in their styles. Ushio worked through the system; he wore tie and jacket and eschewed street vulgarities that some activists delighted in using for shock effect.”¹¹⁴ Yet regardless of whether or not Ushio did truly share Furutani’s political dispositions or was actually willing to uphold the status quo that the Nisei JACLers had maintained since the end of incarceration, it ultimately would not be enough to gain either side’s support. By 1975, only three tumultuous years after he had taken office, Ushio would finally be pushed out of the JACL by the old guard who still controlled the organization, with one Puyallup Valley member taking the opportunity in a *Pacific Citizen* column to get in one last jab on Ushio’s way out, pontificating, “I doubt whether it is possible to find a Sansei who has all the experience and other qualifications desired by the JACL.”¹¹⁵ The Sansei, however, were beginning to disagree.

While they may not all have supported Ushio, after seeing a Sansei in the director’s chair, many of the younger generation began to speak out against the Nisei’s iron-fisted domination of the organization and the apolitical JACL they believed it nurtured. Indeed, only a page below the Puyallup Valley member’s brazen dismissal of Sansei legitimacy, the JACL’s 1975 youth

¹¹² Ed. Brian Niiya, *Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1968 to the Present*, (New York, Facts on File, Inc., 1993), p. 183.

¹¹³ Bill Hosokawa, *JACL: In Quest of Justice*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 329-330.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹¹⁵ Paul W. Ellis, “Reorganize JACL,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1975, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1975), Section E, p. 2.

program director seemed to almost directly reply with her anguished observation that “our young people often still experience the patronizing attitudes of people who either do not want them in the organization or who cannot let go of the reins to let younger people fully participate in the leadership of the JACL.”¹¹⁶ However, not all Nisei were so unyielding. A year later, Edison Uno, a prominent Nisei member in the organization, would write glowingly of the Sansei’s bright future both within and outside of the Japanese American community. In doing so, he also expressed his hope that while the Nisei had been unable to engage with “painful” memories of incarceration and the division it wrought upon the community, “perhaps a sensitive Sansei can do it justice.”¹¹⁷ Little did Uno know, within the decade, a number of Sansei would lead a substantial portion of the Japanese American community as they attempted to do just that.

Reiterating a commonly voiced sentiment amongst Sansei in the years prior to redress, John Tateishi recalled in his 2020 memoirs that, before redress, Sansei, “generally knew little, if anything, about the community’s wartime experience because their parents and the community in general had built a wall of silence behind which the truths about their WWII incarceration lay concealed.”¹¹⁸ While accepting credit for the work he did to get the redress effort up and running on an organizational level, Tateishi believed that it was the Sansei who pushed to break this wall of silence in the 60s and 70s that were the true initiators of the movement, which began in the late 1970s yet wouldn’t switch into full gear until the next decade.

¹¹⁶ Gail Nishioka, “Hikari,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1975, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1975), Section E. p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Edison Uno, “More self-expression anticipated,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 24-31, 1976, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1976), p. 47.

¹¹⁸ John Tateishi, *Redress: The Inside Story of the Successful Campaign for Japanese American Reparations*, (Berkeley: Heyday, 2020), p. 6.

Within the organization, however, the Sansei who were able to gain a voice were beginning to spark dialogues about much more than the Japanese American community of the past. Although they still lacked the power to effect substantive change within the JACL, throughout the 1970s, Sansei opinions on how the JACL should change were being increasingly documented within the pages of the *Pacific Citizen* and, at times, being echoed by Nisei. Indeed, while not necessarily taking a stance one way or another, one Nisei in a 1973 *Pacific Citizen* article posited that perhaps the time had come when “the oldsters should conform to the views of our children,” pressing his fellow Nisei to consider whether there was “a need to modify our philosophy in our appraisal of desirable social structure.” Within the same article, however, the author, Ed Kitazumi, also pointed to the ways in which the Sansei were not so different from the Nisei they so often came into conflict with. While, according to Kitazumi, the Sansei may have viewed African Americans as “people to be emulated,” adopting their “strong language and obscenity” which he noted “tends to ‘TURN OFF’ the Nisei,” the actions and changes they called for were nonetheless “quite conventional and conservative as well as commendable.” Indeed, the issues that concerned Sansei, such as “the problems of ecology, pollution, racial bias, social inequality and community service,”¹¹⁹ were issues that Kitazumi believed all Japanese Americans, regardless of generation, ought to be concerned with. By offering such an analysis of the Japanese American intergenerational conflict, Kitazumi sought to reassure Nisei that the Japanese American community and the JACL would be in good hands under Sansei leadership, yet in doing so he minimized one of the major points of tension, repainting Sansei ‘militancy’ as merely ‘strong language.’ Ultimately, while most Nisei within the JACL saw no need for the

¹¹⁹ Ed Kitazumi, “Sansei mean to find identity in own way,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 21-28, 1973, (Los Angeles: Japanese American Citizens League, 1973), Section D, p. 8 & 12.

kind of self-evaluation Kitazumi called for, some did agree, with one of the most significant examples being the 1972-74 president of the organization, Henry Tanaka.

In the past, the JACL had witnessed debates as to whether or not the organization's purpose was to work on behalf of all Japanese Americans or just those who were members of the JACL, yet with the dawn of the Asian American movement Sansei had begun pushing for the group to expand its range even further, working with other groups within the Asian American community. Thus, it was truly noteworthy when in a 1972 article in the *Pacific Citizen's* holiday issue, Tanaka mentioned, almost casually, the group's "personal commitment to its primary role as an advocate of oppressed and disadvantaged persons of Asian ancestry,"¹²⁰ specifically utilizing a term gaining traction within the Asian American movement as a symbol of interethnic unity. While some Nisei remained directly opposed to the idea of working in cooperation with other Asian Americans, others such as Bill Marutani agreed that the JACL needed to shift towards becoming "an organization to serve and uplift the posture of all Asian Americans as citizens of this land."¹²¹ However, Tanaka did not stop at encouraging the community to embrace a more inclusive Asian American identity that the Sansei were cultivating.

