Working Paper

JAPANTOWNS

Establishment, Erasure, & Reconstruction

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UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge

UCLA Asian American Studies Center

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The UCLA Asian American Studies Center is dedicated o advancing research, programs, and publications that enrich the understanding of the history, cultural heritage and experiences of Asian Americans, in order to promote greater equity and a more just society.

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Report Cover Photo: “Fuji Kan Theatre, Little Tokyo.” Los Angeles Herald Examiner Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library. Photo taken July 29, 1941.

Executive Summary

This study documents and quantifies the historical trajectory of three Japantowns: Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi, focusing on their establishment, wartime dismantling, and post-war reestablishment. These enclaves, situated in the historic urban cores of their respective cities, served as significant cultural and economic hubs for Japanese Americans in the early 20th century. By leveraging 1940 and 1950 U.S. Census individual-level records, this research provides a quantitative examination of demographic, spatial, and socioeconomic changes in these communities. The research is guided by two central questions:

1. How did the demographic, spatial, and socioeconomic characteristics of Japantowns change due to World War II displacement and post-war resettlement? This includes shifts in population size, geographic distribution within the enclaves, and the socioeconomic characteristics of the Japanese American residents.
2. Compared to the pre-war era, how did the enclaves' roles and functions evolve in the aftermath of the war? This considers the social, cultural, and economic dynamics that shaped the reestablished enclaves, as well as external pressures such as urban redevelopment and integration policies.

This research enhances existing qualitative literature by presenting statistical profiles and exploring how these enclaves exemplify resilience in the face of systemic racial barriers and forced displacement. This research also highlights the enduring significance of these spaces in shaping Japanese American identity and community cohesion.

Key Findings

Analysis of available data reveals significant changes in the composition and characteristics of Japanese Americans in Japantowns between 1940 and 1950.

Demographic Shifts

- Neighborhood returnees, the Japanese Americans who had lived in that specific enclave prior to the war, made up a minority of the post-war residents in the enclave. Many of the 1950 Japanese Americans residents in each of the enclaves had previously lived outside the immediate region before WWII.
- The Japanese American population in the three Japantowns collectively declined by about a sixth between the two decades due to barriers to resettlement, including housing shortages, government policies promoting dispersion, and local opposition.
- There were significant regional differences in population decline among Japantowns. Sacramento's Japantown experienced the steepest population decrease, while San Francisco's Japantown saw the smallest reduction, shrinking by approximately one-tenth. Similarly, the Japanese American share of the population also declined, with Sacramento experiencing the most significant drop, whereas Los Angeles' Little Tokyo saw only a marginal decrease in Japanese American representation.
- The proportion of foreign-born Japanese Americans in Japantowns decreased between the two decades, reflecting broader generational shifts and post-war nativity patterns. This also indicates that the enclaves became more of a refuge for those less assimilated.

Socioeconomic Trends

- Earnings within Japantowns increased in absolute terms between 1940 and 1950 but declined relative to statewide Japanese American earnings, falling from above the statewide median in 1939 to below in 1949.
- Educational attainment among Japanese American residents in Japantowns was lower in 1950 compared to Japanese Americans statewide. A majority of adults in these enclaves lacked a high school diploma, reflecting a shift toward socioeconomically disadvantaged populations.
- Significant regional variations were observed: San Francisco experienced the greatest economic improvement, whereas Sacramento's Japantowns faced economic stagnation.

Part 1: Introduction

Japantowns played a critical role as social, economic, and political spaces for Japanese Americans (JAs) in the early-20th century. Like other ethnic enclaves, Japantowns emerged from a combination of internal and external forces. These vibrant communities, characterized by dense intra-group networks and rich cultural life, served as safe havens that allowed immigrants and their descendants to thrive despite widespread racism. However, Japantowns were unique in a tragic way— they were the only ethnic enclaves in the United States to be completely dismantled during World War II (WWII) as a result of the forcible and unconstitutional imprisonment of Japanese Americans into concentration camps, euphemistically referred to as "relocation centers."[1]

Despite a policy of dispersing Japanese Americans upon their release, many chose to rebuild their lives by reconstructing Japantowns after the war. This phenomenon highlights both the enduring cultural and socioeconomic significance of ethnic enclaves and the precarious societal position of Japanese Americans in the aftermath of their incarceration.

This study synthesizes existing literature and incorporates new quantitative analyses to examine the history of Japantowns, focusing on three major enclaves: Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown and San Francisco's Nihonmachi. These were three of the four largest Japanese American enclaves in California, and they capture regional diversity (Southern California, Central Valley and Bay Area). Part 2 reviews the literature on Japanese immigration, the racism they faced, and the mass incarceration during WWII. Part 3 examines the factors that led to the formation of Japantowns, emphasizing the role of housing discrimination, which confined Japanese Americans to marginalized neighborhoods shared with other people of color. There were also internal economic and social factors that supported the development of the enclaves. We supplement this analysis with data from the 1940 decennial census to provide additional insights.

Part 4 focuses on the post-war rebuilding of these Japantowns and the characteristics of their residents. We analyze this period using data from the 1950 decennial census, along with a comparison to data from 1940. This rebuilding process was fraught with challenges, including severe housing shortages and policies that encouraged spatial dispersion and integration. Moreover, the rebuilding of these enclaves was not simply Japanese Americans returning to their former neighborhoods; in fact, former residents often constituted a minority of the post-war population. Changes in the size and composition of the population point to a shift in the enclaves' functions. We conclude with a broader interpretation of these findings and their implications. Details of the data and methods are discussed in Appendix A and Appendix B. Unless otherwise noted, the statistics in the report's figures are described in the appendices.

