



PORTLAND JACL NEWSLETTER

Portland JACL · Supporting Civil Rights Since 1928

• NOVEMBER 2020 | VOLUME 26 ISSUE 10 •

Board Member MESSAGE

Honoring Our Veterans

By Lynn Fuchigami Parks

By the time this article is published, the election will be in the rear view mirror, but no doubt whatever the outcome, our nation will likely still be in a state of extreme division. As Veterans Day looms on November 11th, I can only imagine what the WWII Japanese American Nisei soldiers would think or are thinking, about the state of the country they fought so hard for. Most of the Nisei soldiers were not even old enough to vote, but they put their lives at risk and in some cases, paid the ultimate price with their life for that privilege, and to defend democracy both at home and abroad while many of their families were held prisoner by the country they fought for.

A little over a year ago and what now seems a lifetime ago, I had the honor of going on a tour that followed the footsteps of the WWII Nisei soldiers through Italy and France, with the highlight being the official celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Nisei soldiers liberating the cities of Bruyeres and Biffontaine from the Nazis. Unlike here in our own country where many are unaware of their heroism and unparalleled service and sacrifice, the Nisei soldiers continue to be revered today by families and children overseas who honor their memory and

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

PNW JACL Virtual Meeting

November 7

Family Friendly Car Caravan to support Black Lives Matter

November 8

Veteran's Day

November 11

National JACL Virtual Board Meeting

November 14

Japanese Ancestral Society Virtual Board Meeting

November 16

Thanksgiving Day

November 26

Editor: Chong Sim (simc0186@gmail.com)

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legacy. I was both elated to see this, but also startled and dismayed by the sharp contrast between how their legacy continues to live forever abroad, but often fades and is forgotten here.

As we witness historic times and as we observe Veterans Day, we can honor the sacrifice of those who served by asking ourselves, what can we do to stand up and speak out to defend the principles of freedom and democracy that our veterans fought for? How do we help break the cycle of systemic racism and oppression? Are we just going to be a witness, or are we willing to do the work, to participate in the hard conversations? When we stand in solidarity with Black Lives, are we willing to call out

anti-blackness and able to confront it within ourselves as well as in our own communities?

To honor the veterans we need to answer these questions, and more importantly follow in their footsteps to answer the call to action. **Our veterans fought and sacrificed everything for the United States not for divided states, so let us do our part to stand up for ways that heal and unite us, not destroy and divide us.**

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If you would like to contact the Board, their email address is **First Name@pdxjacl.org**

2021 Newsletter: Changes to Distribution

By Christopher Lee
Co-President Portland JACL

Beginning in January of 2021 Portland JACL will be making a big change to how our monthly newsletter gets distributed. We will shift to providing our newsletter via email as the default and primary format. However, we understand that there are those without computers or internet access, and some who prefer to have a paper copy. Don't worry! You can continue receiving a paper newsletter if you prefer. We are asking for a suggested donation of \$25 a year for those that can afford it. If you want to continue receiving the paper newsletter just fill out the form in this issue and mail it back to us before December 15th, 2020. If we have your email, then you will still get the email newsletter too.

We have heard from many of you who prefer email and have enjoyed getting our updates digitally. For you, nothing will change other than one less piece of mail each month. Based on the survey we ran earlier this year we estimate that less than 20% of Portland members will elect to receive a paper newsletter. Currently, our newsletter gets sent to about 500 addresses each month. This switch will not only help us reduce cost, but it will be a little friendlier to the environment

too. Based on a standard 8-page issue, this will help us keep about 38,400 pages from being printed and transported each year. Not bad for a small nonprofit!

Thank you for your patience and input as we navigated these changes during the pandemic. We have a diverse and growing community even though we couldn't meet in person much this year. I want to give special thanks to Marleen Wallingford for serving as our newsletter editor and Jenny Yamada for taking care of our website and email. They have spent a lot of time making sure we stay connected during these trying times.

