



Riverside JACL



November 2010

Riverside JACL

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A LESSON ON THE MOUNT

Flash back! I remember back about two decades ago I was walking the trail up Mt. Rubidoux. As I approach the peak, I saw an elderly man riding a bicycle up the mountain. He had on a well-worn backpack containing what I later learned was two cans of whole tomatoes. I recognized the man as Gen Ogata (as it turns out, Gen was his given name, not short for General). I huffed and puffed a “hello” explaining I wasn’t used to the altitude. Mt. Rubidoux is a whole 1329 feet tall (elevation gain 500 feet). Gen was breathing normally but wasn’t buying my altitude argument.

Anyway, the conversation somehow drifted to civil rights and eventually the JACL. I wasn’t a member of JACL then and couldn’t see any reason why such an organization is needed.

The Japanese gardener is more of an outdated stereotype than a reality. Today Japanese-Americans, as well as other Asian-Americans, are more closely associated with the Silicon Valley and high-technology than the San Joaquin Valley and the family farm. We are well represented in fields such as medicine, law, and (more increasingly) politics. The percentage of Asian-Americans enrolled in California’s best universities exceed the percentage in the state’s population as a whole. If you look at the metrics of Asian-American participation, one can ask “where’s the discrimination.” I opined that the notion of an Asian-American civil rights group is outdated.

Gen, in Yoda-like fashion, calmly acknowledged the gains Asian-Americans and other groups have made in the past 50 years. However, he was also quick to point out that I should be careful in my thinking and not conclude that discrimination is a worn-out social construct left on the ash-heap of history. Organizations such as JACL are needed, in part, as a sentinel watching to see signs of still-existing intolerance and a rebirth of old intolerance.

Flash forward! Recently I attended the "Special Symposium on the Fight for Civil Rights in Riverside", sponsored by the Inlandia Institute, the Human Relations Commission of the City of Riverside and Heyday Books in celebration of the City of Riverside’s annual Race Equality Week. The morning session featured a presentation by Elaine Elinson and Stan Yogi of their book titled



Wherever There's a Fight: How Runaway Slaves, Suffragists, Immigrants, Strikers, and Poets Shaped Civil Liberties in California. The title, they explained, comes from Tom Joad’s moving speech at the end of John Steinbeck’s “Grapes of Wrath.”

The authors spoke of over a dozen examples detailing the history of California’s struggle for a more equitable society. In Chapter 4 in a section entitled “Inferiority Where None Exists” they discuss how Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez had to struggle for their rights as U.S. citizens. Briefly, Felicitas was a U.S. citizen by her birth in Puerto Rico.



Aiko and Bob Endo at JACL Picnic 2009

Although Gonzolo was born in Mexico, he became a naturalized U.S. in the early 1940's. They operated an asparagus farm near the City of Westminster in Orange County, California on land leased from a Japanese American family interned during World War II. The Mendez family tried to enroll their children in the 17th Street School in the City of Westminster. The administrator would not admit the Mendez children and instructed them to enroll their children in Hoover School, Westminster's "Mexican School." The family first tried to find a political solution to their plight, but eventually had to turn to the courts. They lost in trail court with the judge citing *Plessy v. Ferguson* as legally justifying segregation. The Mendez family later prevailed at the U.S District Court and, eventually, the U.S Ninth Circuit Court. The case in interesting in many respects 1) the Mendez family was represented, in part by Thurgood Marshall, 2) it contributed to the passage of a bill in California repealing all school laws requiring segregation which signed into law by Governor Earl Warren, and 3) as pointed out by the authors, it served as a trial (no pun intended) run for strategies, such as the introduction of social science research, later used by Thurgood Marshall and others in the *Brown vs. Board of Education*. In that case, *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was overturned by the U.S Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Earl Warren.

I would be remiss to point out that friend-of-the-court briefs in the *Mendez* case before the Ninth circuit were filed by many notable civil rights groups including the Japanese American Citizens League.

