

## Campaign for Justice

From 1942 to 1944, some 2,264 persons of Japanese Ancestry living in Latin America were seized and forcibly brought to the United States. The primary purpose was to provide the U.S. with hostages that could be exchanged for Americans held prisoner by Japan. Over 800 Japanese Latin Americans were used for prisoner-of-war exchanges during the war. The others that were abducted languished in various internment camps waiting for the war to end. The camp at Crystal City, Texas held the majority of these prisoners. Although twelve Latin American countries were involved in these forced deportations, the vast majority of those seized and expelled without reason or passports were from Peru. Needless to say, the outrage and anguish of these victims have not subsided to this day.

The United States government orchestrated the kidnapping, arranging transportation across international borders and finally provided for their incarceration in prisoner-of-war camps. After the war ended, those that were not used for exchange purposes were declared “illegal aliens” and subject to immediate deportation. The Latin American countries of their origin showed little interest in accepting those they had cast out, although 100 or so did eventually manage to return to their homes. Saddled with left over “bargaining chips” that were not used, 900 of these prisoners were then “voluntarily” deported to a war torn Japan.

By 1947, some 365 Japanese of Latin American origin still remained in this country. Some enlisted the aid of an attorney, Wayne M. Collins of San Francisco, who fought their deportation and managed to obtain residency status



**Alice Nishimoto and Carmen Mochizuki, spearheaded the campaign in Southern California. Both were brought to the U.S. from Latin America for possible use as hostages.**

for them. Residency status, retroactive to WWII, became meaningful when redress legislation was passed in 1988. Those that had managed to change from “illegal” to “permanent residency” became eligible for redress.

In August of 1988, President Reagan signed the redress bill for Japanese Americans who were interned and who were still living. Some 80,000 plus claimants received an apology and a payment of \$20,000. With the exception of the group who had managed to change their residency status, the Latin American hostages were excluded from redress. Those who were exchanged as hostages and “voluntary deportees” sent to Japan as well as those who failed to change their “illegal” status were denied reparations.

On July 11, 1998, the U.S. settled a class action suit filed on behalf of the Latin American Japanese that were excluded (Mochizuki v. the U.S.) This settlement, which has been described as “bittersweet,” offered an apology and a redress payment of \$5000 as opposed to the \$20,000 granted each internees under the 1988 bill signed by President Reagan. Although most agreed to accept the payment as the best that could be obtained under a changing political climate, a few individuals did “opt out”. They proceeded to challenge the government individually through litigation but have so far been



In June of 2000, Representative Xavier Becerra of California introduced a bill into Congress (H.R. 4735), which essentially sought “parity” for the redress given to Latin Americans to match that given to the Japanese American internees. This bill entitled the “Wartime Parity and Justice Act”, would raise the payments given to the Latin American abductees to \$20,000 and would also

**Hector Watanabe whose family was brought to the U.S. from Peru during WWII**

extend redress to a smaller number of claimants who were denied redress due to technical reasons.

This fight for parity and justice still goes on. Writing for the NCRR publication, the “Banner”, Richard Katsuda urged everyone to continue the struggle for justice. Representative Xavier Becerra (H.R. 619) and Senator Daniel Inouye (S. 1237), have been trying to rally support for legislation that would resolve this final issue. “We need support for the bill to pass. We need constituents to contact their representatives in Congress and urge them to help sponsor these bills”, said Katsuda.