During his time as president, Tanaka would also challenge Nisei's understanding of their own identity, serving as one of the first Nisei within the JACL to directly refute and critique the model minority myth, a stereotype that had become a household term by the 1970s. For some Nisei, it was difficult to dismiss and reject the model minority myth when so many of them felt that their quiet hard work was the fundamental reason they had seen such unprecedented success, a sentiment Tanaka himself acknowledged. Yet while he may have appreciated "being known as

¹²⁰ Henry T. Tanaka, "Priorities," *Pacific Citizen*, December 22-29, 1972, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1975), Supplement, p. 1.

¹²¹ Bill Marutani, "JACL should consider renaming its name," *Pacific Citizen*, December 24-31, 1976, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1976), p. 103.

industrious, hardworking, [and] intelligent,” this did not outweigh his understanding that, in being labeled a member of the ‘model minority,’ he was being “placed in the role of the **middle man minority** ... trapped in the middle, conveniently used as a scapegoat by those above us and receiving the wrath of those below us”¹²² (author’s emphasis). By sharing these opinions, Tanaka was giving a voice and lending credence to the sentiments of the Sansei, many of whom had been arguing since the late 1960s that the model minority stereotype not only delegitimized and undercut the plight of minority groups that faced structural roadblocks that the Japanese American community did not suffer, but also ignored barriers within the Japanese American and Asian American communities that kept individuals from advancing socially, politically, and economically. As Warren Furutani, a Yonsei activist with the Asian American movement, would argue, the notion that Japanese Americans were “‘Outwhiting the Whites,” was a “superficial observation” when one took into account the “lack of middle management and supervisory positions”¹²³ held by Japanese Americans. Like Furutani, many within the younger generation of Japanese Americans recognized that though minorities had come a long way towards equality ‘on paper’ during the Civil Rights Movement, systemic racism still prevented the realization of equality of opportunity. In response to this enduring discrimination, the 1970s would see the first mentions of the JACL’s support for affirmative action policies, with Dave Ushio pushing for the sponsorship of affirmative action workshops and even some Nisei, such as Tom Owan, recognizing the need for “affirmative action to overcome differential treatment in service delivery.”¹²⁴ Even so, many Nisei nonetheless remained attached to the success narrative of the

¹²² Henry T. Tanaka, “Priorities,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 21-28, 1973, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1973), Supplement, p. 1.

¹²³ Warren T. Furutani, “Opposite Side of the Same Coin,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23-30, 1977, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1977), p. 43 & 86.

¹²⁴ David Ushio, “On the Threshold of Immense Promise,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1974, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1974), Section C, p. 1. Tom Owan, “Asian Americans: Case of Benighted

model minority myth and were reluctant to push the organization towards further involvement in the struggles of other communities.

The 1970s had been a chaotic and uncertain decade for the JACL. They had struggled to keep a national director for more than a year at a time after Ushio's departure, leading to a period of "inaction" that Masaoka believed put "confidence in the credibility and accountability of National JACL ... at stake."¹²⁵ On top of this organizational turmoil, the JACL continued to face problems that ambitious leaders within the organization had been hampered by for decades. Indeed, in her report for the 1976 year, Midwest District Council governor Lillian Kimura bemoaned the fact that "National JACL's gloomy projection of its income for the next two years" had resulted in a financial "crisis" that had forced her district to cut back on civil rights activities "just as we were beginning to make inroads." Kimura would also point to the "apathy and complacency which come with the feeling of having 'made it,'"¹²⁶ that had plagued the organization and its chapters since the 1950s and ultimately stirred the conflict that had divided Nisei and Sansei both within and outside of the organization. In response to this division and the apathy and financial problems that had exacerbated it, in 1977, Karl Nobuyuki, the organization's latest national director, would call for the organization to finally "get the house in order," addressing the division between "'old timers' and 'young blood'" through the development of a national policy to "effectively blend the two elements."¹²⁷ Ultimately, while Nobuyuki would only last three years as the organization's national director, his call for

Neglect," *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1975, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1975), Section D, p. 9.

¹²⁵ Mike Masaoka, "Mandate of 1976 JACL convention being carried out at snail's pace...", *Pacific Citizen*, December 23-30, 1977, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1977), p. 40.

¹²⁶ Lillian Kimura, "The Midwest District 'Family,'" *Pacific Citizen*, December 24-31, 1976, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1976), p. 89.

¹²⁷ Karl Nobuyuki, "A Very Special Season," *Pacific Citizen*, December 23-30, 1977, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1977), p. 98.

intergenerational unity would begin to take shape in the years after his departure as redress became the central focus of the organization.

While it would not be able to solve all of the problems of the organization's intergenerational conflict, the redress movement, which had found its initial footing in the late 1970s, would finally begin to catalyze change in the relationship between Nisei and Sansei. Indeed, as John Tateishi recalled of the first years of the movement, "for once the Japanese American community was united on an issue of great importance."¹²⁸ For the Nisei, redress offered, even more than any monetary compensation, a chance to finally bare all, liberating the stories of suffering that they had kept bottled in for decades. For the Sansei, it offered the chance to finally hear these stories and satisfy the need expressed by one Sansei who wrote, "I long for them to share this experience with me, to tell me stories about camp and to explain why we moved to the Midwest afterward. Then, I think, I will be complete."¹²⁹ Perhaps the greatest signal of the unifying potential that redress offered, however, was the fact that, to many members' surprise, redress brought Mike Masaoka, who by the 1980s was, in his own words, "a stranger to most of the organization's new inner circle,"¹³⁰ back into the operations of the JACL. Yet this time he would be fighting *with*, rather than against the Sansei.