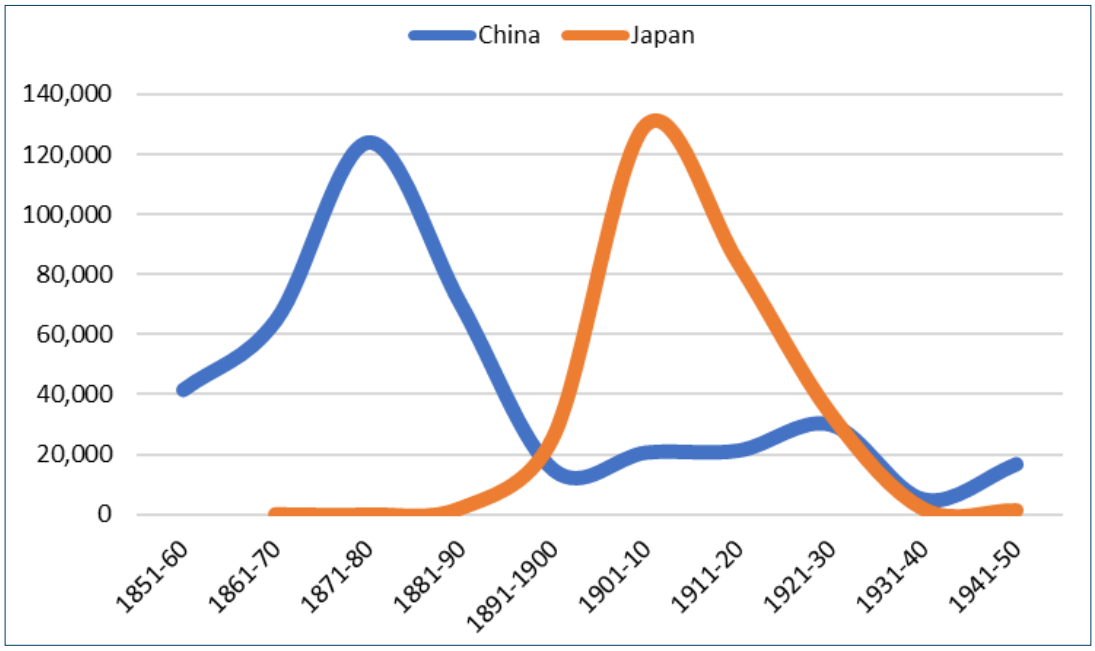
1 There were also other communities of color that were erased, such the wholesale removal of American Indians (Ehle, John. Trail of tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation. Anchor, 1997; and Thornton, Russell. American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492. Vol. 186. University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.), the removal of Chinese in many Western towns (Pfaelzer, Jean. Driven out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans. Univ of California Press, 2008, and the erasure of the African American in Tulsa (Madigan, Tim. The Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. Macmillan, 2003).

Part 2: Japanese American Immigration, Discrimination, and Mass Internment

In the early 20th century, Japanese immigration to the United States increased significantly (see Figure 1), driven in part by the demand for cheap labor to replace Chinese workers, who had been excluded by restrictive immigration policies.[2] During the peak of this immigration wave, Japanese immigrants found work primarily as farm laborers, miners, and railroad workers in the American West.[3]

Over time, many Japanese immigrants were able to save enough money to start their own businesses, particularly in agriculture. They leveraged communal resources and networks, adopting innovative practices in truck farming, which allowed them to thrive in a competitive market.[4] Their economic success enabled them to carve out a viable economic niche in the agricultural sector, but it also drew resentment and hostility from white Americans, who disdained their achievements.[5]

Figure 1: Japanese and Chinese Immigration to the United States (1851-1950)



Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1997

White workers viewed Japanese immigrants as unwelcome economic competitors, fueling widespread anti-Japanese sentiment.[6] This hostility led to support for domestic racist barriers, particularly in denying Japanese immigrants the ability to gain citizenship. For example, the 1870 amendment to the 1790 Naturalization Act explicitly barred Japanese and other Asian immigrants from being admitted as US citizens.[7] Further restrictions were codified in the 1922 Cable Act, which declared that "any woman citizen who marries an alien ineligible to citizens shall cease to be a citizen of the United States."[8]

2 McWilliams, Carey. Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California. Univ of California Press, 2000.
3 Library of Congress. (n.d.). The U.S. Mainland: Growth and Resistance. https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/japanese/the-us-mainland-growth-and-resistance/
4 Iwata, M. (1962). "The Japanese Immigrants in California Agriculture". Agricultural History, 36(1), 25–37; Yagasaki, N. (1982). Ethnic Cooperativism and Immigrant Culture: A Study of Japanese Floriculture and Truck Farming in California. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.
5 Ibid.
6 Daniels, R. (1977). The Politics of Prejudice : The Anti-Japanese Movement in California, and The Struggle For Japanese Exclusion. Atheneum.
7 Chin, G. J. (2020). A Nation of White Immigrants: State and Federal Racial Preferences for White Noncitizens. Boston University Law Review, 100(4), 1271–1313.
8 https://immigrationhistory.org/item/cable-act/; Cott, N. (1998). Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934. American Historical Review, 103.5:1440-74. For additional discussion, see also Cott, N. (1998). Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United

These laws were part of a broader series of restrictions targeting Japanese immigration. In 1908, the Gentlemen's Agreement between the United States and Japan limited the immigration of Japanese male laborers into the US. The 1917 Immigration Act introduced a literacy test for immigrants over the age of 16 and barred individuals from a "Asiatic Barred Zone," which included parts of Asia from Western China to the Pacific Islands.[9] Although this zone excluded Japan and certain U.S. territories in Asia, the 1924 Immigration Act went further, explicitly banning Japanese immigration by prohibiting the entry of individuals ineligible for citizenship and implementing a restrictive quota system.[10]

These restrictions disproportionately affected Japanese women, many of whom immigrated as "picture brides"— women who married Japanese men in the U.S. through arranged marriages facilitated by photographs. As new arrivals navigating a foreign culture, these women were particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.[11]

Barriers to citizenship also justified discriminatory property laws, such as the Alien Land Laws, which excluded Japanese immigrants (and others) from owning property.[12] For example, California's 1913 Alien Land Law stated: "All aliens eligible to citizenship under the laws of the United States may acquire, possess, enjoy, transmit, and inherit real property, or any interest therein, in this state in the same manner and to the same extent as citizens of the United States, except as otherwise provided by the laws of this state."[13] While the wording of the law was ostensibly neutral, it effectively excluded Japanese immigrants (and other Asian immigrants), who were ineligible for citizenship under the 1870 amendment[14] to the Naturalization Act of 1790, which restricted naturalization to "free white persons."

The racially discriminatory intent of such laws was evident in cases like the Oyama v. California,[15] where the U.S. Supreme Court examined the unequal treatment of Japanese immigrants in property ownership. The Court ruled in 1948 that applying California's Alien Land Law to seize property from Fred Oyama, a U.S. citizen of Japanese descent, violated his constitutional rights. These laws explicitly targeted Japanese Americans, restricting them from acquiring real estate based on their racial and citizenship status. Because of these barriers, Japanese Americans continued to endure segregation, shaped by both national and local forces.[16]

Despite immigration barriers and widespread hostility, the Japanese population in the United States grew steadily during the first half of the 20th century (see Figure 2). By 1930, nearly 140,000 Japanese Americans resided in the U.S., with the vast majority settling in California. These immigrants formed families and established a sizable second generation, known as the Nisei. However, their numbers declined in the following decade, partially due to negative net migration due in part to the economic hardships of the Great Depression, which severely limited opportunities for Japanese Americans.[17]

States, 1830-1934. American Historical Review, 103.5:1440-74.

