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# Chinese American Citizens Alliance

~ National ~

1044 Stockton Street, San Francisco, California 94108 • Telephone/Fax (415)829-9332

National Lodge  
ESTABLISHED 1895

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **C.A.C.A. Mourns the Death of Corky Lee, Renowned Chronicler of the Chinese American Experience**

San Francisco, January 29, 2021 — The Chinese American Citizens Alliance (C.A.C.A.) mourns the passing of photojournalist and activist Corky Lee, who died on Wednesday, January 27, in New York City due to complications from COVID-19. Mr. Lee was 73.

Born in 1947 to Chinese immigrants, the second-generation native of Queens, New York City, was a charter member of C.A.C.A. Greater New York Chapter. Mr. Lee, who once quipped that he was the “undisputed unofficial Asian American Photographer Laureate,” was essentially a social crusader and his instrument of choice was the camera. “I’d like to think that every time I take my camera out of my bag, it’s like drawing a sword to combat indifference, injustice and discrimination, trying to get rid of stereotypes,” Mr. Lee once remarked in an interview.

“Corky was widely considered the official lens of the contemporary Chinese American experience,” said C.A.C.A. National President Melanie Chan. “His life was dedicated to correcting misrepresentation, clarifying contributions and restoring recognition of Asian Americans in this country’s history through his photography and community engagement.”

Mr. Lee is credited for some of the Asian American community’s most iconic historic imagery, notably protests against the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin in Michigan by autoworkers who blamed Japan for the loss of U.S. auto jobs and highlighting the importance of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese laborers in the construction of the first Transcontinental Railroad in the United States. He was behind several group photo events that took place at Promontory Point, Utah, where he used his work to illustrate the egregious lack of acknowledgement of the Chinese who built a significant portion of the 1,912-mile-long railroad. The son of a World War II veteran, Mr. Lee campaigned with C.A.C.A. and other activists for Congressional Gold Medal recognition for Chinese American WWII Veterans, which Congress had passed at the end of 2018.



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Mr. Lee's accomplishments earned him many accolades. New York Mayor David Dinkins proclaimed May 5, 1988, "Corky Lee Day" in New York City, in recognition for his documentation of Manhattan Chinatown and New York City's Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. In May 2019 he was recipient of the President's Award from the Chinese Railroad Workers Descendants Association (CRWDA) Chinese Rail Road Workers Descendents Association at the Golden Spike 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the completion of the United States Transcontinental Railroad held in Salt Lake City.

On January 7, he was admitted to Long Island Jewish Hospital in Forest Hills. A Facebook page was created for him by friends called the Corky Lee Recovery Fundraiser. It had raised more than \$46,000 to help cover medical bills associated with his hospitalization.

Mr. Lee is survived by his brother John Lee and was predeceased by his wife nearly 20 years ago.

A private service is scheduled at the Wah Wing Sang Funeral Home, at 26 Mulberry St. in New York Chinatown. In lieu of flowers, donations in Corky Lee's memory can be made to the Asian American Journalist Association (AAJA) Photog Affinity Group, [www.aaja.org](http://www.aaja.org).

With 20 chapters nationwide, the Chinese American Citizens Alliance is the oldest, continuous civil rights and advocacy organization for Americans of Chinese ancestry established in 1895.

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1044 Stockton St.  
San Francisco, CA.

Web: [www.CACAnational.org](http://www.CACAnational.org)  
Chinese American Citizens Alliance

The Chinese American Citizens Alliance, established in 1895, is among the oldest civil rights organizations in the United States. Headquartered in San Francisco with chapter/lodges in Albuquerque (NM), Boston (MA), Chicago (IL), Greater San Gabriel Valley (CA), Greater New York (NY), Houston (TX), Las Vegas (NV), Los Angeles (CA), Mississippi, Oakland (CA), Orange County (CA), Peninsula (CA), Portland (OR), Phoenix (AZ), Sacramento (CA), Salinas (CA), San Antonio (TX), San Francisco (CA), Seattle (WA) and Washington, D.C., the Alliance addresses issues regarding voter education, political participation, racial discrimination and hate crimes, and supports youth leadership training programs and equal employment opportunities for all Chinese Americans.