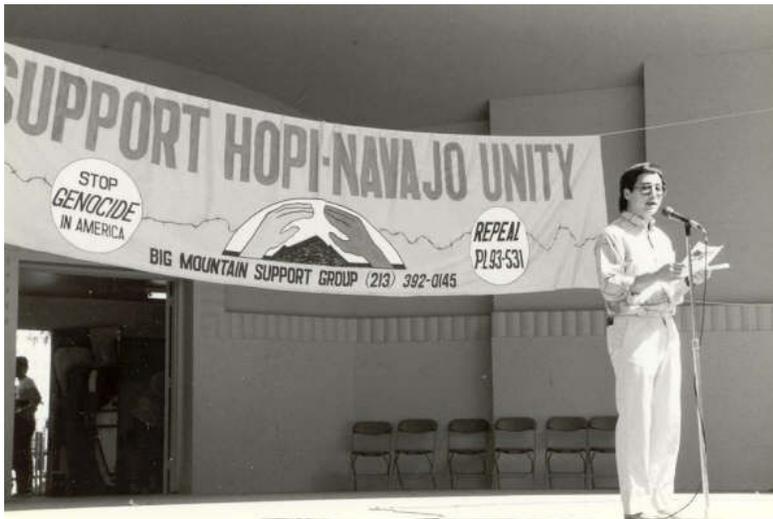


## BIG MOUNTAIN

During the 1986 Day of Remembrance program in Little Tokyo, the members of NCRR were startled to see traditional elders of the Navajo in attendance. Seated prominently in the front row at the Little Tokyo Towers, they had come all the way from the Big Mountain area of Arizona to seek help. Their homes, the hogans, were being bulldozed to the earth. This was being done under the guise of a reported feud between the Navajo and Hopi tribes concocted by a giant energy company that wanted access to the mineral rich areas of the reservation.

The traditional elders, who the majority of the tribe followed, were being circumvented by elected officials of the tribes who wanted the royalties that would be provided by the energy companies. The dispute was more between the traditional elders and some elected officials of the tribes than it was between the Navajo and Hopi people. Both Navajo and Hopi traditional elders

opposed the desecration of their lands for the benefit and profits of the energy companies.



The NCRR received an open letter entitled "We do not want money for land" to explain their dilemma:

"Since the government mistakenly expects us to move, many services entitled

[Kevin Hasegawa of NCRR at Big Mountain Rally, presents a check from a fundraiser at MacArthurPark, 1987.](#)

to us through treaty and individual rights have been denied. Inadequate roads, insufficient water supplies and poor housing continue to be conditions that are worsening.

For our people who continue living in Big Mountain, we are becoming more depressed because the pressure builds each day. Our elders cannot speak

about this without crying because even now the future looks so painful for us. Our people do not sleep well at night and the appetites of our people are also affected.

Our hardships began around 1882 with the U.S. Government and it has been without end since that time. While our elders experience much sadness, our young people ages of 20-45 face a worse future because these younger people cannot build more homes for the growing families. Our homes are already overcrowded, but to continue the hardship, we are being forced to lose our livestock, which we depend on for our food, trade and use in ceremonial purposes. Our entire livelihood is being erased along with our homes and our land.

Our local economy is such that we have livestock at great expense because they need water and hay. Our transportation is expensive because the dirt roads are in poor condition and we must travel long distances for food and supplies. Our vehicles are expensive to begin with and yet they depreciate so rapidly. Food and supplies are also expensive and we all have to pay federal income taxes along with other assorted taxes on merchandise. One of the arguments anti-Indian legislators present is that Navajo live a life free off the government and pay no taxes.

For us Big Mountain people, our day to day living is a great tax that we pay. The threats to our livelihood, our homes, our religion and our land is the greatest tax anyone could ever pay when it may be taken away from us. We have paid taxes ever since the White Man came to this land. We have very little left on this Mother Earth. So you can understand why we want to know -- will we die or go to prison when we resist the federal government? We feel that we will pay once again for protecting what is ours. Our men fought and died in foreign lands to ensure freedom and peace for the free world. Today, our families do not feel the peace and the freedom. We only know worry, the fears, the sadness of what is taking place at Big Mountain. We do not want money for land! Thank you for letting us share our thoughts with you." Very sincerely yours, The People of Big Mountain.

Volunteering to go on a fact-findings mission to the Big Mountain area, NCRR member Aki Maehara's reports challenged the press and media description of a land dispute between the Hopi and Navajo. His observations printed in the NCRR Banner indicated that the real underlying reason for these actions was to try and evict the people from their land, weaken Native American

sovereignty and give energy companies direct access to these mineral rich lands. In terms of this nations' deposits of coal, oil, uranium, gold and timber, large quantities are found in the reservation area, he said.

In the meantime, the NCCR called upon sympathetic legislators for help. Senator Alan Cranston and Representative Norman Mineta were both strong supporters of the redress effort and were also open to use their offices to assist the Navajo. A moratorium on the destruction of the hogans was called for and the wanton destruction of the peoples home.

Two months later in June of 1986, the NCCR sponsored a film showing of a documentary of the struggle taking place at Big Mountain called "Broken Rainbow." The showing was as much for our own education as it was to help spread the word within the Japanese American community. The event attracted a large audience on a Sunday afternoon at the Japan



**"Broken Rainbow", an award winning documentary shown at the Japan American Theatre, a NCCR fundraiser.**

America Theater in Little Tokyo. It showed the misery being caused in peoples lives by the government sponsored effort to clear the land for the benefit of the energy companies.

This was soon to be followed by a rally co-sponsored by NCCR and the Big Mountain Support Committee at MacArthur Park in downtown Los Angeles.. A large crowd of about 1000 supporters heard NCCR spokesman, Kevin Hasegawa, denounce the enacted legislation. (PL 93-531) and call for it's repeal. This law separated the land into Hopi and Navajo areas and called for the relocation of those that "did not belong." The NCCR had concurred with the people of Big Mountain that this was nothing but a bold attempt by the energy companies to seize Indian land under the guise of settling a land dispute.

The Navajo of the Big Mountain area were hard hit by the fact that those who refused to "relocate" were having their dwellings bulldozed based on the pretext that they were built on Hopi territory. Their plight struck a strong chord within NCCR. The removal and dispersal of a people would always touch a sensitive nerve within the Japanese American psyche. These had been the

same conditions that had destroyed Japanese American communities during WWII.

An important “point of unity” for the NCRR is that the organization would commit itself to aid and assist any group that finds itself in conditions similar to what Japanese Americans had experienced during World War II. This was a pledge it made to itself when the organization was founded in 1980 and this was a pledge it intended to keep!