9 National Archives. (n.d.). Restricting Immigration from Asia and the Pacific, 1870s to 1950s. https://www.archives.gov/research/aapi/immigration

10 Office of the Historian. (n.d.) The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924). https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act

11 Nakamura, K. "Picture Brides". (2014, May 27). Denso Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 14, 2024 from https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Picture%20brides

12 Ong, P., Ong, J., Pech, C. (2024). Lessons from California's Historical Alien Land Law: Racial Xenophobia and Home Ownership [Working Paper #14]. UCLA Ziman Center for Real Estate, Anderson School of Management. https://www.anderson.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/document/2024-08/2024-15wp.pdf

13 Immigration History. (n.d.). "Alien Land Laws in California (1913 & 1920)". The University of Texas at Austin, Department of History, College of Liberal Arts. https://immigrationhistory.org/item/alien-land-laws-in-california-1913-1920/

14 Chin, G., Finkelman, P. (2024). The "Free White Person" Clause of the Naturalization Act of 1790 as Super Statute. 65 Wm. & Mary L. Rev. 1047. https://scholarship.law.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4025 context=wmlr

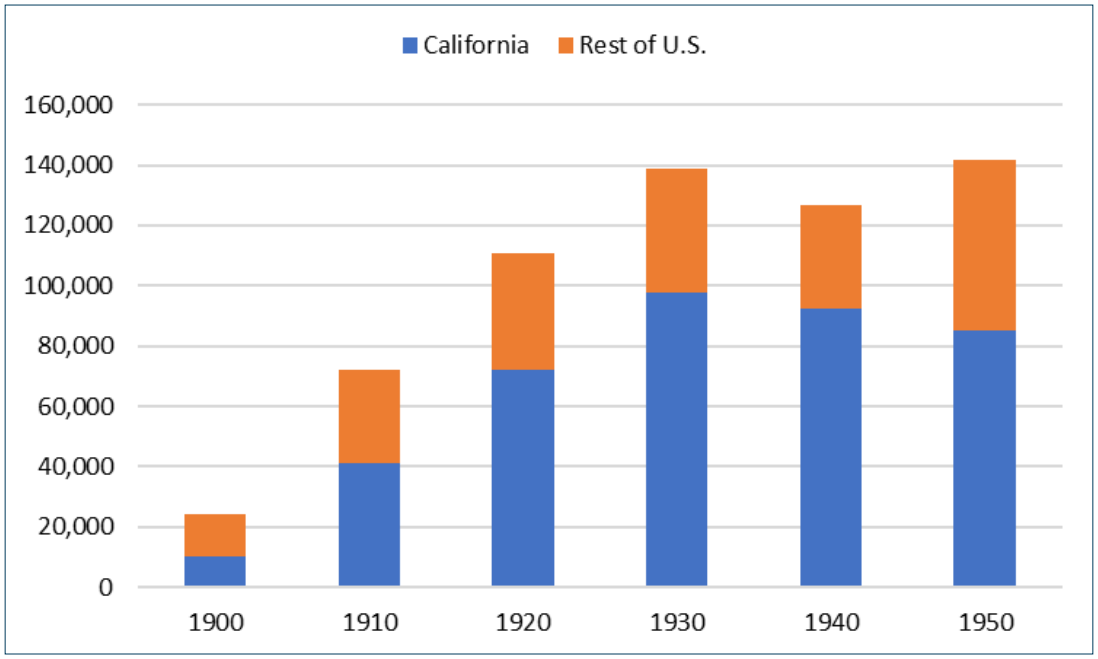
15 Justia, U.S. Supreme Court, Oyama v. California, 332 U.S. 633. (1948). https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/332/633/

16 This is a pattern among segregation in American cities from Trounstine, J. (2018). Segregation by Design: Local Politics and Inequality in American Cities. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108555722

17 An increase in emigration rate during the Great Depression was evident among European foreign born (Greenwood, Michael J., and Zachary Ward. "Immigration quotas, World War I, and Emigrant Flows From the United States in the Early 20th century." Explorations in Economic History 55 (2015): 76-96.) Not all out migration was voluntary, particularly in the case of Mexicans who were expelled in huge numbers (Hoffman, Abraham. Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939. Vnr Ag, 1974.)

This out-migration phenomenon also occurred among Japanese Americans. For information on the size of Japanese immigration and emigration, see Onozawa, Nitaya. "Immigration from Japan to the USA, historical trends and background." Bulletin of Tokyo Kasei Gakuin Tsukuba Women's University 7 (2003): 115-125. Page 116. However, recorded emigration alone was probably not the only factor in the reported decrease in the Japanese American population between 1930 and 1940 census enumerations.

Figure 2: Japanese American Population in California and Rest of the U.S. (1900-1950)



Source: Compiled by authors from sources listed in Appendix B

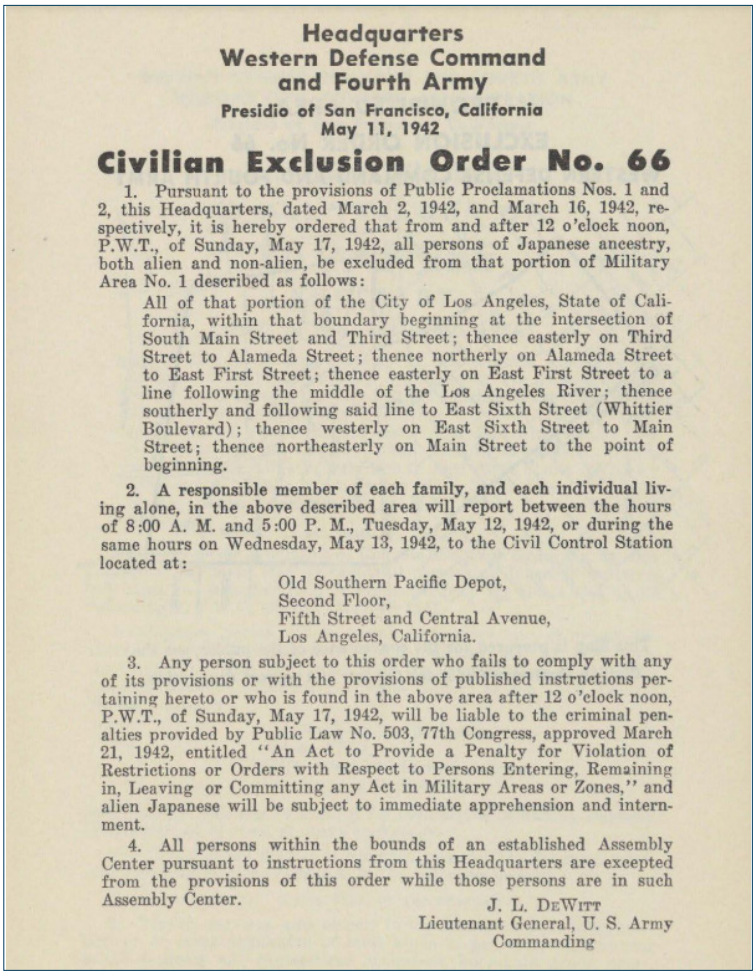
The daily lives of Japanese Americans were abruptly upended in 1942, when they became the targets of one of the most egregious violations of civil rights and liberties in U.S. history. Following the attack of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, many Americans and the U.S. government began to view Japanese Americans as a wartime threat. Despite government documents proving[18] Japanese Americans' loyalty to the United States, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066[19] in February 1942. This order empowered the Secretary of War to designate parts of the Western Coast as military zones,[20] paving the way for the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans (See Figure 3 for Civilian Exclusion Orders.)

