

Japan & Black L.A. Initiative

Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles

Objective:

The Japan & Black L.A. Initiative aims to work with children, youth, and adults in the Los Angeles community — a city that represents the diversity of the U.S. — to share aspects of Japanese and African American culture that will broaden mutual understanding as global citizens.

Background:

The Initiative began in Fall 2020 through conversations between the Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles and local pastors of predominantly Black churches of the United Methodist Church (UMC) California Pacific Conference West District in the Greater Los Angeles area. The California-Pacific West District has the highest number of Black congregations in the Western Jurisdiction of the UMC, and the California-Pacific Conference has the highest number of historic Japanese American congregations in the country.

Past Events:

Online Workshop: Onigiri Making/ March 27, 2021

Through Onigiri Action, which uses Japan's soul food onigiri as its symbol, Table for Two International donates five meals to children in need throughout the world for every photo related to onigiri posted on social media with the hashtag #OnigiriAction. Corporate donors to Table for Two provide the funds for these meals donated to needy children.



Online Workshop: Origami/ April 22, 2021

Through the hands-on experience of making origami creations together virtually, the participants of the workshop deepened cultural and mutual understanding, enhancing the ties between the Japanese and Black communities.

Online Seminar: "Stories Not Yet Told: Japanese and African American Shared Kinship"/ June 28, 2021

The United Methodist Church California Pacific Conference, West District and Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles cosponsored a virtual program featuring a presentation by critical race and ethnic studies scholar Dr. Curtiss Takada Rooks of Loyola Marymount University examining the history of "racing" Blacks and Asians in the U.S., the forces obscuring their sense of kinship, and their acts of collaboration to form communities of solidarity.



Tour: Crenshaw District & Watts Towers/ August 23 & 26, 2021



The Crenshaw tour highlighted important remnants of Japanese American influence in the neighborhood, including the distinctive Japanese landscaping of the homes lining the streets behind Crenshaw Square, and signs of Japanese businesses (past and present) including Kashu Realty and Tak's Hardware.

Consul General and Mrs. Muto also visited St. John's United Methodist Church in Watts to learn about its important role in the community and toured nearby Watts Towers.

Tour: California African American Museum/ November 9, 2021

Consul General and Mrs. Muto visited the California African American Museum with leaders of the Japanese and Japanese American community and Black clergy of local United Methodist churches, joined by Mr. Daniel Park representing the Office of Los Angeles County Supervisor Holly Mitchell. Executive Director Ms. Cameron Shaw led the tour, which was followed by a discussion moderated by Dr. Curtiss Takada Rooks of Loyola Marymount University exploring the relationship between the historic Japanese and Black communities in Los Angeles.



Tour: Japanese American National Museum / March 15, 2022

https://www.la.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/2022_JapanBlackLAJANMVisit.html

On March 15, 2022, Black clergy of predominantly African American local churches of the United Methodist Church along with leaders of Japanese and Japanese American organizations toured the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) and engaged in a discussion moderated by Loyola Marymount University professor Dr. Curtiss Takada Rooks. Joining the tour were representatives of the offices of California State Senator Steven Bradford, Los Angeles County Supervisor Holly Mitchell and Los Angeles City Councilmember Nithya Raman.



Networking Event: Spring Jazz Night featuring Yu-Ki Shamisen Jazz Project/ March 23, 2022

https://www.la.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/JapanBlackLASpringJazzNight.html

On March 23, 2022, the Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles, Japanese American Cultural & Community Center (JACCC), and Japan Foundation Los Angeles co-organized an event at the Toshizo Watanabe Culinary Cultural Center featuring the Yu-Ki Shamisen Jazz Project, led by Yu Ooka on guitar and shamisen, with Kimo Cornwell of the Grammy-nominated group Hiroshima on keyboards, Jervonny “JV” Collier on bass, and Land Richards on drums. They played a variety of jazz, smooth jazz R&B, and traditional Japanese songs, which deeply resonated with the guests which included leaders of the African American and Japanese American communities.



Speaker's Event: A Conversation with Senator Bradford/ May 14, 2022

https://www.la.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/2022_JapanBlackLA_SenatorBradford.html

On May 14, 2022, California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) and the Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles co-sponsored an event featuring California State Senator Steven Bradford. The event was held on the campus of CSUDH and featured remarks by Senator Bradford and a panel discussion moderated by CSUDH President Dr. Thomas A. Parham, with Senator Bradford, Africana Studies Department Chair Dr. Donna Nicol, and Consul General MUTO Akira.

