



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE/JACL

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JACL'S BRIDGING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM VISITS TULE LAKE

San Francisco - The San Francisco **Bridging Communities program** of the **Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)** recently took high school students on a three-day trek to Tule Lake, where 18,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were unjustly incarcerated during World War II.

This site, the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, Tule Lake Unit, was the largest of America's concentration camps, and is located near the California-Oregon border.

The **San Francisco Bridging Communities program** was held in partnership with the **Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-SFBA)** and the **Tule Lake Pilgrimage Committee**. The program featured workshops over a five-month period, bringing together Asian American and American Muslim students to learn with and from one another by examining one other's history and experiences. The students discussed the parallels they share in being viewed and treated like "the enemy" following Pearl Harbor and 9/11, and the racial profiling and stereotypes that continue to challenge them today.

Bridging Communities participant **Feeza Mohammad** said, *"Being at Tule Lake was such an uncomfortable experience for me - not in the sense that I didn't want to be there, but uncomfortable in the sense that it was daunting and almost overwhelming to realize that I was in such a historical place. Were it not for the Bridging Communities program, I would never in my life have experienced going to a concentration camp, and I would, in fact, still be calling it an internment camp without realizing the different connotations behind it."*

The students were able to hear first-hand accounts of what life was like in Tule Lake from San Jose Nisei **Jimi Yamaichi**, who was a teenager when his family was incarcerated behind barbed wire. Yamaichi, now 88 years old, provided the students with powerful images and stories as the group walked around the camp site.

"When I found out Jimi was an actual internee, I was afraid he might be traumatized to go back to Tule Lake, and thought he had so much courage to tell us about his time in camp," said high schooler and Bridging Communities participant **David Gee**. *"With Jimi telling us stories, we got to learn what really happened instead of the basic information we get from textbooks. It was great to see how much passion he had for passing on that knowledge."*

The high school participants also took part in a community service project organized by the **National Park Service (NPS)**, where they discovered, photographed and documented writings on the walls of the camp jail left 70 years ago by former detainees. In documenting the thoughts of those who were confined in the jail - some for close to 300 days - and noticing how difficult it was to find the faded writings, which were done by the detainees in pencil, the students gained an understanding of the importance of preserving historic sites such as these for future generations.

"The service project in the jail was really eerie and a bit intimidating, but the experience was unforgettable," remarked 16-year-old participant **Afreen Hasan**.

The San Francisco Bridging Communities program has been funded by the **Japanese American Confinement Sites grant program** through the **National Park Service**, with sister-components held in Los Angeles and Seattle. Serving as an organizational supporter in the San Francisco program was the **National Japanese American Historical Society**.

Emily Isakari, a 14-year-old participant, summed up her experience by saying, *"The Bridging Communities program has really opened my eyes to what is happening in the world and made me think about my position in society. We all have an obligation to try and educate others about past injustices in order to create a more harmonious society for our families in the future."*

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