18 Mintz, S., & McNeil, S. (2018). The Munson Report. Digital History. Retrieved Aug 21, 2024 from https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/japanese_internment/munson_report.cfm;

19 Executive Order 9066, February 19, 1942; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9066

20 Kumamoto, Bob. "The Search for Spies: American Counterintelligence and the Japanese American Community 1931–1942." Amerasia Journal 6, no. 2 (1979): 45-75. https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.6.2.rw2212q8724mw376

Figure 3: Civilian Exclusion Order No. 66 (May 11,1942)



Headquarters
Western Defense Command
and Fourth Army

Presidio of San Francisco, California
May 11, 1942

Civilian Exclusion Order No. 66

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Public Proclamations Nos. 1 and 2, this Headquarters, dated March 2, 1942, and March 16, 1942, respectively, it is hereby ordered that from and after 12 o'clock noon, P.W.T., of Sunday, May 17, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, be excluded from that portion of Military Area No. 1 described as follows:

All of that portion of the City of Los Angeles, State of California, within that boundary beginning at the intersection of South Main Street and Third Street; thence easterly on Third Street to Alameda Street; thence northerly on Alameda Street to East First Street; thence easterly on East First Street to a line following the middle of the Los Angeles River; thence southerly and following said line to East Sixth Street (Whittier Boulevard); thence westerly on East Sixth Street to Main Street; thence northeasterly on Main Street to the point of beginning.

2. **A responsible member of each family, and each individual living alone, in the above described area will report between the hours** of 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M., Tuesday, May 12, 1942, or during the same hours on Wednesday, May 13, 1942, to the Civil Control Station located at:

Old Southern Pacific Depot,
Second Floor,
Fifth Street and Central Avenue,
Los Angeles, California.

3. Any person subject to this order who fails to comply with any of its provisions or with the provisions of published instructions pertaining hereto or who is found in the above area after 12 o'clock noon, P.W.T., of Sunday, May 17, 1942, will be liable to the criminal penalties provided by Public Law No. 503, 77th Congress, approved March 21, 1942, entitled "An Act to Provide a Penalty for Violation of Restrictions or Orders with Respect to Persons Entering, Remaining in, Leaving or Committing any Act in Military Areas or Zones," and alien Japanese will be subject to immediate apprehension and internment.

4. All persons within the bounds of an established Assembly Center pursuant to instructions from this Headquarters are excepted from the provisions of this order while those persons are in such Assembly Center.

J. L. DeWitt
Lieutenant General, U. S. Army
Commanding

Source: Denso Sites of Shame[21]

Situated on racetracks, fairgrounds, livestock pavilions, lumberyards, migrant labor camps, and a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp,[22] 92,183 Japanese Americans were forcibly "relocated" to 15 "Assembly Centers." These facilities were plagued by unsanitary conditions, poor ventilation, unrepaired structures, including damaged roofs, and pervasive foul odors.[23] By October 1942, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) had established ten long-term incarceration camps in remote areas. These camps were characterized by strict surveillance and tightly restricted daily activities.[24]

Within these harsh confines, Japanese Americans faced regimented routines: children attended school in makeshift classrooms, while adults worked on farms or maintained physical plants under tightly controlled conditions. Overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and limited autonomy defined daily life. Despite these adversities, the incarcerated community demonstrated remarkable resilience, creating institutions that fostered a sense of normalcy through leisure and recreational activities.[25]

By 1942, the WRA began dispersing young Nisei by allowing them to attend college and universities, followed by a temporary leave program enabling some Japanese Americans to work in the

21 "Civilian Exclusion Order No. 66", (densho-EO-66), Densho, Sites of Shame Map, accessed August 19, 2024 in https://ddr.densho.org/media/sitesofshame/EO-66.pdf

22 National Park Service, US Department of the Interior. Glossary: Virtual Museum Exhibit, Manzanar National Historic Site. https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/manz/glossary.html; Brian Niiya, correspondence with authors, December 4, 2024.

23 These were the general conditions in the "Assembly Centers" but experiences varied across different centers. For more detailed accounts, see Linke, K. (2009). Dominance, Resistance, and Cooperation in the Tanforan Assembly Center. Amerikastudien / American Studies, 54(4), 621–655. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/41158468; and Kodachi, Z., Heikkala, J., & Cormack, J. (1980). Portland Assembly Center: Diary of Saku Tomita. Oregon Historical Quarterly, 81(2), 149–171. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20613724.

24 Iwata, J. (1942). "Camp Sign", Japanese American National Museum, Calisphere, https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/tf4w1003x1/

25 Library of Congress. (n.d.). Behind the Wire. Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/japanese/behind-the-wire/

agricultural industry. Later, the WRA introduced a complex and arduous application process for resettlement.[26] Unsurprisingly, resettlement from the camps was limited. By the end of 1942, only 884 individuals had chosen to resettle.[27] Interviews and a poll of 300 Nisei and 305 Issei revealed differing attitudes: while the majority of Issei did not plan to resettle, most Nisei expressed intentions to do so.[28]

In 1943, the resettlement process became more streamlined, though it remained fraught with challenges, including the controversial loyalty questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed to assess the allegiance of Japanese American adults,[29] but it often yielded arbitrary and damaging results. Individuals deemed "disloyal"[30] were transferred to the Tule Lake Segregation Camp in Siskiyou, California, while those classified as "loyal"remained in camps, were drafted into the military, or resettled.[31] Tule Lake, one of the largest camps, became a high security prison, featuring tanks, barbed wire fences, and an abundance of armed guards.[32] Many individuals were unfairly labeled "disloyal" due to the quesetionnaire's flawed design, leading to significant consequences for those affected.

