

## Celebrating the Life of Jim Matsuoka, a Man for All People

On Saturday, January 14, friends and admirers of Jim Matsuoka will come together to celebrate all the richness of his life and the fondness and high regard in which he was held in the Japanese American as well as other communities. The Celebration of Life will take place at the Japanese American National Museum at 2 PM. All are welcome.

Jim was perhaps best known for his powerful testimony at the August 1981 Los Angeles hearings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. The chair was trying to move the agenda for the day as they were behind schedule, and so he appeared to rush the remaining testifiers. Jim would have none of it. He pounded his fist on the table and roared that he would not be rushed by this government and that the former incarcerated had already been subjected to total disdain by the government. Jim was known as a fierce, tenacious warrior who never backed down in his call for justice and fair and equitable treatment of every person, no matter what their position or status in society. In his testimony, he asserted that the Nisei gardeners, homecare, and other workers were the backbone of the Japanese American community.

Jim was also there at the first Manzanar Pilgrimage in 1969, where he declared that a whole generation of Japanese Americans were buried there. Jim was just a child at Manzanar, but that wartime experience would keep the fire within him burning.

Jim always responded when the community needed someone to speak out against big corporations, government abuses, and community misdeeds. He led a successful campaign against the Kajima Corporation, which was involved in major war crimes during WWII, in its pursuit of being the contractor for the Japanese American National Museum. Jim always attended and often spoke at rallies in support of the workers fighting for fair treatment at the New Otani Hotel. He spoke at a rally protesting the sale of the Keiro Retirement Home, where he recounted the love and devotion that the community had shown to the Issei and Nisei for so many years and asked how all of that could just be thrown out the window.

So you might think that Jim was a scary guy, unapproachable and grim. But when you just talked to him and got to know him, you felt his warmth and the resonance of wide-ranging experiences in his life.

He was the consummate educator, telling stories that had wonderful lessons for younger members of the community, for Jim believed that it was critical to pass down such lessons for future generations. For many years, he gave talks to young Asian American activists in a program called Summer Activist Training. Jim also spoke annually to teachers of Los Angeles Unified School District about the WWII incarceration and the Japanese American Redress Movement. In those talks, he clearly stated that the Civil Rights Movement and the sustained, heroic demonstrations by African Americans were pivotal as role models for the Japanese American Redress Movement.

Jim was always drawing lessons while making those connections. Not only did he emphasize the inspiration that the Japanese American Redress Movement gained from the Civil Rights Movement of African Americans, but he also called for support for Black reparations and even expressed his regret that he could not continue to do more. He spoke up in support of Muslim Americans in rallies in Little Tokyo as well as at Muslim American community events. Jim felt that, as a former incarcerated during WWII, he had the opportunity and even obligation to offer his support and solidarity to Muslims and others who are victims of hate and misinformation.

But many simply knew Jim as a good guy who had passion for many interests, including horse racing, the Los Angeles Rams, good food and music, Japanese history and culture, and making ceramics.

For so many reasons, people who knew Jim wish to come together to say good-bye while sharing treasured memories of him. If you wish to attend the Celebration of Life, please RSVP at [jim.celebration2023@gmail.com](mailto:jim.celebration2023@gmail.com) by January 9. Masks will be required at the event. For livestreaming, visit [youtube.com/@TuesdayNightProject](https://www.youtube.com/@TuesdayNightProject) on January 14 at 1:45 PM PST and click on the livestream titled "Celebration of Life for Jim Matsuoka." For more information, email [rkatsuda318@gmail.com](mailto:rkatsuda318@gmail.com).