

Regional/National

Exhibition of wartime incarceration photographs ties to present day politics

By TOMO HIRAI
Nichi Bei Weekly

“Then They Came for Me: Incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII and the Demise of Civil Liberties” opened at the Futures Without Violence in San Francisco’s Presidio Jan. 18. The exhibit combines photographs by Dorothea Lange and other photographers with artifacts and art that help tell the stories of the forced removal and incarceration of some 120,000 people of Japanese descent from the West Coast during World War II.

The exhibit, produced and primarily sponsored by the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation, also ties the experience to current day prejudices, which have spawned policies such as the “travel ban,” and the separation of children from parents at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Jonathan Logan, head of the foundation, said the exhibit is the culmination of several years worth of projects he and the foundation have supported. Logan said his first project started with Richard Cahan and Michael Williams contacting him about reproducing the formerly impounded photos of the Japanese American wartime incarceration experience by renown photographer Lange.

“Apparently, the War Relocation Authority didn’t realize who Dorothea Lange was, and telling her to do a puff piece on the incarceration of American citizens ... was something Dorothea Lange just couldn’t do,” Logan said. Those photos were reproduced in Cahan and Williams’ book, “Un-American: The Incarceration of Japanese Americans During World War II.” They also inspired “Then They Came for Us,” a film by Abby Ginzberg, as well as the original iteration of the “Then They Came for Me” exhibit, which was first shown in



Chicago in 2017.

Part of what prompted Logan to pursue the film and additional programming was President Donald Trump’s call for a “Muslim ban” during his campaign and the subsequent travel ban since implemented by his administration.

Logan said bringing the Chicago exhibit — which first went to New York last year — to San Francisco took extensive collaboration with the San Francisco-based National Japanese American Historical Society and Emeryville, Calif.-based J-Sei, as well as other individuals and organizations in the Bay Area.

Logan, who funds progressive projects such as nonprofit investigative reporting, arts and culture projects and documentary films, said the exhibit encompasses all of his foundation’s program areas.

“This became a labor of love, pretty much, from the very beginning,” Logan said. “Then when the Muslim ban came up, which was certainly after the book came up ... I called my friend Abby Ginzberg up and said, ‘We have to make this film. And she went to work on this immediately.’”

Anthony Hirschel, curator of the exhibit, said he was the original curator for its debut in Chicago in 2017.

Whereas that exhibit focused on the resettlement of Japanese Americans after the war, Hirschel said the San Francisco



Presidio exhibit was retooled to examine the lives of Japanese Americans returning to the West Coast after the war.

“It couldn’t be more appropriate to be in the Presidio,” Hirschel told the *Nichi Bei Weekly*, referring to the role the former U.S. military base played in the incarceration. Gen. John L. DeWitt signed all the exclusion orders — forcing the incarceration of West Coast *Nikkei* — from the base in 1942.

While the wartime incarceration is the focus of Lange’s photography and the exhibit overall, Hirschel said the exhibit also took into account the racial prejudice that led to creating an environment where racist policies could be enacted.

Hirschel added that a section of the exhibit also shows Japanese American activism after the war, including recent images of Japanese Americans protesting the Trump administration through the 2017 Women’s March.

The curator said working with local organizations and people allowed the exhibit to source much of its artifacts on display from local collections, including Satsuki Ina’s family.

Ina, who was born in the Tule Lake Segregation Center in California, spoke about her father’s resistance during the war and shared artifacts on display in the exhibit.

“He protested the incarceration and was charged



photo credits:
Clem Albers, Arcadia, California, April 5, 1942. National Archives.

Dorothea Lange, Oakland, California, March 13, 1942. National Archives.

Dorothea Lange, San Francisco, California, April 25, 1942. National Archives.

RELATED EVENTS AT THE EXHIBIT

“And Then They Came for Us” by Abby Ginzberg and Ken Schneider will screen every Saturday and Sunday from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., noon to 1 p.m., and 4 to 5 p.m. Schedule of film screenings subject to change and seating is limited.