In another section of the book, the authors write about *repartidos*. At the turn of the 20th century most of

the anti-immigration fervor was directed towards Asians. In the early 1900s Mexican immigration was insignificant. However, the First World War and the resulting lack of workers, along with California's booming agricultural industry, created a labor shortage which the U.S. government addressed by importing Mexican labors. But, as the authors state "the welcome mat was suddenly pulled out from under Mexican workers when the stock market crashed in 1929." In the 1930s people of Mexican ancestry were routinely rounded up deported without regard to legal status. Visa and immigration ruled were changed. At First, many businesses refused to hire

"History is merely a list of surprises...It can only prepare us to be surprised yet again."
Kurt Vonnegut

noncitizens. Later they refused to hire anyone of Mexican ancestry, citizens and noncitizens alike. Such massive deportation efforts created a great unease in Mexican-American communities with many people leaving ahead of the law. Raids such as those on La Placita in Los Angeles where 400 people were rounded up and forced to show papers or be deported immediately were not unusual. Special trains were dispatched from Los Angeles to the Mexican border in the *repartidos* effort.

Suddenly, though, the repatriation efforts stopped. A sudden change in attitude? A great vision of equality and human rights? Nope. Pearl Harbor happened. America's entry into the war and the end of the Great Depression created another labor shortage. Those historical events gave us the *Bracero* program. But that, as the saying goes, is another story.

After listening to Elaine Elinson and Stan Yogi retell story after story, it occurred to me much of what went on in the 20th century is going on in the 21st century. Not much has changed and I pondered if we had really learned anything from our past. I was truly surprised

by this history lesson. But it seems that Kurt Vonnegut was right when he wrote "history is merely a list of surprises. ... It can only prepare us to be surprised yet again."

I still make that trip up Mt. Rubidoux, although not as frequently as before. The last time up I past an elderly man wearing a backpack sitting on the side of the road. He had a bicycle laying on the grass by his side. As I walked past him he broke out in a boisterous laugh all the while staring at me, almost challenging me. As I approached him to ask him what was so funny, he quickly jumped on his bicycle and rode quickly away with a twinkle in his eye shouting, "Please explain to me again how the notion of an Asian-American civil rights group is outdated!"

I suspect I have not seen the last of him.

Clyde Wilson
Riverside JACL
Civil Rights Chair

SAVE THE DATE

Installation Luncheon

February 26, 2011 at
the Riverside Marriott

Program by
Taiko Mix



When do “Model Minorities” stand up and fight? The battle for Riverside’s Chinatown continues

Well, when does anyone stand up to fight?

Reading *Wherever There’s a Fight: how runaway slaves, suffragists, immigrants, strikers, and poets shaped civil liberties in California*, the answer must be: whenever it is important.

Thank you Elaine Elinson and Stan Yogi for having written a compelling and easily read-



able book that traces the numerous fights for social justice in California, and

for recently sharing with us their historical odyssey from California’s beginnings to recent times, packed with brave, memorable, and poignant stories. Some of these are classic; others are little-known. All deserve acknowledgement.

Highlighting local examples, the panel discussion on *The Fights That Shaped Civil Liberties in Riverside* provided part two of the Special Symposium for Riverside’s Annual Race Equality Week. Local speakers shared stories of struggle from social justice history in Riverside.

In one struggle for social justice, the historic Riverside Chinatown archaeological site, the Riverside Superior Court found that the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) improperly followed procedures for the disposition of surplus properties (2009) in their attempted sale of the land to developer Doug Jacobs. RCOE appealed this decision. In turn, the Save Our Chinatown Committee (SOCC) appealed the decision that the City correctly followed California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) procedures in their Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The case is still in litigation.

However, a new wrinkle was revealed at the October 15th symposium. RCOE proposed a Land Swap with Developer Jacobs *giving* him the Chinatown property in exchange for a vacant property he currently owns in Moreno Valley. RCOE filed a Notice of Intent and a Negative Declaration, detailing information on the Moreno Valley property. Both documents were issued in print and made available for public examination at RCOE offices (but not online). The 30-day Public Comment Review period ended November 3, 2010. As of this writing, RCOE was to take up the Land Swap Proposal (aka Riverside - Moreno Valley Land Exchange) at their Board meeting November 10, 2010. An article in the *Press Enterprise* appeared October 30, 2010.

Information about the historic Riverside Chinatown archaeological site is available at <http://saveourchinatown.org>.

