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Rights group honors Sacramento Muslim American

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Kais Menoufy – one of Sacramento's leading Muslim American activists – first learned about the Florin chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League the day after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"They had a press conference calling on America's leaders to make sure they didn't make the same mistake they did 60 years ago," when Japanese Americans were rounded up and sent to internment camps. Menoufy said Sunday. "I felt we were not alone in this country."

Menoufy was honored at the Florin JACL's 75th anniversary celebration at the Radisson Hotel. The event Sunday was attended by many of civil rights champions.

spearheaded the national movement to get a presidential apology and \$20,000 in reparations for more than 50,000 Japanese American internees and their families.

"My community work started from there," he said. "I did not know a single organization could make such an impact."

Menoufy helps bring "Songs of Hope" – an annual concert performed by Arab and Israeli



Randall Benton / rbenton@sacbee.com

The Sacramento Taiko Dan drum ensemble performs at the Florin Japanese American Citizens League's 75th anniversary celebration Sunday. A Muslim American activist was honored for his work in reaching out after the 9/11 attacks.

MORE INFORMATION

▲ Florin Japanese American Citizens League

For 75 years, the Florin Japanese American Citizens League has been a pre-eminent civil rights organization in Sacramento, taking the lead on Japanese internment issues and organizing support for groups targeted by hate crimes. Here are selected highlights:

2009: Co-sponsored with the Council on American Islamic Relations-Sacramento Valley a panel at the

sharing the parallels between the two experiences after the Dec. 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor and Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

2007-08: Built grass-roots support efforts during the hate crime trial after the death of Satendar Singh, an Indian Fijian American.

2006: Sponsored an Interactive Camp Experience Workshop with the Council on American Islamic Relations – Sacramento Valley for Muslim American high school students at the Sacramento Area League of Associated Muslims.

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musicians – to Sacramento.

"I learned from them what we need to do to educate the American public about misunderstandings and how we go about building bridges," he said.

Started in 1935 by the children of Japanese farmers, the Florin JACL has battled bias against all Americans regardless of race, ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation, said JACL's Andy Noguchi.

"For 75 years they've consistently brought people together," said Senate President Pro Tem [Darrell Steinberg](#). "They have a lot to teach, and their story is crucial to the fabric of our community."

The group's first victory came in 1939, when it successfully desegregated Japanese-only schools in Florin and Clarksburg, Noguchi said.

After Pearl Harbor, about 2,500 Japanese Americans in the south Sacramento town of Florin, most of them strawberry growers, were shipped to internment camps, Noguchi said. "They couldn't harvest their crops and almost everyone lost their farms and homes because they were locked up and couldn't pay their mortgages."

But Noguchi said his father and other Florin farmers never forgot the kindness of a few Caucasian friends who stepped forward to look after their property.

Mary Tsukamoto of Florin became an Elk Grove elementary school teacher after being interned in Kansas. She led the grass-roots campaign to get redress.

The branch organized the first Time of Remembrance Program in 1983. The Elk Grove Unified School District – also honored Sunday – incorporated the internment story in its fifth-grade curriculum.

After President Ronald Reagan signed the 1988 Civil Liberties Act, Tsukamoto wrote that only in America would "people of indomitable faith in the spirit of justice for all be able to obtain redress and an apology with a declaration that we had been wrongfully incarcerated and were innocent of the implied guilt of disloyalty to our nation."

Tsukamoto died in 1998, but the 320-member

2001: Mobilized the Japanese American community against backlash towards Muslim, Arab, and Sikh Americans unfairly targeted after 9/11.

2000 and 2002: Led efforts for a National JACL apology recognizing the legitimate protests by World War II internee draft resisters against the unjust imprisonment of Japanese Americans.

1999: Organized first local multiracial forum to explore issues and support the growing multiracial community.

1994: Initiated the Japanese American Archival Collection with the California State University, Sacramento, library.

1994: Supported the National JACL marriage equality resolution to oppose banning gay couples from marriage, as Japanese Americans had once been banned from marrying people of other races. The only other national group in support was the ACLU.

1993-94: Led the community coalition around the trial of the Sacramento firebomber who attacked the Sacramento NAACP office, Sacramento JACL, Congregation B'nai Israel and then-Councilman Jimmie Yee's home.