Duncan Ryukun Williams will present “American Sutra” Sunday, Feb. 24 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. to tell the story of the sutra rocks of Heart Mountain, Wyo. Participants may paint their own sutra rock in this family-friendly event. A separate

performance by No-No Boy and Williams will take place from 2 to 4 p.m.

Zahra Billoo, executive director of Council on American Islamic Relations, Bay Area Chapter, and Suzanne Barakat of Our Three Winners will speak Saturday, March 2 from 5 to 8 p.m. at the “The Realities of Othering: Islamophobia and the Legacy of Japanese American Incarceration” event.

Yayoi Kambara will perform “Ikka: Once” with her dancers Sunday, March 24 from 2 to 4 p.m.

with sedition for opposing the (so-called “loyalty questionnaire”) and was sent to Bismarck, North Dakota. He was an enemy alien,” she said.

Ina detailed the toys her father made for her brother while separately imprisoned, and how he had hidden letters to her mother in scraps of cloth he had wrapped in his pants when he asked to have them mended.

“He was assigned this jacket, and it’s like-new because he refused to wear it,” Ina said. “They told him that the circle around the ‘EA’ would be used as a target if he tried to escape.”

The *Sansei* told the *Nichi Bei Weekly* that working with the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation presented an opportunity to

tell the Japanese American story to a broader audience. “It’s not just our story, it’s the American story,” she said.

“Then They Came For Me” will be on view through May 27 at Futures Without Violence, 100 Montgomery St., in the San Francisco Presidio. The gallery is open Wednesdays through Sundays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. with the last gallery admission at 5:30 p.m. Admission is free. The PresidiGo Downtown Shuttle provides free roundtrip service to the Presidio. The shuttle picks up at the Transbay Terminal or Embarcadero BART station. For more information e-mail info@thentheycame.org or call (415) 923-9795.

Politicos introduce bill to award Korematsu the Congressional Gold Medal

WASHINGTON — Politicians introduced a bill Jan. 30 — on what would have been Fred Korematsu’s 100th birthday — to award the civil rights icon the Congressional Gold Medal “in recognition of his fight against the illegal incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and his work to advance civil rights,” a statement issued by Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) said.

“Korematsu stood up for the rights of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II, and continued his fight for decades to expand civil rights and overturn his own false criminal conviction,” Hirono said.

She is joined by Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Chris Coons (D-Del.), and Cory Gardner (R-Colo.) and Rep. Mark Takano (D-Calif.) in


calling for Korematsu to receive the nation’s highest civilian honor.

“Nearly 75 years after the Supreme Court delivered a devastating blow to the civil liberties of Japanese Americans in the landmark *Korematsu v. United States* decision, we are witnessing and experiencing the progress we have made as a country. Progress that was made possible due to the tireless advocacy of civil rights icons like Fred Korematsu,” Takano said. “Mr. Korematsu was an outspoken activist, a fighter for justice, and a hero to many — including myself. ...”

In 1942, at the age of 23, Korematsu was arrested for refusing to enter a U.S. concentration camp for Americans of Japanese ancestry. “After his arrest, he appealed his case all

the way to the Supreme Court, which upheld Executive Order 9066 based on military necessity. After 40 years, on November 10, 1983, Korematsu’s criminal conviction was overturned in a federal court in San Francisco. Korematsu remained a civil rights advocate throughout his life and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, from President Bill Clinton in 1998. He passed away on March 30, 2005 at the age of 86,” the statement said.

S. 277 has been referred to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs while H.R. 924 has been referred to the House Committee on Financial Services, in addition to the House Committee on House Administration.



GRANT T. TOMIOKA
Attorney at Law

4444 Geary Blvd. #301
San Francisco, CA 94118
Tel: (415) 670-9929
Fax: (415) 933-6187
Email: granttt@earthlink.net

LIKE A GOOD NEIGHBOR, STATE FARM IS THERE.®

Brian Takemoto, Agent
Insurance Lic. #: 0C63270
1515 S. El Camino Real Ste 220,
San Mateo, CA 94402
Bus: (650) 340-6955;
(650) 340-6958 fax
brian@briantakemoto.com
www.briantakemoto.com







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