

San Jose's 43rd Annual Day of Remembrance

By Austin Hideo Eng, San Jose JAACL Member

On February 19, the Bay Area Japanese, Muslim and Native American communities gathered in San Jose Japantown for the Nihonmachi Outreach Committee's 43rd Annual Day of Remembrance. Over 200 attendees commemorated the 81st anniversary of Executive Order 9066 which led to the World War II incarceration of over 120,000 people of Japanese descent.

The theme of this year's program was "Reparatory Justice: Together We Rise," bringing awareness to the public about the redress and reparations movement and the importance of solidarity with other communities in their continuing struggle for reparative justice.

The featured speaker, Professor Veronica Martinez of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust Board, shared the sad story of her great grandmother and the Amah Mutsun people who were forced into missions in San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz, California. Today they own no land within their sacred territory and the U.S. government has taken away their federal tribal recognition.

Recently, an investor group purchased Amah Mutsun ancestral lands near Gilroy, California and wants to develop it into a sand and gravel mining operation. This would erase the thousands of years of history that the Mutsun ancestors held sacred ceremonies on the 403-acre Juristac property. Martinez expressed her gratitude for the support of the Japanese American community who she feels share similar obstacles in terms of healing, loss of identity and recovering their culture.

Council Member, City of Mountain View and former Mayor, Margaret Abe-Koga shares a message in parallel to Martinez, as a Japanese American attending the commemoration.



“We must unite with any marginalized group in American society and denounce any form of racism or discrimination,” Abe-Koga said. “We should support our Amah Mutsun brothers and sisters in their efforts to protect their sacred lands, so they too are not stripped of what belongs to them, their identity and their rights to live and thrive on their lands.”

The program included testimonials by survivors, Sumi Tanabe and Susie Yasui, followed by a candle lighting ceremony by survivors of the 10 camps. A candle light procession through San Jose Japantown was then held, led by youth members of the JACL and community organizations. The program concluded with a moving performance by San Jose Taiko with a set of pieces dedicated to the Day of Remembrance.



"In light of our Japanese American community's horrific experience where citizens were stripped of their rights and incarcerated during WWII, it is incumbent on us to educate people about this dark moment in US history so that it is not repeated," Abe-Koga said.

1. Pictured: JACL Youth Members/Volunteers Avery Wong and Austin Hideo Eng. Photo: Naoko Fujii
2. Pictured: Professor Veronica Martinez . Photo courtesy of: Alfred Leung of Pro Bono Photographer
3. Pictured: Christine Hikido, Sydney Kasson, Halle Sousa and Avery Wong leading the candlelight procession. Photo courtesy of: Chris Cassell of Pro Bono Photographer