Questions: Why would RCOE propose this land swap while the case is still under litigation? Is this an attempt to get around the legal system? The Negative Declaration indicates that RCOE does not have current plans to develop the Moreno Valley property; why have this swap now? Who really benefits from this land exchange? Why does this sound like a backroom deal? Is there a correlation between developer campaign contributions and developer business advantages? When Jacobs acquired the Moreno Valley property in 2007, he proposed a two-story medical office building for the site, but no development occurred. That development plan approval expired April 26, 2010 (Negative Declaration p. 2). What does this action coupled with the developer’s behavior over the 2009 February holiday weekend at the Chinatown site tell us? What was RCOE’s involvement in the February 2009 activities on the Chinatown site? Do these actions and proposed land exchange fit with RCOE’s stated core values? Shouldn’t the core values come before private developer interests?

The Chinatown site played a prominent

role in the history and development of Riverside, the citrus industry, and citrus agriculture. Its influence encompassed a population of more than Chinese Americans. How many Riverside locations currently enjoy 4 levels of significance (city, county, state, and national)? Saving this site should not be this difficult.

SOCC proposes a Chinese Memorial Park to benefit the public, our children, and the preservation of Riverside’s history, an idea that nearly came to fruition 25 years ago. Wouldn’t a Memorial Park with direct links to the California Citrus State Historical Park and the Jensen-Alvarado Historic Ranch promote and highlight Riverside, reinforce our collective histories, and provide collaborative educational opportunities? Wouldn’t this vision be more in line with our expectations of an educational organization? Shouldn’t the Riverside County Office of Education lead the way, rather than hinder it?

Judy Lee Save Our Chinatown Committee

Author’s note: I would personally like to thank our JACL friends for their support and encouragement in this struggle. Working with you has been particularly meaningful, as my family enjoys heritage associations to both the Riverside Chinatown site and the Harada House, one half of the total Riverside National Landmarks. Two years ago when I was collecting signatures for a petition drive related to Riverside’s Chinatown, I told my brother-in-law about the landmark Supreme Court decision brought about by the Harada case. He promptly made the connection; “That’s why my grandparents were able to buy a house back then.” (This was along California’s Central Coast.)

Should any of you be interested in SOCC’s electronic updates, let us know that you would like to be added to our list at saveourchinatown@gmail.com. We also appreciate your letting your networks know or facilitating our contact with: be they individuals, media contacts, legislative connections, or other resources.

Riverside Japanese American
Citizens League

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JACL ANNUAL LUNCHEON
OCTOBER 2010

A heartfelt thank you to the representatives of the *Nikkei For Civil Rights and Redress* who were guests at the Riverside JACL annual luncheon on October 23, 2010 at the First Christian Church in Riverside.

Kay Ochi, Janice Yen and Haru Kuromiya graciously presented the inspiring film *Stand Up for Justice: the Ralph Lazo Story*. This is the story of a 17-year old Mexican-American boy in Los Angeles who joined his Japanese friends in confinement at Manzanar concentration camp during WW II. It is a story of courage and loyalty. The film has an educational curriculum guide and is being shared with schools and organizations in California and beyond. The film was made, edited and produced now in DVD format over a thirteen year period. It has been well received by teachers and the public in general. It has been a project of the NCRP and Visual Communications in Los Angeles.

The NCRP is located at 231 E. Third

Street, G104, Los Angeles, CA 90013 and their website is www.ncrr-la.org



Real life Ralph Lazo at
Manzanar, shown front and
center.

Thank you to the organizers of the luncheon. They were Michiko Yoshimura, Beverly Inaba, Helen and Akio Yoshikawa, Clyde Wilson, Meiko Inaba, Gayle and Francis Fujioka.

CONDOLENCES

Condolences to the family of Robert Minoru Endo who passed away on October 28th. He was born in Mountain View, CA. He served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team during World War II. He was an Assistant Professor at UCLA before coming to Riverside to serve as a Professor of Plant Pathology for 28 years. Bob leaves his wife Aiko, daughter, Jean Stoutenborough, and sons Robert and Kenneth, 4 grandchildren. Services were held on November 8th with burial following at the Riverside National Cemetery.

Bob, as he was known to his many friends, was active with our chapter and served on the Board for many years. He loved books and was an avid reader. He shared his knowledge of many subjects with everyone. Family and friends will miss him