1989: Organized the first hate crime forum in the local Asian American community.

1988: Initiated the Florin JACL Oral History Project that published over a 15-year period more than 85 books on stories sharing the experiences of members, families and friends of the Japanese American community.

1952: Supported the overturn of the ban on immigrant Japanese Americans (Issei generation) becoming naturalized citizens.

1942-48: Assisted Japanese Americans forcibly evacuated in WWII and then later resettled back in the Sacramento area.

1939: Successfully desegregated the all-Japanese American Florin East Grammar School.

Source: Florin JACL

[JACL museum exhibit](#)

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"Justrightofcenter wrote: I can never figure you folks so far out to the left. If you feel so incredibly ashamed of being American for conquering the native Indian, or the internment of Japanese during WWII, then why do you stay? Of course whenever an article comes out on efforts of non-caucasians advocating equal rights, treatment, and protections; justrightofcenter rears its head (and I stress 'its') to justify everything America has done to suppress minorities was justified at the time and should be ignored. It would also have you believe that destruction of non-military foreign property and deaths of civilians at the hands of Americans were all justified. Even though the UN itself has investigated US and Britain as two of the worst



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branch – led by her daughter Marielle Tsukamoto – continues her legacy.

"Justice is a matter of continuing education," said Mariella Tsukamoto, herself a longtime teacher. "My mother saw the importance of gaining redress because if we allow the stain to remain, it jeopardizes the freedom and liberty of future generations."

The branch organized the first local Asian American hate crime forum in 1989. In 1990, it defended a Hmong student in Marysville attacked for having white friends.

In 1993, after the firebombing of Congregation B'nai Israel, the offices of the Sacramento NAACP and JACL, and the home of Councilman Jimmie Yee, the Florin JACL mobilized Sacramentans of all races against hate.

The branch stepped up again in 1999 to raise donations and community awareness after the murder of a gay couple in Redding and the firebombing of three Sacramento synagogues.

It spoke out against the 2007 beating death of Fijian American Satendar Singh, who was perceived by assailants to be gay, and defended Lt. Ehren Watada's protest against the [Iraq war](#) from 2006 to 2008.

The branch's mission has changed along with California's shifting demographics. Since 1999 it has held forums recognizing the growing multiracial population.

"Japanese Americans are one of the highest out-marrying groups," said member Walter Kawamoto, who is Japanese and Mexican American.

In the new multiracial reality, young people need to realize their identity "is not about genetics. It's what you learn from your parents and what you feel inside you," Kawamoto said.

After 9/11, branch members made thousands of origami birds and flowers and placed them in the windows of local Islamic schools, recalled Basim Elkarra, Sacramento director of the Council on American Islamic Relations, one of more than a dozen organizations at Sunday's celebration.

Since 2006, the Florin JACL has partnered with Muslim organizations to take Muslim American youths to the Manzanar Internment Camp in the Southern California desert.

"My son Zacki came back a stronger, more patriotic American," said Durriya Syed of Sacramento's Interfaith Service Bureau.

Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada, D-Davis, said the Florin JACL continues to serve as a beacon of hope "for all those who are oppressed."

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violators of the Geneva Convention, and considers only Israel to be worse. So justrightofcenter can keep its blindfold on and wave its US flag. Because the US isn't a bad place to live, that makes everything that this government has done ok."

-- BYUAlum

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Comments:  49 Showing: Newest first



[rashid01](#) wrote on 01/29/2010 12:17:18 PM:

JACL is truly a great organization. For as long as I have know JACL (almost 10 years) it has always stood for civil rights and fought against bigotry, and prejudice. It is a role model for many other organizations. As the article shows, it has kept the candle of remembrance alive for decades. Steve Magagnini writes with a passion. Many, many segments of our community find in his writings an affirmation of the inscription on the Statue of Liberty:

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Thanks to the Bee and Mr. Magagnini.

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[samoussa87](#) wrote on 01/29/2010 10:39:57 AM:

Excellent article about a progressive community organization awarding a Muslim American community leader who proves that Muslims should not be labeled terrorists. Thanks Steve!