The 1980s: A Single-Issue Orientation

Not everyone was on board with redress initially. Among those who disapproved was the only other Nisei still alive with enough 'old guard' clout to rival Masaoka: his longtime friend,

¹²⁸ John Tateishi, *Redress: The Inside Story of the Successful Campaign for Japanese American Reparations*, (Berkeley: Heyday, 2020), p. 243.

¹²⁹ A. Hifumi, "Scenes From A Sansei Life," *Pacific Citizen*, December 21-28, 1979, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1979), p. 53.

¹³⁰ Mike Masaoka, Bill Hosokawa, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka: An American Saga*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1987), p. 323.

Bill Hosokawa. Indeed, in his trademark fashion, Hosokawa would write in a 1980 issue of the *Pacific Citizen* that, just as the “more militant, direct-action tactics” of the late 1960s Black Power movement had failed African Americans, “griping about past injustices and demanding rights” would get Japanese Americans nowhere. Put more bluntly by Hosokawa: “bitching may be good for the soul but can be counterproductive if done excessively.”¹³¹ However, regardless of whether Hosokawa and some other Nisei members disapproved, redress would come to dominate JACL life throughout the 1980s.

Very much a catharsis for the entire Japanese American community, redress brought together individuals from all walks of Japanese American life. A sense of restlessness and disconnect between the Nisei and the Sansei that had been born during the Vietnam years, captured vividly by one Sansei who recalled, “when they started to draft kids and started to hear (about) massacre in Vietnam, everything was wrong ... and it was as if our parents could let that happen to them,”¹³² (author’s ellipses) would finally be met head on. In listening to their parents explain, in their own voices, *why* they did what they did during the war years, many Sansei would at last be able to at least understand, if not fully accept, the choices that had been made. Looking back on the many days of Nisei testimonies that he bore witness to as part of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Incarceration of Civilians’ hearings, John Tateishi remembers them as being “as emotionally draining as they were exciting,” allowing Japanese Americans to “get at the real heart of the community’s pain.”¹³³ Providing a platform for the stories of both the sacrifices the Nisei soldiers and their families had made and the anguish that

¹³¹ Bill Hosokawa, “Reopening of old wounds: Is it worth the pain?,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1980, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1980) p. 5.

¹³² Nobu Miyoshi, “Identity Crisis of the Sansei and the American Concentration Camp,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 41, 1980, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1980), p. 55.

¹³³ John Tateishi, *Redress: The Inside Story of the Successful Campaign for Japanese American Reparations*, (Berkeley: Heyday, 2020), p. 251.

draft resisters felt as they were rejected by kin and country, the hearings were highly successful in moving both government officials and forward-thinking Americans towards acceptance of the redress movement's goals. However, the redress movement would likely never have gotten that far had it not been guided, at least initially, by a leader serendipitously well-suited to bridge the Nisei-Sansei divide: John Tateishi.

A Sansei, albeit one of the few who had actually lived inside the camps as a child, John Tateishi was young enough to connect with and understand his fellow Sansei on an ideological and emotional level, yet also had access to the legitimacy that camp experience granted a Japanese American in the eyes of the Nisei. More importantly, though, he empathized with and respected both the Nisei and their more conservative political leanings and the Sansei's preoccupation with social justice and interracial solidarity. An alumnus of UC Berkeley, the place where Tateishi had the chance to get involved with the Free Speech Movement and get his first taste of the leftist political style, Tateishi nonetheless was able to work with more conservative Nisei within the organization such as Clifford Uyeda, whom Tateishi noted in his memoirs was one of the JACL's many proponents of Japanese American bootstrap narratives.¹³⁴ This ability to develop productive relationships with both Nisei and Sansei would serve Tateishi well as he would need the support of both generations to take on such a monumental task. However, as the struggle for redress progressed and more and more Nisei had the chance to share their stories, the Sansei who were steadily taking over the JACL were beginning to work towards an understanding of the more conservative Nisei as well.

In 1987, Bill Hosokawa, who by then had adopted a more positive, if still critical view of redress, somberly observed that within a few years, many of the Nisei still alive "will no longer

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 17 & 40.

be here” and the Sansei, in turn, would become “the movers, the shakers, the thinkers and doers”¹³⁵ of the JACL and the Japanese American community. Indeed, the 1980s would come to see the leadership of the JACL’s first Sansei president, Floyd Shimomura, a significant occurrence given that few Sansei had seen real leadership roles since the days of Dave Ushio. In taking the reins, however, the Sansei by no means completely overhauled the JACL and the ideology it had been founded upon, though they did make slow but steady changes. This in many ways can be understood by considering that, since the late 1960s and 1970s, the Sansei themselves had changed, with Nobu Miyoshi, founder of the Sansei Legacy Project, noting in 1980 that “the Sansei of the ‘70s have been described by Don Hayashi ... as ‘quiet observers and listeners’ in contrast to the vocal, demanding Sansei of the ‘60s who learned that protests made directly to the Nisei or in their behalf only alienated their parents’ generation.”¹³⁶ Such an analysis has been echoed by scholar Jere Takahashi, who has argued that as some of the Sansei that had come of age during the activism of the 1960s entered middle-age “both their work and the changing racial scene made it much more difficult for them to sustain the same level of political activism and commitment to social change.” However, Takahashi is also keen to point out that, even if the 1980s Sansei had begun “reproducing the electoral political tendencies of their Nisei predecessors ... their progressive perspectives around race, class and gender continue to guide their work.”¹³⁷ Within JACL, the political ideology that Takahashi points to would serve to push the JACL in directions that it had never seen under Nisei leadership, yet, at the same time, wouldn’t be enough to stop them from falling back into the Nisei’s ethnocentricity at times.

