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Nisei Students to Receive Honorary Degrees

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USC to recognize former students interned during World War II.

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The University of Southern California will award honorary degrees to Japanese American former students who were interned during World War II.

President C. L. Max Nikias will confer the Honorary Baccalaureate and Honorary Master's degrees at this year's Commencement ceremony on Friday, May 11.

Referred to as Nisei ("second generation" in Japanese, though the term refers to first-generation Japanese Americans), the students at USC and many other universities were forced to abandon their studies in 1942, when President Franklin Roosevelt ordered the internment of American citizens of Japanese descent and Japanese nationals living along the Pacific coast.

"We are privileged to honor the accomplishments and the dreams of the Nisei students who are highly deserving of receiving a college degree for the work they have done at USC," said USC President C. L. Max Nikias. "Through the years these students have been among the most passionate and dedicated members of the Trojan Family. We are honored that our Nisei students have an enduring devotion to USC and we want them to know that the university is also devoted to them."

USC Alumni Association CEO Scott M. Mory said the association was "proud and fortunate to be able to recognize our Nisei alumni" and added: "USC is especially grateful to Jonathan Kaji, past president of the USC Asian Pacific Alumni Association, who led the effort to honor our Nisei students in this manner."

Nisei students who were forced to leave USC in 1942 can register for an honorary degree and an invitation to Commencement at www.usc.edu/commencement or by contacting Grace Shiba, senior director of alumni relations at USC, at (213) 740-4937 or nisei@usc.edu. Families of deceased Nisei students can receive a

certificate of honorary alumni status and an invitation to Commencement through the web site or by contacting Shiba.

Rod Y. Nakamoto, president of the USC Asian Pacific Alumni Association, stated: “We are proud of our Nisei former students as they will forever serve as an inspiration to the Trojan Family, and we acknowledge the significant recognition planned by the university at Commencement to confer honorary degrees to all living Nisei former students and to reaffirm honorary alumni status to the Nisei that have since passed on.”

This marks the second time that USC has recognized its Nisei students. In 2008, the university granted honorary alumni status to Nisei students at the annual Asian Pacific Alumni Association’s Scholarship and Awards Gala.

That year the university and the association also announced the creation of an Honorary Nisei Student Scholarship, and USC honored the Nisei at a ceremony at a Trojan football home game.

“Honoring our Nisei alumni will be one of the highlights of the 2012 Commencement ceremonies and will serve as an inspiration to the Class of 2012 and all members of the Trojan Family,” Mory said. “We look forward to celebrating the occasion with them and their families.”

For information on this year’s commencement ceremony, visit <http://www.usc.edu/commencement/>