



+ CALIFORNIA NISEI HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROJECT

Honoring the Class of 1942 - 1945

2004 -2005 | San Francisco

In 2003, Assemblywoman Sally Lieber (D-San Jose) authored Assembly Bill No. 781 (AB781) as a form of redress and honorarium for the American-born citizens of Japanese ancestry (*Nisei*), whose high school careers were disrupted when the federal government forced them into incarceration during World War II. Under AB781, California high school districts were allowed and encouraged to award hundreds of Nisei retroactive diplomas.

In 1945, "homecoming" to the average high school students meant varsity sports, spirit rallies, alumni groups and school dances. However, homecoming had a completely different meaning to the high school aged Nisei; it meant returning to their hometowns after years of forced incarceration in isolated camps. Unable to share in the traditional coming-of-age high school experiences, many Nisei saw AB781 as an exciting opportunity to graduate from their former high schools and gain closure from their "lost years" in camp.

To support AB781, the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC) coordinated the California Nisei High School Diploma Project. From 2004 to 2005, the JCCCNC collaborated with Assemblywoman Sally Lieber, California Civil Liberties Public Education Program (CCLPEP), and California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) to locate, contact and award Nisei their retroactive high school diplomas. In 2005, the JCCCNC hosted a commencement ceremony to honor 20 Nisei. Additionally, from 2004 to 2005, over 415 honorary high school diplomas were awarded to Nisei across 80+ schools in California.

Through the California High School Diploma Project, the JCCCNC highlighted the importance of education: both to the Nisei who finally received their high school diplomas and to the general public who learned an important lesson about the past and need to build a brighter future.