¹³⁵ Bill Hosokawa, “JACL and the Nikkei in 1992,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 16-25, 1987, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1987), Section A, p. 15.

¹³⁶ Nobu Miyoshi, “Identity Crisis of the Sansei and the American Concentration Camp,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 41, 1980, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1980), p. 55.

¹³⁷ Jere Takahashi, *Nisei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American identities and politics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), p. 195 & 208.

On August 10 of 1988, President Ronald Reagan would sign a redress bill “authorizing payment of \$20,000 and [an] apology to the estimated 60,000 former internees.”¹³⁸ While there was still much work to be done in facilitating individuals’ receipt of the promised payments, the last true hurdle to be surmounted for redress had been cleared. However, in clearing it, the JACL had adopted what one member referred to as a “single issue orientation.”¹³⁹ Indeed, as Tateishi recalls in his memoirs, along the path to victory, factions within the JACL that were beyond his control would push the organization to “forgo all other responsibilities in order to focus solely on redress,” a decision that would eventually result in “its loss of credibility and status in the larger civil rights community that it had abandoned.”¹⁴⁰ However, the JACL did not just ignore issues being tackled by other civil rights groups. Indeed, at one point, the organization found itself working against these other groups on a crusade for redress that Clifford Uyeda, one of Tateishi’s greatest allies, would refer to as “self-serving.”¹⁴¹ With a desire to remain in the good graces of the Reagan administration as the redress bill moved ever closer to the stage of executive approval, the JACL had officially “declined to take a position on President Reagan’s nomination of Judge Robert Bork to the Supreme Court” despite the fact that “most board members believed that his confirmation would be a setback for minority and women’s rights.”¹⁴² In a manner reminiscent of the Nisei of the 1952 JACL who had chosen to push for the McCarran-Walter Act despite the cries of liberal allies, the Sansei leading the organization had chosen to put Japanese American interests above a broader civil rights focus, a decision that

¹³⁸ “JACL History,” *Japanese American Citizens League Website*, <https://jacl.org/history>.

¹³⁹ Trisha Murakawa, “JACL moves to the future,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1992, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1992), Section C, p. 16.

¹⁴⁰ John Tateishi, *Redress: The Inside Story of the Successful Campaign for Japanese American Reparations*, (Berkeley: Heyday, 2020), p. 348.

¹⁴¹ Clifford I. Uyeda, “JACL in the Year 2000,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1987, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1987), Section A, p. 24.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. Section A, p. 24.

would haunt them throughout the next decade. Nonetheless, even as the JACL failed to act in a way that aligned with the prevailing political leanings of the Sansei who were increasingly holding its leadership positions, the younger generation did bring about changes *within* the organization that would set the stage for interracial coalition building in the 1990s.

Although they may not have held onto the anger and zeal they carried with them in the 1960s and 70s, many Sansei were willing to use the JACL as a platform to voice political stances that some Nisei would likely find unpalatable. While many Nisei, JACL members included, had worked to cultivate and defend their status as members of the ‘model minority,’ the 1980s would see Sansei continue to repudiate the label, even dedicating an entire holiday issue in 1986 to the theme “Model Minority?” Within the issue’s pages, only one member could be found defending the myth while others harshly criticized the stereotype as a means of “dividing the oppressed minorities”¹⁴³ and pointed out that “praising any minority group for being a ‘model’ is only a way of ensuring that minority group’s subordinate position in society.”¹⁴⁴ This resonated with the organization’s growing commitment to work on behalf of the entire Asian American community rather than just Japanese Americans.

While some old guard Nisei, such as Bill Hosokawa, remained tethered to the belief that Asian Americans “share virtually no commonality of interest other than, perhaps, a fondness for rice,”¹⁴⁵ for many of the younger generation, the murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American who had been mistaken for a Japanese American, made it clear that regardless of their differences, Asian Americans suffered together. As a result of this awareness, sentiments such as

¹⁴³ Edna Ikeda, “Asian Americans and the Model Minority Myth,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1986, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1986), Section B, p. 12.

¹⁴⁴ Cheryl A. Taniguchi, “Is Being a ‘Model Minority’ Hazardous to Your Health,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 19-26, 1986, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1986), Section B, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Bill Hosokawa, “JACL and the Nikkei in 1992,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 16-25, 1987, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1987), Section A, p. 15.

that voiced by district governor, Yoshio Nakashima, who believed “we should work toward a united effort with all Asian groups,”¹⁴⁶ were no longer the rare occurrences within the pages of the *Pacific Citizen* that they had been during the 1970s. Alongside such calls for solidarity were arguments in favor of affirmative action not just from members but also from the organization’s Legislative Education Committee that in 1988 recognized the importance of affirmative action policies in “[protecting] all minorities from discriminatory treatment in the workplace.”¹⁴⁷ The JACL was slowly but surely shifting its focus to include not just Japanese Americans, but oppressed Americans of all ancestry thanks in large part to the ideals that Sansei were bringing to the organization. Yet another factor contributing to this shift was the fact that the JACL was slowly becoming an organization not just made up of individuals who were solely of Japanese American ancestry.