We will make this form available in both the November and December issues of the newsletter, so you have time to get back to us with your preference. If you have any questions feel free to write us a letter, leave us a voicemail or send an email. Oh, and don't forget to vote!

Portland Chapter JACL

PO Box 86310
Portland, OR 97286

Voicemail: 1.877.843.6914

Email: newsletter@pdxjacl.org

Name of JACL Member		Preferred Phone	
		Circle One: (Home / Cell)	
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New Address (if changing)			
Street Address			
Street Address (Line 2)			
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Please return this form to Portland Chapter JACL, PO Box 86310, Portland, OR 97286
A suggested donation of \$25 per year will help us cover costs.

Anti-Bl In Asian

By Lauren Yanase

In early June, during protests following the atrocious murder of George Floyd, my Boomer-age Japanese American father expressed frustration about certain happenings in the news. He reiterated his general support for the demonstrations, then paused before saying, "You know, those people are horribly racist to us too."

'Those people' were understood to be Black Americans, while 'us' was Asian immigrants and their Asian American children.

When pressed for his reasoning, he replied, "You know, they hate us 'model minorities.' They 'ching-changed' me as much as any White kid growing up in the Sixties."

Therein lies the answer to my unasked question: what formative encounter had he experienced to codify such views? How could my progressive, sensitive father believe that the long history of violent racism inflicted by White people on Black people is comparable to conflict between BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) communities?

Of course, this was not my first or only

experience with casual anti-Black sentiment in my Asian American family and community.



1948, Trip between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles: (L to R) Mitsue Oshita, Tsuchino Kobayashi Kato, Kuni Kato, Ted Kato, Emiko Wexler, Barbara Shirota, Ayako Kato

As a Japanese American, family is everything – and nothing is more important than the sacred act of being together. My father's extended family, numbering over fifty people, has come together for each holiday, big or small, for the past half-century. The most significant loss during the Coronavirus pandemic has been the inability to

ackness America

celebrate together; to break bread together;
to simply be together.

Like many American families, ideologies within my dad's family range from deeply conservative to extremely liberal and everything in between. And, like many families, there are strong opinions and emotions that vary wildly on race issues in America. It was counter-intuitive to me that anyone who had been discriminated against on the basis of race could be Anti-Black. How could those who lived through one of the worst violations of Asian American human and civil rights (the Japanese American incarceration camps) believe the worst of a group whose existence is a continued testament to their push for acceptance in a nation they helped build?

Ironically, there are deep, old roots of Anti-Black sentiment in my dad's non-White family that lead to an attitude remarkably similar to the unforgiving racism carried by my mom's White, old-genteel-Southern family.

Like most American families, my father and I come from a legacy of immigrants. His grandparents came from Japan in

the late 19th century. The early history of Asian immigrants on the West Coast is notably marked by the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad and the subsequent Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. But my great-grandparents held tight to their American Dream even though their new home was actively hostile against them.

Because of their radical pilgrimage and establishment, my father's late grandparents are revered legends in my family and their American legacy weighs on our shoulders decades after their passing. An underappreciated fact of my family's patriarch and matriarch was their unswayable, documentable anti-Black ideology in a time when they, too, were the targets of gross racial discrimination. My father grew up hearing his grandparents using English and Japanese slurs against Black people and their perceived offenses against our family. His father, my late grandfather, a state prosecutor, was convinced that Black people were intellectually inferior.

Anti-Blackness is embedded in my Japanese family's roots, immigration story, and consequently our political identity. The

racial obstacle my family faces now is acknowledging and confronting the anti-Black sentiment that has persisted for over a century in our heritage and our identity. Whenever this is mentioned in my family, I hear the uncomfortable “they were a product of their time” explanations ... and more. Their intent is clear: don’t dishonor your great-grandparents’ memory by asking about their shortcomings.