Further compounding the hardships faced by Japanese Americans was Public Law 405, passed in 1944, which permitted Japanese Americans to renounce their citizenship. Fear of family separation, deportation, or forced relocation to unstable American settlements drove many to renounce their citizenship. However, lacking proper information to make an informed decision, many Japanese Americans who remained in the U.S. found themselves in an even worse position—designated as "aliens" stripped of their citizenship.

By 1945, all WRA camps had been closed, except for Tule Lake Segregation Center. After the war, the WRA prioritized mass resettlement, advocating for widespread dispersal of the Japanese American population across the U.S.[33] States like Illinois, Colorado, and Utah became key resettlement locations.[34] Some individuals also returned to the West Coast after the government lifted exclusion zone restrictions.[35] Those who resettled quickly often had financial resources and strong social networks[36] to support them. However, for the majority of the Japanese Americans, resettlement was marked by devastating economic losses[37] incurred during incarceration and insufficient government assistance[38]—a mere $25 and a one-way train ticket to their chosen destination. The resettlement experience was steeped in fear and anxiety as Japanese Americans navigated postwar American society, grappling with the challenges of rebuilding their lives amidst lingering prejudice and economic hardship.

26 Taylor, S. C. (1991). "Leaving the Concentration Camps: Japanese American Resettlement in Utah and the Intermountain West." Pacific Historical Review, 60(2), 169–194. https://doi.org/10.2307/3640490

27 Asaka, Megan. "Resettlement". (2020, October 8). Densho Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 28, 2024 from https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Resettlement.

28 Yatsushiro, Toshio, Iwao Ishino, and Yoshiharu Matsumoto. "The Japanese-American Looks at Resettlement." Public Opinion Quarterly 8, no. 2 (1944): 188-201.

29 The "Loyalty Questionnaire," 1943. (2020, November 18). Densho Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 28, 2024 from https://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-denshopd-p72-00004-3/.

30 Lyon, Cherstin. "Questions 27 and 28". (2020, August 24). Densho Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 28, 2024 from https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Questions_27_and_28/

31 Asaka, Megan. "Resettlement". (2020, October 8). Densho Encyclopedia. Retrieved August 28, 2024 from https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Resettlement

32 "History." Tulelake Committee. Accessed November 23, 2024. https://www.tulelake.org/history.

33 https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/z1nz9x4t/?brand=oac4. Page 90.

34 Brian Niiya. "Return to West Coast," Densho Encyclopedia. https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Return%20to%20West%20Coast

35 This was especially the case for Japanese Americans who returned to Los Angeles. See Kurashige, Lon. 2002. Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990. 1st ed. Vol. 8. Berkeley: University of California Press as cited in Jean-Paul deGuzman. 2016. "Japanese American Resettlement in Postwar America: The Los Angeles Experience." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.270.

36 Kekki, Saara. 2022. "Going, but Where? The Resettlement of Japanese Americans from the Heart Mountain Relocation Center." The Western Historical Quarterly 53 (3): 223–44. https://doi.org/10.1093/whq/whac034.

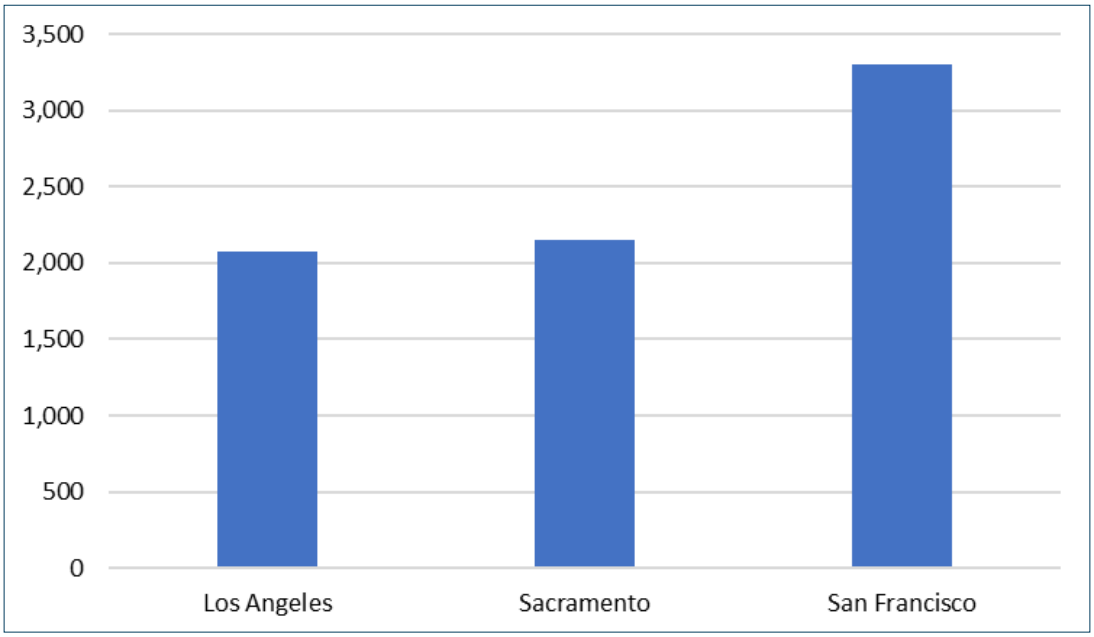
37 William Littmann, "Finding a Way Home: Japanese American Resettlement After Incarceration," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 83, no. 1 (March 2024): 23–26.

38 For more information, see: https://researchguides.gonzaga.edu/c.php?g=67732&p=436753; https://www.history.com/news/japanese-american-wwii-incarceration-camps-redress

Part 3: Establishing Japantowns

The spatial formation of Japantowns was driven by a combination of explicit and implicit racial segregation policies implemented by national and local governments and private-sector actors. These enclaves also served multifaceted economic and social purposes for Japanese Americans. Three of the largest Japantowns were located in Los Angeles, Sacramento and San Francisco, with populations ranging from over two thousand to over three thousand in 1940. (See Figure 4.) This section explores the interplay of these factors to understand how Japantowns emerged and what they looked like prior to WWII, which serves as a base for comparison to the nature of the enclaves after the war covered in Part 4.

