



NEWS

**El Camino College Compton Center | Public Relations & Marketing Department
16007 Crenshaw Blvd., Torrance, CA 90506
Contact: Ann M. Garten, Director, Community Relations
Telephone: (310) 660-3406 | E-Mail: agarten@elcamino.edu**

For Immediate Release

October 14, 2010

Compton Community College District to Confer 78 Honorary Degrees to Former Japanese American Students

The Compton Community College District (CCCD) will confer 78 honorary degrees on October 16 to Japanese American students of the former Compton Junior College whose education was interrupted by internment during World War II.

Fifty-one families are expected to attend this special ceremony; of the 51 families, 43 former students will be on hand to personally receive their honorary associate degree.

The event is part of the California Nisei College Diploma Project, the implementation of Assembly Bill 37, authored by Assemblymember Warren T. Furutani (D – South Los Angeles County). The aim of this project is to award honorary college degrees to Japanese American students whose studies were forcibly suspended in 1942 when they were ordered into internment camps as a result of Executive Order 9066.

“The purpose of Assembly Bill 37 is not to take a trip down memory lane, nor is it an exercise in nostalgia,” said Assemblymember Furutani, keynote speaker at the event. “It is to codify this righting of a wrong by law because it was a law, an executive order, that put Japanese Americans into concentration camps during World War II. This provides a teaching moment about this dark chapter of American history, which is important because if we don’t learn from our past mistakes we are bound to repeat them.”

The California Community College, California State University and University of California systems are all participating in this project. Since this historic legislation was signed into law, hundreds of Japanese Americans have received honorary degrees, some posthumously, from colleges and universities throughout California.

The CCCD event will begin with a reception in the Student Lounge and a viewing of a library exhibit titled "The Nisei Student Experience at Compton Junior College" at 1:30 p.m., followed by the graduation ceremony at 3:30 p.m., which will take place at the Compton Community College District located at 1111 E. Artesia Blvd., Compton, CA 90221.

Two former students who will be honored at the October 16 ceremony are siblings Lily Teraji Ozaki and the late Yoji Ozaki. They attended the former Compton Junior College until they were evacuated in the spring of 1942. The one thing they feared most was having their family separated. Ozaki went to Manzanar to help build the internment camp there – his labor was rewarded by a promise to keep his family together at the Jerome Internment Camp in Arkansas.

After the family was released, they moved to Chicago where Teraji found work as a nanny and later as a secretary; Ozaki and his older brother Sam were recruited into the 442nd Regimental Combat Team comprised completely of Japanese Americans. They served in both Italy and France.

Both of the siblings eventually married and had children. Teraji never returned to college and remains the only one in her family without a college degree. Ozaki, who passed away in 2007, earned a degree in psychology from Roosevelt University, became a social worker, and spent his life dedicated to community service. His sister, June, will accept his honorary degree, accompanied by Teraji, who will accept her own degree.

For more information about the Compton Community College District's California Nisei College Diploma Project, go to www.compton.edu/nisei/.

#

About the Compton Community College District

The Compton Community College District serves the communities of Carson, Compton, Enterprise, North Long Beach, Lynwood, Paramount and Willowbrook. The District is governed by a state-appointed Special Trustee, who works with the five-member elected Board of Trustees. Board meetings are held the third Tuesday of each month and are open to the public. The District is located at 1111 E. Artesia Boulevard, Compton, CA, 90221.