1944, Heart Mountain Relocation Center (Kato family photo in front of the barrack): (L to R) (Front) Emiko Wexler, Ted Kato, Mitsue Oshita, Kuni Kato, (Back) Ayako Kato, Katsumi Kato.

It can be hard, then, to feel empowered to

confront my family members' views since setting aside individuality for the sake of deference to elders is doctrinal.

About a month prior to the killing of George Floyd, PBS released a fabulous five-hour film series, “Asian Americans,” on the history of Asian Americans starting from the first migrants. Particularly galling to me was a historian’s tongue-in-cheek summation of the plight of non-European immigrants and migrants: “each immigrant group is striving to be as far from ‘Black’ as possible.” In a gross generalization of the immigrant experience, this quip reveals the fundamental foundation behind assimilation culture: the systemic, institutionalized racism Black people face in America is so pervasive around the world that non-Black immigrants and Americans must distance themselves as far from Blackness as possible.

As a non-Black person, qualifying Blackness is impossible and inappropriate, so I will not attempt to try. I will say, however, that the non-Black perception of Blackness is often derived from stereotypes and pop culture. The tropes we consume from those media inform the unwritten non-Black POC (People of Color) handbook on achieving acceptance and admittance to White America.

And so is the paradox of Blackness for non-Black POC; we must shun and distance ourselves from the most egregiously ‘Black’ behaviors up until the point they are co-opted by White American pop culture.

With the quiet time that quarantine has afforded me, I realized that there is nothing more reverential to my family’s legacy than using the voice given to me.

The lived history of Asian Americans is radical: existing, struggling, learning to thrive in a space that has tried to exclude them from the beginning. In that way, Asian

America is more similar than it is different from Black America. As a 21st century Asian American, I stand on the shoulders of Black abolitionists, suffragettes, civil rights leaders, and advocates. The object now is to demonstrate these fundamental affinities in our communities and broaden a coalition of support for Black empowerment.



July 2020 (present-day): (L to R) Bobbie Shirota, Lauren Yanase, Mitsue Oshita, Emiko Wexler

I am not the first nor the last of my background to opine on and decry the apparent disconnect of my community to the plight of Black people in America and the bastardization of 'Blackness.' From outrage over skin-lightening creams to collaboration in the Civil Rights movement there is a through-line in history, however narrow, of Asian Americans as allies to Black lives. Unfortunately, as a whole, Asian Americans have not tied our empowerment to a synchronous Black liberation.

As poor White Southerners were intentionally turned against their Black peers in the Reconstruction Period and beyond, Asian Americans have tried to distinguish themselves as far from Blackness as

possible. It must be my intention as a fourth-generation Asian American to promote breaking down the systemic walls that isolate minority groups from one another. We must be willing to risk the discomfort and offense of our Asian American families and be advocates because it is incumbent on the partnership of Black and Asian Americans to secure equality and dignity for both.