In 1985, the *Pacific Citizen* would publish its annual holiday issue with the theme, “Interracial Families,” celebrating a makeup of the Japanese American community that was increasingly diverse since *Loving v. Virginia* had struck down anti-miscegenation laws across the country. The issue focused on the unique struggles and problems that mixed Japanese Americans faced in attempting to understand their identities while navigating both Japanese American communities and other communities of color. It is significant to note that individuals who were half-white were not the sole focus of the issue. Acknowledging the sad truth that, in the past, “most Japanese believed that any Japanese woman considering marriage to an American man (especially a Black American) must be insane, a prostitute or a fortune hunter,” in her article

¹⁴⁶ Yoshio Nakashima, “A Time to Reflect and Redirect,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23-30, 1983, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1983), Section C, p. 12.

¹⁴⁷ Jerry Enomoto, “JACL-LEC: Post Passage,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23-30, 1988, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1988), Section A, p. 18.

“Denial of Dual Ethnicity Unwarranted,”¹⁴⁸ Christine C. Iijima Hall would go on to discuss the ways in which she had struggled to find acceptance in both black and Japanese American communities as the child of an African American father and a Japanese American mother, voicing a frustration that another half-black Japanese American, Velina Hasu Houston echoed in her article, “On Being Mixed Japanese in Modern Times.”¹⁴⁹ While publishing such stories was not equivalent to the JACL taking any action to combat the discrimination that African Americans faced in the United States, it did illustrate the changing face of the Japanese American community and shed light on issues that the JACL would need to begin to address if it wished to stay alive and relevant in a time when Japanese Americans were marrying outside of the community at a rising rate.

While the 1980s saw the appearance and perpetuation of a number of new ideas and modes of thought within the JACL’s discourse, it was a decade that saw little political action beyond the redress movement. While in 1986 the organization would “approve a resolution opposing [the] forced removal of Navajos to Big Mountain,”¹⁵⁰ most of the JACL members’ talk of looking beyond the Japanese American community remained on paper. However, once the fight for redress was finally over and, for the first time in decades, the members of the JACL were faced with the question of “what’s next,” those in the membership who had been patiently sowing the seeds of interracial cooperation and solidarity could begin to transform words into actions.

¹⁴⁸ Christine C. Iijima Hall, “Denial of Dual Ethnicity Unwarranted,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1985, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1985), Section B, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ Velina Hasu Houston, “On Being Mixed Japanese American in Modern Times,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1985, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1985), Section B, p. 1-3.

¹⁵⁰ “JACL History,” *Japanese American Citizens League Website*, <https://jacl.org/history>.

The 1990s: New Pillars

Six years after Bill Hosokawa foresaw a future in which the Sansei would come to dominate the JACL, he found his prediction to be correct, though he was not too pleased with the fact that such changes meant that the Sansei of his local chapter “don’t ask me for advice.”¹⁵¹ While he would still write for the *Pacific Citizen* from time to time, the man who had done much to ignite the intergenerational conflict with his *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* was beginning to be forgotten along with the divide he had contributed to. While the wounds of the past were not completely gone, many of those who had kept them fresh and bleeding were. The start of the decade had seen the death of Mike Masaoka and the “new” JACL’s feelings towards the ‘old guard’ who remained could in many ways be summed up by the words of one young member who admitted, “I am also saddened by a dose of reality, for it is rather difficult for people who have served as pillars in the old world to remain as pillars in the new world.”¹⁵² Indeed, by the mid 90s, the board of directors, the institutional fixture that in the past had dismissed Ushio for being a young and inexperienced Sansei, was now composed primarily of Sansei.¹⁵³ In response to this evolution, some Nisei quietly stepped aside to allow the next generation to make their own mark while others such as Barry Saiki decried a generation that was “ignoring the past.”¹⁵⁴ Yet one might argue that the Sansei of the 1990s JACL were by no means ignoring the past, they just weren’t willing to remain in it.

¹⁵¹ “Now and then with Bill Hosokawa,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 17, 1993 – January 6, 1994, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1993), Section A, p. 10.

¹⁵² Joe Horiye, “Reaching for The Promised Land,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 17, 1993 – January 6, 1994, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1993), Section A, p. 41.

¹⁵³ Lillian Kimura, “Back to my Chicago roots,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1992, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1992), Section A, p. 45.

¹⁵⁴ Barry Saiki, “JACL’s course: Not by Ignoring the Past,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 1996, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1996), Section B, p. 69.

Now that Sansei held a substantial amount of power within the JACL it was up to them to determine what the JACL's course of action would be in the post-redress era. While there had still been redress work to do throughout the late 1980s, passage of amendments to the 1992 Civil Liberties Act at the beginning of the decade officially ended the fight, giving JACLers no excuse to hold off on answering the difficult question that had haunted their parents' generation decades prior. In anticipation of the end of the redress effort, in 1989 the *Pacific Citizen* had run a holiday issue with the theme of "What now?" in which former president Henry Tanaka would write, "after more than 50 years of 'doing business as usual,' and despite significant accomplishments, especially following the Evacuation and incarceration period of the early 1940s, JACL has not kept pace with the environment in which it operates."¹⁵⁵ In offering a new course of action, Tanaka would point to the need for the organization to finally make active efforts in the realm of coalition building, a sentiment echoed by most members in the holiday issue attempting to plot out the JACL's new direction. However, in 1992, one member writing in the *Pacific Citizen* recalled a story they had heard from John Tateishi in which, at a meeting of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the group the Nisei had long pointed to as evidence of the JACL's civil rights focus, a former NAACP executive director had "cynically asked him what JACL was doing there."¹⁵⁶ This anecdote highlighted the need for a genuine commitment to civil rights and coalition building that would be necessary if the organization was to regain and retain its position in the civil rights community during the 1990s. Yet even with acknowledgments such as this coming from wide sections of the organization, doing so would not be easy.

¹⁵⁵ Hank Tanaka, "The 1990s: JACL after Redress," *Pacific Citizen*, December 22-29, 1989, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1989), Section E, p. 6.