Figure 4: Japanese American Population in Japantowns (1940)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 U.S. Census[39]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi.

Japantowns as a segregated space

Like other people of color (POC), Japanese Americans faced intense racial discrimination in the housing market. They were excluded from white neighborhoods through private and governmental actions, including restrictive covenants, subdivision plats, and exclusionary zoning.[40] Restrictive covenants were legal agreements embedded in property deeds that prohibited the sale of homes to nonwhite buyers. Subdivision plats referred to plans for newly developed neighborhoods that often included explicit racial restrictions on who could live there. Exclusionary zoning used local laws and regulations to limit affordable housing or impose requirements that effectively barred people of color from certain areas.

The places where people of color could reside were often the least desirable parts of town—sometimes literally on the "wrong side of the tracks."[41] These neighborhoods were typically low-income,

39 Steven Ruggles, Matt A. Nelson, Matthew Sobek, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, J. David Hacker, Evan Roberts, and J. Robert Warren. IPUMS Ancestry Full Count Data: Version 4.0 [1940]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. https://doi.org/10.18128/D014.V4.0

40 In San Francisco, plats or subdivision plans, explicitly asserted that "no person of African, Japanese, Chinese, or of any Mongolian descent" own homes in Schentag, Annie. ""Designs for People Who Do Not Readily Intermingle": Olmsted Jr.'s Use of Race-Restrictive Covenants, ca. 1900–1930." Journal of Planning History 23, no. 2 (2024): 87-109; Moore, E., Montojo, N., & Mauri, N. (2019). Roots, Race, & Place: A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area.

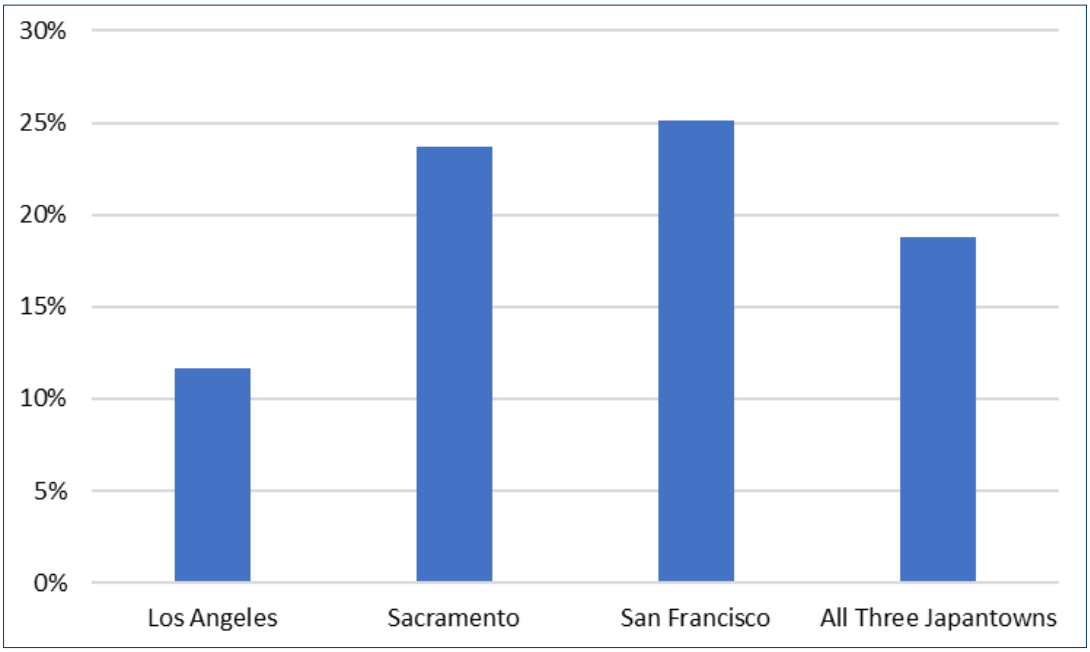
41 See for example, the case of West Fresno and Colton, where people of color were segregated to one side of the railroad tracks while whites lived on the opposite side. (Paul M. Ong, Chhandara Pech, Jacob L. Wasserman, Andres F. Ramirez, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Leila

as POC residents faced systemic barriers to economic opportunity. These marginalized spaces were exacerbated by redlining, a practice developed by Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) in the 1930s to assign mortgage risks to neighborhoods. Areas deemed high-risk for lending practices were colored red on maps, and these "redlined" zones often coincided with neighborhoods where POCs were forced to live.

The government compounded the effects of redlining. For instance, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) routinely denied mortgage insurance to communities labeled as "Japanese" or otherwise racially nonwhite.[42] As discussed earlier, Japanese American immigrants, along with other Asian immigrants, faced additional restrictions through Alien Land Laws, which prohibited them from owning property outright.[43] These discriminatory housing practices profoundly disadvantaged Japanese Americans and other POC by systematically barring them from building wealth through homeownership—a cornerstone of economic mobility in the United States.

One consequence of the racialized housing market was that Japanese Americans often shared neighborhoods with other marginalized groups, either in mixed neighborhoods or adjacent ones. This pattern is evident in the demographic composition of the three Japantowns. Figure 5 highlights that in 1940 Japanese Americans made up less than a quarter of the residents in and around these enclaves. In Sacramento and San Francisco, they constituted about a quarter of the population. In contrast, they accounted for just over a tenth of the residents in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo. Within the core of Japantown, the blocks with the highest concentration of Japanese American residents and businesses, the Japanese American share can be considerably higher. (See maps in Figures 16, 17 and 18 in Part 4 of the report for the areas defined as the core.)

Figure 5: Japanese Americans Share of Total Population in Japantowns (1940)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 U.S. Census[44]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi.

Ullmann, and Megan Riley. Further Implications of Freewaiting in California: Freeway Development and Communities of Color in Colton, Fresno, and San Diego, UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge and UCLA Institute for Transportation Studies, forthcoming.

