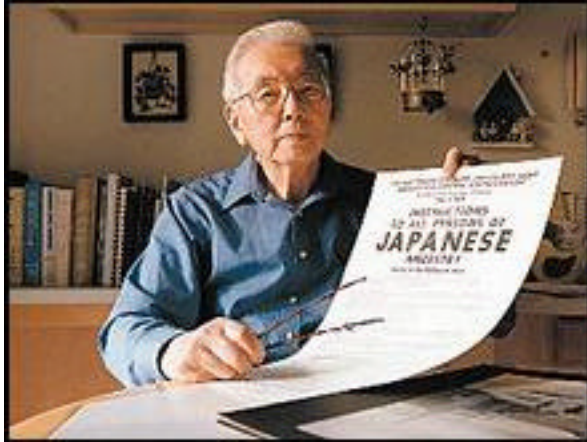


## **BILL HOSOKAWA - an obituary**

The dean of Japanese American Journalists passed way on November 9, 2007 at the age of 92. The conscience of the Nikkei Community was recognized as the JACL's *Japanese American of the Biennium* in 1958. Respected and revered, he received the Asian American Journalists Association's (AAJA) Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003.



Bill Hosokawa, who grew up in Seattle, Washington was once interned at the Heart Mountain, Wyoming Relocation Center during World War II as a security risk because of this Japanese heritage. While at Heart Mountain, he served as editor of the camp newspaper which regularly criticized national politicians and officials who ran the camps. Hosokawa was a pioneer from the beginning, pursuing a career in journalism even after his faculty advisor at the University of Washington urged him to quit "because no one would hire a Japanese boy." After the war, he worked for the Denver Post, the leading newspaper in Denver – in a time when Japanese were not hired to professional positions – a time when the Asian American Journalists Association was n't even in existence.

Hosokawa went on to become one of the first Asian American foreign correspondents and covered the Korean and Vietnam wars for the Denver Post. He worked his way up from columnist, editorial page editor, assistant managing editor and to becoming the executive news editor. He was nominated for the *Pulitzer* prize in 1961 for his coverage of student riots in Japan. He also served as ombudsman columnist for the rival Rocky Mountain News.

Hosokawa as written books committed to the advancement of civil rights. His book, *Nisei, The Quiet American* was cited numerous times by the Congressional panel that investigated the incarceration of Japanese Americans. He has been honored by the Colorado American Civil Liberties Union, has taught journalism, and served as a *Pulitzer* Prize juror. He was also president of the Colorado Freedom of Information Council. Hosokawa was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Denver Press Club and the American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors.

At one time I asked Editor Emeritus Harry Honda of the JACL newspaper, the Pacific Citizen about Bill

Hosokawa. He kindly referred me to the 1993 Holiday Issue PC interview – "Now and Then with Bill Hosokawa." The pertinent question asked was: Is JACL leadership missing any significant issues? Bill's answer was:

"Sometimes I get the feeling that we are looking for issues to become indignant about. The issues today pale by comparison to the great issues of the past that affected all of us as a people and the United States itself. How can we get excited about the thrust of a Hollywood potboiler when we have come thorough the experience of serving time in a concentration camp because our nation was insensitive, unaware of or careless about how the Bill of Rights was violated?

"It's an altogether different scale (now). JACL is, I think, less constructive about meeting the needs of our people than it has been. The effort seems to be reactive. Something happens. Then we get mad at it, instead of going about our problems in a constructive manner. I think the word they use is proactive.

"Over the years, there have been discussions about making JACL a kind of watchdog organization with its major effort in Washington and not try to be all things to all people. We have something like 700 – 800,000 Japanese Americans and there is a membership of less than 25,000. I think that situation needs to be examined. Should we go on trying to get a large membership when obviously there isn't that interest out in the community?

"I am also concerned that many of our brightest and best people are not involved in JACL. We give a great deal of attention to a few people who are involved in JA relations. Whereas there is a very large number of Japanese Americans who are making a mark in the world of business, law, science and government – outside of the confines of JACL – who get space in the Japanese American press simply because they are not out there raising hell or, complaining about something. In reality, they are making very significant contributions to the economic and social life of the United States as Americans who just happen to be of Japanese descent. I would like to get more of these people involved in the concerns of JACL. They are a great resource that is not being utilized."

Books by Bill Hosokawa include: *The Uranium Age*, 1955; *Nisei: The Quiet American*, 1969; *The Two Worlds of Jim Yoshida*, 1972; *Thirty-five Years In the Frying Pan*, 1978; *East to America: A History of the Japanese in the United States*, 1980; *Thunder in the Rockies: The Incredible Denver Post*, 1976; *JACL in Quest of Justice*, 1982; *They Call me Moses Masaoka*, (with Masaoka) 1987; *Old Man Thunder: The Father of the Bullet Train*, 1997; *Out of the Frying Pan: Reflections of a Japanese American*, 1988; *Patriotism, Perseverance, Posterity: The Story of the National JA Memorial* (editor) 2001; *From Foe to Friend: One Man's Experience in the Japanese American Trade*. 2002; *Colorado's Japanese Americans: From 1886 to the Present*, 2005.

This article appeared in the Watsonville-Santa Cruz JACL Chapter newsletter of December 2007. It is reprinted with permission from Mas Hashimoto, editor.