¹⁵⁶ Trisha Murakawa, "JACL moves to the future," *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1992, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1992), Section C, p. 16.

Although the JACL was now led primarily by individuals who did have a desire to engage in interracial coalition building, it would still face some of the same roadblocks that had stymied more progressive Nisei in attempts to do so in the past. As had always been a problem for the JACL, finances would continue to limit the organization throughout the 1990s, especially as they found themselves attempting to find a new purpose at the same time that the country was experiencing a recession that would force the organization to cut the weekly publication of the *Pacific Citizen* down to a bimonthly schedule and lead national officers to forecast “less service and fewer programs.”¹⁵⁷ At one point the organization’s budget crisis would reach such an intolerable state that, during an attempt to reorganize the JACL, most of the national office would walk out and abandon the organization in frustration, only shaking the unsteady foundation of the JACL even further.¹⁵⁸ However, for those who did wish to see more programs and more service from the JACL, finances were not the only problem.

When asked in 1993 whether or not he believed that it was good or bad that the JACL “today is more interested in the problems of all minorities, rather than Japanese Americans themselves,” Bill Hosokawa responded that while it was good that the organization had “broadened [its] horizons,” such a course might not be appealing to “Sansei and Yonsei, who have ‘made it,’ who are more concerned with their own personal problems and personal advancement.”¹⁵⁹ While in giving such an answer Hosokawa may have been projecting the ways that Nisei had felt about their own participation in the JACL in the years after incarceration, his conclusion did mesh with the sentiments of at least some members in the organization, though

¹⁵⁷ Denny Yasuhara, “National Board oks cost-cutting plan to answer huge deficit,” *Pacific Citizen*, December, 1994, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1996), Section A, p. 49.

¹⁵⁸ Bill Hosokawa, “Adversity, again,” *Pacific Citizen*, December, 1995, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1995), Section A, p. 31.

¹⁵⁹ “Now and then ... with Bill Hosokawa,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 17, 1993 – January 6, 1994, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1993), Section A, p. 9.

not necessarily the younger members he ascribed them to. In 1983, the first Sansei president, Floyd Shimomura, had advised the membership to “not be afraid to evolve beyond its traditional civil rights orientation,”¹⁶⁰ calling instead for Japanese Americans to focus on accumulating economic and political power. While most members during the 1990s tended to disagree, his words did resonate well with the thoughts of the 1994-1996 president, Denny Yasuhara, who argued that “while civil rights is an important dimension of JACL, these issues, by themselves, will not sustain this organization through the 21st century.”¹⁶¹ However, unlike Shimomura, Yasuhara was a Nisei, and unlike Yasuhara and many of the Nisei still in the organization, many Sansei believed civil rights ought to be *the* most important dimension of the JACL.

In many ways heralding a new era for the JACL of the 1990s, in 1992 the organization would elect its first woman, Lillian Kimura, as president. While Bill Hosokawa may have believed that if the organization wanted to survive, it needed to take time to examine “the values that sustained the Issei, values that had nothing to do with abortion or homosexuality,”¹⁶² under Kimura’s leadership the JACL would pass resolutions in support of women’s reproductive rights, ending discrimination for gays and lesbians in the military and employment, and equal marriage rights for all people.¹⁶³ In taking such stances on gender and sexuality, the JACL was making its first steps back into cooperating with the broader liberal civil rights community with little worry about how the old guard remaining in the JACL may have felt about such actions. Yet such changes were not limited to the realm of gender and sexuality, as the 1990s would see the organization make good on a commitment to working on behalf of all races as well.

¹⁶⁰ Floyd Shimomura, “Rekindling the Issei Dream,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 23-30, 1983, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1983), Section C, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ Denny T. Yasuhara, “The Spirit of Community Service,” *Pacific Citizen*, December, 1994, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1995), Section A, p. 4.

¹⁶² Bill Hosokawa, “For the sake of their children,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1992, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1992), Section A, p. 44.

¹⁶³ “JACL History,” *Japanese American Citizens League Website*, <https://jacl.org/history>.

While it would express initial reluctance in choosing whether or not to condemn the confirmation of conservative Clarence Thomas to the supreme court, the JACL did eventually come around to making a statement against the judge in an attempt to avoid the mistake it had in the 1980s during the Robert Bork confirmation proceedings. However, Trisha Murakawa, JACL vice president of planning and development, would criticize the action as being “too little, too late,” arguing that “we can afford this kind of flagrant behavior no more as a civil rights organization.”¹⁶⁴ While Thomas was indeed an African American, he and other African Americans such as Stephen L. Carter, Glenn Lowry, and Shelby Steele represented a rising chorus coming from conservative elements of the African American community that called for the dismantling of affirmative action policies. In expressing even the slightest hesitation in choosing to condemn Thomas, the JACL was going against the calls to protect affirmative action that were increasingly a feature of the organization’s policy platform. Throughout the 1990s, affirmative action, which one member claimed was “a direct result of the 1960s Black Civil Rights Movement” that “all other minorities and immigrants ... benefitted from,”¹⁶⁵ was the subject not only of an ever-present dialogue within the organization but also actual JACL action and campaigning. Indeed, in addition to officially voicing its support for affirmative action policies, the JACL also engaged in a project to defeat a proposition in California that would “eliminate mandated affirmative action,” with “meetings, newspaper ads, coalition building, leafleting, etc ... all part of the effort.”¹⁶⁶ Alongside such activities, the 1990s would also see the JACL take an increasingly passionate stance against the prevalence of hate crimes that Asian

¹⁶⁴ Trisha Murakawa, “JACL moves to the future,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 18-25, 1992, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1992), Section C, p. 16.