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[Justrightofcenter](#) wrote on 01/25/2010 10:52:33 PM:

This is too funny. The Sacbee employees having some fun tonight. Let's make sure I understand this: someone calls me anti-semitic, when I am clearly pro-Israel and pro-Jewish, I correct them in their

mistake, and my comments are hidden pending site review?

You might want to go back and censor all of the Islamic comments made in regards to this article, not just mine. We wouldn't want people to know they have a viewpoint contrary to that of the Bee employees on tonight. Get crackin'.

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[vincenthorne](#) wrote on 01/25/2010 07:51:09 PM:

[neltharion](#) wrote on 01/25/2010 07:20:30 PM:

[Justrightofcenter](#) wrote: BYU, if you feel our government is so shameful, then leave.

It is Obama who is trying to 'fundamentally change America.' Obama's words. Maybe instead of changing America into his vision of the USSA; it is Obama who should leave - and go to Russia, China or Cuba.

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[neltharion](#) wrote on 01/25/2010 07:20:30 PM:

[Justrightofcenter](#) wrote: BYU, if you feel our government is so shameful, then leave.

I don't see anywhere in BYU's comment, any reference to the government being shameful, rather comments that the US has made mistakes in its treatment of ethnic minorities, which is true.

"I totally believe in equal rights for all people, regardless of race or religious belief."

Your post is one huge contradiction. You claim to believe in equal rights, but then basically claim there was nothing wrong with the internment. You go on to refer to 'these Muslims'. What nonsense? Are you calling minority groups speaking out for the protection of their rights, nonsense?

"Where is the sympathy from Muslims in this country over that? There isn't any. You are completely clueless about the agenda Muslims worldwide,"

Replace the word Muslims with, 'Blacks' or 'Jews', take your pick. BYU is right about you. You seek out these posts and leave comments that are racist and anti-semitic.

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[biddlin](#) wrote on 01/25/2010 06:39:35 PM:

Replying to PatThePI (01/25/2010 06:15:05 PM):
"Colonically blinded???? Did YOU make that up? If you did, I'm giving you fair warning that I intend to steal it and use it. What a great way to say what it says about someone! Thank you !":

You're more than welcome. As a public employee for almost thirty years I came up with a few good ones to slip in without being fired.

 [Recommend \(4\)](#)

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BYUAlum wrote on 01/25/2010 06:25:37 PM:

Justrightofcenter wrote: I can never figure you folks so far out to the left. If you feel so incredibly ashamed of being American for conquering the native Indian, or the internment of Japanese during WWII, then why do you stay?

Of course whenever an article comes out on efforts of non-caucasians advocating equal rights, treatment, and protections; justrightofcenter rears its head (and I stress 'its') to justify everything America has done to suppress minorities was justified at the time and should be ignored. It would also have you believe that destruction of non-military foreign property and deaths of civilians at the hands of Americans were all justified. Even though the UN itself has investigated US and Britain as two of the worst violators of the Geneva Convention, and considers only Israel to be worse.

So justrightofcenter can keep its blindfold on and wave its US flag. Because the US isn't a bad place to live, that makes everything that this government has done ok.

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PatThePl wrote on 01/25/2010 06:18:21 PM:

Replying to dragon49 (01/25/2010 10:09:29 AM):
"The Sacramento Taiko Dan drum corp is annoying and gives me a head ache....the only people having fun listening to the drumming is the ones drumming....its kind of lame":

Gotta disagree. I thoroughly enjoy it. This group is awesome.

 [Recommend \(0\)](#)

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PatThePl wrote on 01/25/2010 06:15:05 PM:

Replying to biddlin (01/25/2010 02:36:27 PM):
"As the colonically blinded fail to see, this is a story of the human capacity for compassion and co-operation.":

Colonically blinded???? Did YOU make that up? If you did, I'm giving you fair warning that I intend to steal it and use it. What a great way to say what it says about someone! Thank you !

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tomatoman1 wrote on 01/25/2010 05:26:08 PM:

Ezz-What a ridiculous American-hating thing to say. I am proud of this country. If you want to wallow in self-loathing, knock yourself out. Just don't try to drag the rest of us down with you. And, about my people of color--if I were racist, I would not love them. You don't get to define my relationships or my feelings about race. It's that simple. You are one sad individual. By the way, I am all for looking out for America first...not spreading imperialism.

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