Writer Bio



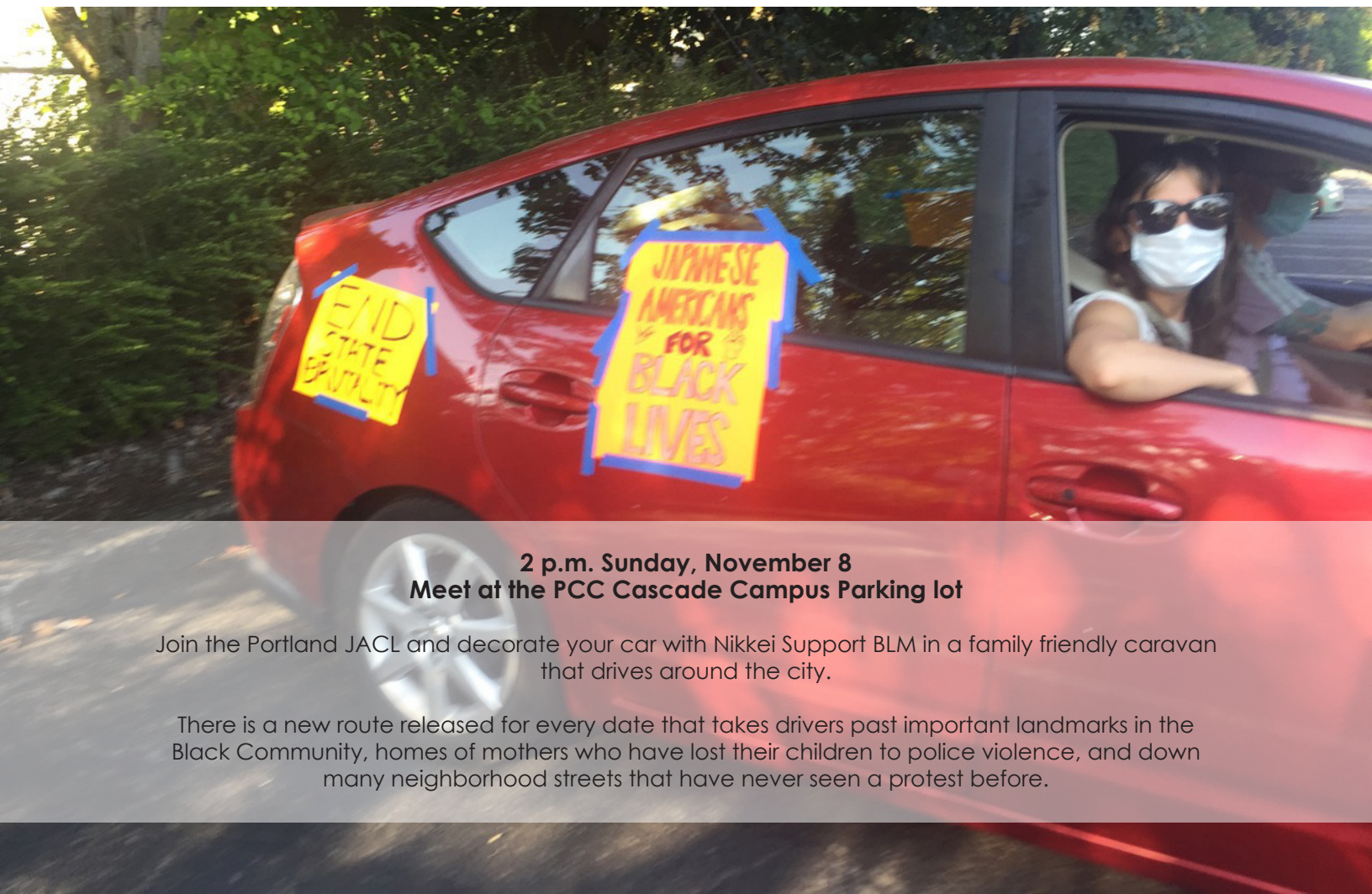
Lauren Yanase is a recent graduate of St. Mary's Academy in Portland, Oregon. An avid storyteller, Lauren has previously written creative fiction and nonfiction accounts of Japanese American internment and has been recognized regionally and nationally for her writing. In 2019, she earned the Girl Scout Gold Award for her documentary about the Japanese American internment. This is a prestigious honor, with fewer than six percent of Girl Scouts worldwide earning this award.

Lauren is attending Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont, following a gap year of working in outdoor education and community organizing. She is an enthusiast of mid-priced coffee and semi-athletic endeavors in the mountains.



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2 p.m. Sunday, November 8
Meet at the PCC Cascade Campus Parking lot

Join the Portland JACL and decorate your car with Nikkei Support BLM in a family friendly caravan that drives around the city.

There is a new route released for every date that takes drivers past important landmarks in the Black Community, homes of mothers who have lost their children to police violence, and down many neighborhood streets that have never seen a protest before.