¹⁶⁵ Ken Yabusaki, “Back to the future, Affirmative Action,” *Pacific Citizen*, December, 1996, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1996), Section B, p. 7.

¹⁶⁶ Herbet Yamanashi, “Looking Back at the Past 11 Months,” *Pacific Citizen*, December, 1996, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 1996), Section B, p. 71.

Americans and other minorities faced, participating in court cases, legislative fights, and even publishing a 109-page book called *Walk with Pride: Taking Steps to Address Anti-Asian Violence* in 1991.¹⁶⁷ However, perhaps the greatest indicator of the current of change that younger Japanese Americans had brought with them to the JACL's leadership, was the ways in which the JACL was beginning to take an interest in issues not just that Japanese Americans shared with other minorities, but that solely affected non-Japanese American groups.

In a 1989 *Pacific Citizen* article reflecting on the work the JACL had done during the redress effort as it was winding down, JACL member George Ogawa briefly mentioned the ways in which “forays by the government against the Palestinians, which was based on a hidden inter-governmental ‘Contingency Plan’ to detain and ultimately deport Arab immigrants by the thousands based solely on their nationality,”¹⁶⁸ seemed to mirror the ways in which the government had unfairly incarcerated Japanese Americans almost half a century before. Two years later, “reacting to the persecution of Arab Americans because of the Gulf War,” JACL national director, Bill Yoshino, would warn that “we must learn from our past that unwarranted actions towards a group of Americans based solely on their ancestry are wrong.”¹⁶⁹ While such calls did not amount to any extensive action on the part of the JACL to combat the discrimination that Arab Americans were facing, this discourse foreshadowed both the rise in discrimination that Arab and Muslim Americans would face in the coming decade, and the lens through which the JACL would view such discrimination. In recognizing that other minority groups could share discrimination not just that the JACL was experiencing in the present but also

¹⁶⁷ “JACL History,” *Japanese American Citizens League Website*, <https://jacl.org/history>.

¹⁶⁸ George Ogawa, “Redress Recognition,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 22-29, 1989, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1989), Section C, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ Gwen Muranaka, “1991, The Year in Review,” *Pacific Citizen*, December 20-27, 1991, (Los Angeles, Japanese American Citizens League, 1991), Section A, p. 21.

that the organization *had* experienced in the past, a sense of responsibility grew amongst members of the JACL to use their own experiences and wisdom to work to ensure other minority groups did not fall victim to the discrimination and tragedy that they had suffered during the twentieth century.

During the 1990s, the JACL came a long way towards realizing its goals of looking beyond the Japanese American community, building coalitions, and returning into the fold of the mainstream civil rights community. However, many believed that the organization still had a long way to go and a substantial amount of work to do. Among them were John Tateishi, who had stepped away from the organization following his work on the redress campaign, yet had returned in 1999 to serve as the JACL's national director with the hope that he could teach the JACL to "once again master the art of making a difference."¹⁷⁰ By continuing to propel the JACL down a path in which it could be engaged in issues that spanned beyond the Japanese American community, Tateishi believed that the JACL would slowly but surely be able to regain the recognition and respect it had once laid claim to. Yet an opportunity to prove whether or not the organization as a whole would remain true to this new direction would arise much sooner than expected.

Conclusion: What's Next?

In the uncertain and fearful hours following the attacks of 9/11, with not a second to lose, Tateishi and JACL president Floyd Mori utilized every outlet they could to urge "Americans 'not to make the same mistakes as a nation that were made in the hysteria of WWII following the

¹⁷⁰ John Tateishi, *Redress: The Inside Story of the Successful Campaign for Japanese American Reparations*, (Berkeley: Heyday, 2020), p. 350.

attacks of Pearl Harbor.”¹⁷¹ While it is impossible to know how much of an impact, if any, the voices of the JACL truly had in the cacophony of noise that followed this new ‘day of infamy,’ it was certainly the case that JACLers’ recognition that their own history and experiences could allow them to understand and respond to the plights of others was solidified in the midst of the crisis. Yet why had they done this?

The experience of incarceration had shaped the Nisei of the JACL and the broader Japanese American community in many ways. When they had their homes, livelihoods, and belongings stolen from them, the rest of the country stood idly by. While they were in the camps, calls for their freedom were rare. When they resettled and attempted to rebuild what they had lost, they were told to keep their heads down and stay quiet. Thus, when they had finally ‘made it’ and were in a position to help others, it was hard for many not to recall the silence of the country when they most needed help. It was hard to see others taking to the streets and calling for equality when they believed they had achieved it by simply working hard and being grateful for what they had. Yet the Japanese Americans and the JACL who stepped up to do what they could to ensure the tragedy that Japanese Americans had endured in the past would not happen again were not these Nisei.

John Tateishi and Floyd Mori, the two men who were behind the JACL’s actions on 9/11, were quite different than many of the JACL leaders who had come before them. Tateishi, the national director, was a Sansei while Mori, the president, was a younger Nisei whose family had never been incarcerated. The JACL they were a part of, while still containing some old guard Nisei such as Bill Hosokawa, 86 years old at the time of the attacks, was now led by a substantial number of Sansei who, though perhaps a bit ‘quieter’ than they had been during the 1960s,

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 358.

nonetheless carried an appreciation for the belief that despite the victories of the Civil Rights Movement, systemic racism still permeated American society, that being Japanese American and being Asian American were not mutually exclusive, and that all minorities suffered together under the American racial hierarchy and fighting it together would be the only way to bring about change.