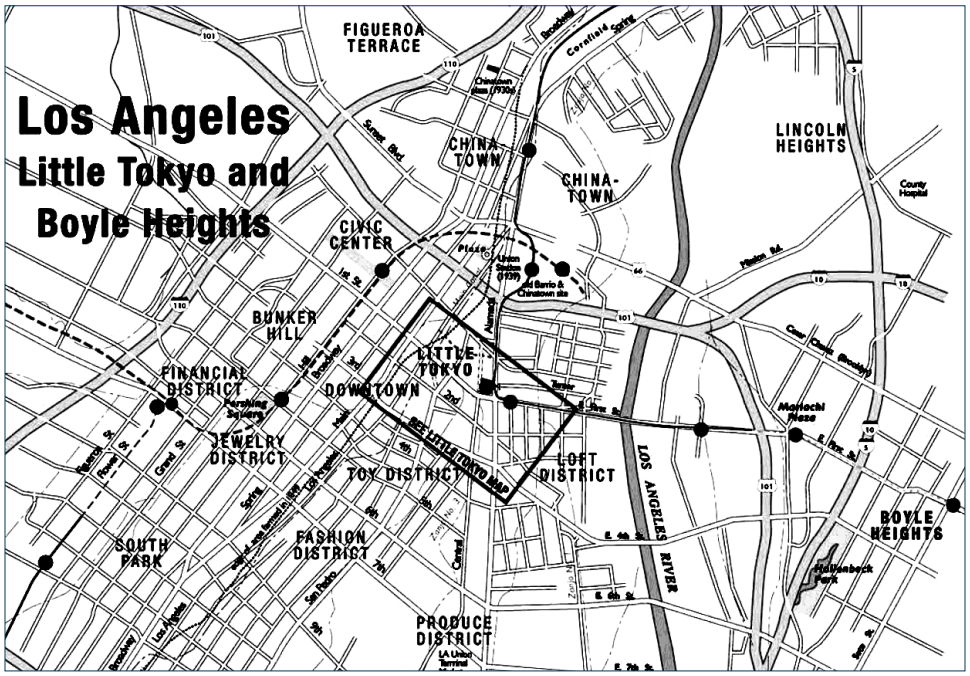
42 Tierney, T. F. "Segregating the Suburbs in Postwar California: A History of Ladera Housing Cooperative, 1944-1950." Journal of Urban History (2023): 00961442231199270.

43 Ong, P., Ong, J., Pech, C. (2024). Lessons from California's Historical Alien Land Law: Racial Xenophobia and Home Ownership [Working Paper #14]. UCLA Ziman Center for Real Estate, Anderson School of Management.

44 Steven Ruggles, Matt A . Nelson, Matthew Sobek, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, J. David Hacker, Evan Roberts, and J. Robert Warren. IPUMS Ancestry Full Count Data: Version 4.0 [1940]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. https://doi.org/10.18128/D014.V4.0

The relative locations of the three Japantowns are shown in Figures 6, 7, and 8. In both Los Angeles and Sacramento, Japantown was situated adjacent to or near the city's downtown and another Asian enclave, Chinatown. In contrast, San Francisco's Japantown was located farther from the city center, a consequence of the 1906 earthquake. The original Japantown, which was close to Chinatown, was destroyed by the earthquake, leading to the establishment of a new enclave in the Western Addition. This area also became a settlement for African Americans, reflecting the racialized housing patterns of the time.

Figure 6: Map of Relative Location of Los Angeles's Japantown



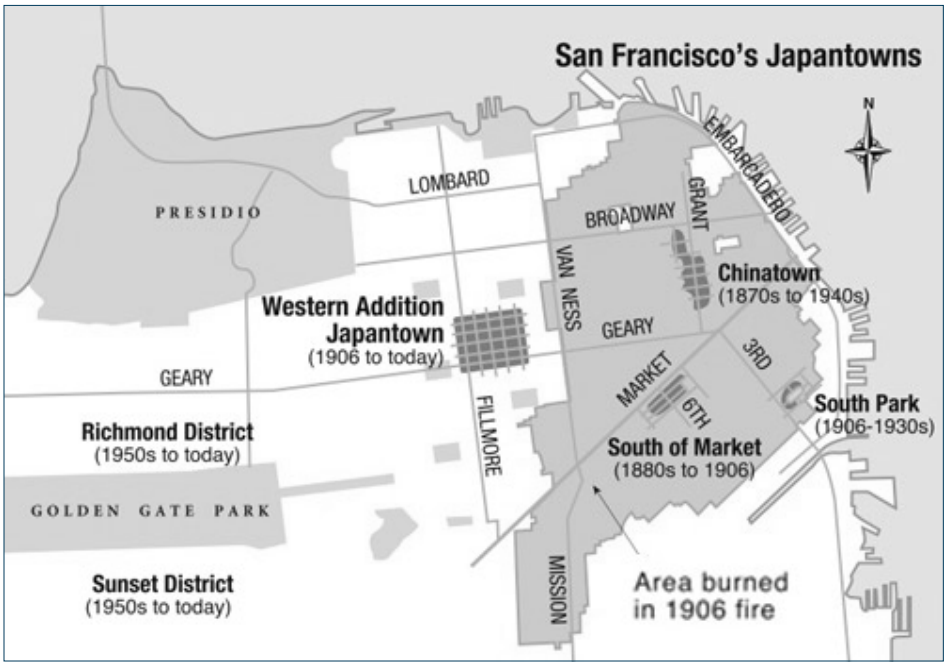
Source: Japantown Atlas[45]

45 Japantown Atlas. Map of Los Angeles Japantown. Accessed December 31, 2024. http://www.japantownatlas.com/map-losangeles2.html.

Figure 7: Map of Relative Location of Sacramento's Japantown

Source: Japantown Atlas[46]