In 2004, the JACL would celebrate the 75th anniversary of the organization, an event that allowed them to reflect on the organization's history but also ponder what the future of the JACL would look like in the decades to come. In the 2003 holiday issue dedicated to this theme it was clear that 50 years after it had attained the goals outlined at its first postwar convention and over 10 years since it had won the fight for redress, the organization was still stuck asking the question "what's next." In answering this question, one Sansei member would respond by arguing that "some members believe that JACL should support civil rights for anyone (Japanese or non-Japanese). Yes, I believe that civil rights should be applicable to everyone, but is that what JACL's purpose is – to solve the world's problems on civil rights."¹⁷² Gail Tanaka, the Sansei writing the article, believed that rather than focus on civil rights, the organization should focus on social activities that would develop an appreciation and exploration of Japanese culture given that, "touting civil rights is not the way that will attract the younger generations into the JACL."¹⁷³ However, those of the younger generation who were also writing in the *Pacific Citizen* did not necessarily agree.

While some of the younger members writing in the 2003 holiday issue expressed an appreciation for the need to use social events to draw in youth, they all remained firm in the

¹⁷² Gail Tanaka, "A Vision for JACL," *Pacific Citizen*, December, 2003, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 2003), p. 8.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

belief that civil rights needed to continue to be a mainstay of the organization. The most passionate amongst these calls would come from Carl Takei, who believed that to pursue a social course would “betray our unique historical legacy and the important responsibilities that come with this inheritance.”¹⁷⁴ Echoing his passionate cry would be Maya Yamazaki, the JACL National Youth/Student Council chair, writing in an article titled, “An Affirmative Action Wake-up Call” that while “all too often, I hear that the youth are not interested in civil rights, that we want social and cultural events ... the youth today never forget the importance of civil rights.”¹⁷⁵ These young Japanese Americans had grown up in an America where the progress that had been won since the 1960s was simply the baseline. Just as the Sansei had been told that the world they inherited was a world without discrimination, yet nonetheless wanted more for themselves and for all, so did these youth. Thus, the fact that the JACL today, composed of this younger generation, supports the Movement for Black Lives and efforts to secure reparations, fights to end incarceration at the borders, and works with other Asian American groups to combat stereotyping and hate crimes seems only natural. One look at the JACL website’s sections addressing these issues makes it clear that an ability to understand other minority groups’ problems through the lens of Japanese American history has allowed them to take such stances as almost all statements issued in support of other communities reference Japanese Americans’ parallel experiences in one way or another.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Carl Takei, “A New Role for JACL,” *Pacific Citizen*, December, 2003, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 2003), p. 13.

¹⁷⁵ Maya Yamazaki, “An Affirmative Action Wake-up Call,” *Pacific Citizen*, December, 2003, (Monterey Park, Japanese American Citizens League, 2003), p. 18.

¹⁷⁶ “JACL Statement Submitted to House Judiciary in Support of HR 40,” *jacl.org*, March 2, 2021, <https://jacl.org/statements/jacl-statement-submitted-to-house-judiciary-in-support-of-hr-40>. “Executive Director, David Inoue’s Statement for Tsuru for Solidarity,” *jacl.org*, June 7, 2021, <https://jacl.org/statements/executive-director-david-inoues-statement-for-tsuru-for-solidarity>.

Today the JACL is led by a president who is a Yonsei and a national director who is a Shin Nisei.¹⁷⁷ Both are half-Chinese. When Jefferey Moy, the current president, was sworn in, he joked, “you may have noticed something a little bit odd about tonight’s swearing in. I’m here to confirm that your worst nightmare is coming true: Young people are taking over.” Though such a statement may not have actually rung true for the members attending who responded with “hoots and applause,”¹⁷⁸ it might have hit old guards such as Mike Masaoka and Bill Hosokawa a bit hard had they still been alive to hear it. Yet it is because they and the ideology they clung to are no longer exercising a tight grip on the organization that the JACL has been able to evolve into the organization that it is today.

In his 1972 book, *No Name in the Street*, James Baldwin wrote that, “America proves, certainly, if any nation ever has, that man cannot live by bread alone; on the other hand, men can scarcely begin to react to this principle until they—and, still more, their children—have enough bread to eat.”¹⁷⁹ When members of both the past and present have charged the JACL to look beyond the Japanese American community in the fight for civil rights, such propositions have generally tended to rest upon the presumption that the Japanese American has reached a position in society in which they are secure enough to do so. While many would argue that Japanese Americans today have still not reached the ‘equality’ that JACLers spoke of so many years ago, the community does at least lay claim to a sense of security far-reaching enough that new generations are beginning to view looking beyond their own ethnic community in the pursuit of equality as a given. Yet for this to have ever been possible, a generation of Japanese Americans had to make difficult decisions and navigate challenging circumstances.

¹⁷⁷ “Shin Nisei” are Japanese Americans whose parents immigrated in the years following World War II.

¹⁷⁸ George Toshio Johnston, “JACL Installs ‘Young-Sei’ Leaders at Sayonara Banquet,” *pacificcitizen.org*, (2018), <https://www.pacificcitizen.org/jacl-installs-young-sei-leaders-at-sayonara-banquet/>.

¹⁷⁹ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 87.

Not all Nisei may have believed that Japanese Americans had a responsibility to look beyond their own community. Yet, at the same time, not all Nisei were “quiet Americans.” Indeed, as Japanese Americans have been attempting to make clear for decades, not all Japanese Americans can be said to share any given characteristic beyond their Japanese ancestry. However, *many* Nisei truly did make sacrifices that have, whether they were intended to or not, allowed the generations that have followed them to chart their own courses in the pursuit of justice, equality, and a Japanese American identity. Ultimately, it is because of them, and a legacy they left behind that would provide their children with a lens through which they could attempt to understand the struggles of others, that, as Roy Nishikawa wondered so many decades ago, perhaps the time has finally come when the JACL can remain committed to concerning itself not *less* with persons of Japanese ancestry but *more* with Americans of all ancestry.

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