Figure 8: Map of Relative Location of San Francisco's Japantown

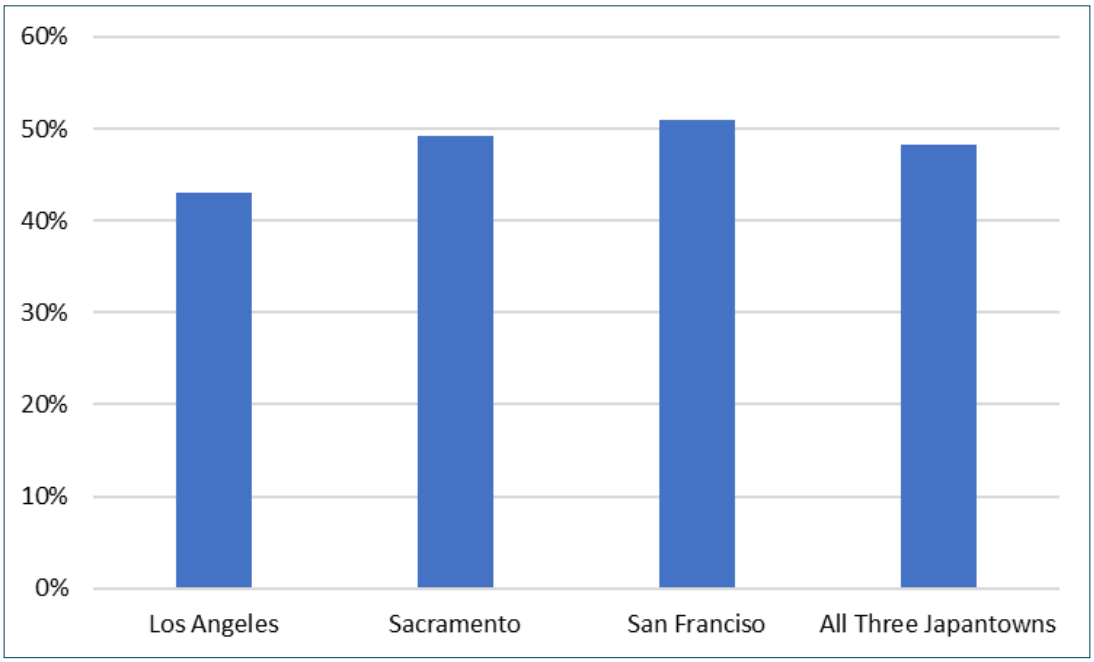


Source: Japantown Atlas[47]

46 Japantown Atlas. Map of Sacramento Japantown. Accessed December 31, 2024. http://www.japantownatlas.com/map-sacramento.html.
47 Japantown Atlas. Map of San Francisco Japantown. Accessed December 31, 2024. http://www.japantownatlas.com/map-sanfrancisco.html.

The three Japantowns consisted of two distinct areas: the core, which housed Japanese American businesses, institutions and residents, and an adjacent area that accommodated additional Japanese American residents. (Maps of these subareas can be found in Part 4.) In 1940, nearly half (48%) of Japanese Americans in these enclaves resided in the core areas. As shown in Figure 9, about half of Japanese Americans in Sacramento and San Francisco Japantowns lived within their respective core areas.

Figure 9: Japanese Americans as a Share of the Total Population in Japantown Core Areas (1940)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 U.S. Census[48]

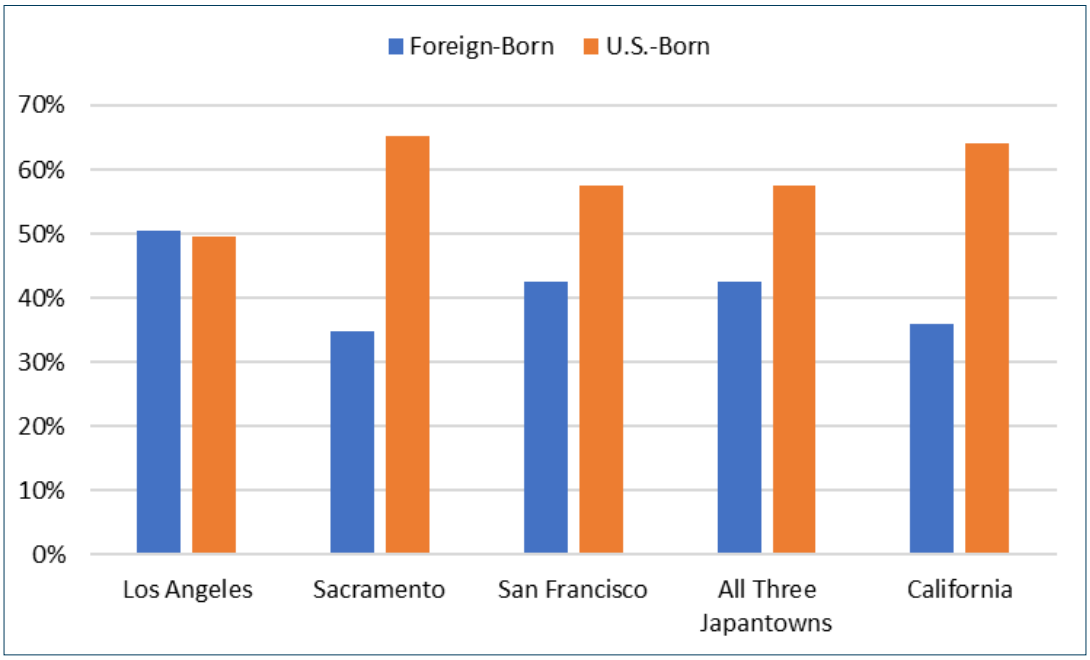
Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi.

Moreover, these Japantowns served as an important haven for foreign-born Japanese Americans. Japanese American residents in Japantowns were disproportionately more likely to be immigrants compared to Japanese Americans statewide. In 1940, 43% of Japanese Americans residing in the three Japantowns were foreign-born, compared to 36% statewide.

This composition by nativity aligns with the idea that Japantowns were vital social and cultural spaces (as discussed later), making them more attractive to immigrants than to American-born Japanese Americans. However, there were notable differences in the percentage of foreign-born Japanese Americans across the three Japantowns. Figure 10 shows that in 1940 Los Angeles' Little Tokyo had the highest proportion of foreign-born residents, with immigrants comprising a majority. In contrast, Sacramento had the lowest rate, with about one-third of its Japanese American residents being foreign-born.

48 Steven Ruggles, Matt A. Nelson, Matthew Sobek, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, J. David Hacker, Evan Roberts, and J. Robert Warren. IPUMS Ancestry Full Count Data: Version 4.0 [1940]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. https://doi.org/10.18128/D014.V4.0

Figure 10: Nativity Status of Japanese Americans in Japantowns and California (1940)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 U.S. Census[49]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi, as well as Japanese Americans in California as a whole.

Japantowns as Economic Spaces

Similar to their experiences in housing, Japanese Americans faced significant discrimination in the job market. As a result, they relied on ethnic enclaves to create and sustain economic opportunities.[50] The Issei (first generation immigrants), in particular, sought spatial proximity to build a resilient ethnic economy, focusing on small-scale businesses in industries such as market gardening, commerce, fishing, and farming.[51] Enclaves enabled them to take advantage of what is known as agglomeration economies, where proximity and clustering yield multiple benefits to businesses, workers and consumers.[52]

To build this ethnic economy, the Issei in Sacramento established a six-block area bordered by L, O, Third, and Fifth Streets, commonly referred to as "Ofu" or the "Sakura City."[53] This area became a hub for various businesses and served as a connecting point between farms and agricultural workers.[54] In Los Angeles, Little Tokyo developed east of Downtown, south of Chinatown, and west of Boyle Heights, with commercial activity centered on San Pedro, First, and Second Streets. Similar to Sacramento's Japantown, Little Tokyo saw the proliferation of small businesses and self-employed professionals, supported by nearby streetcar lines that connected it to surrounding agricultural districts.[55]

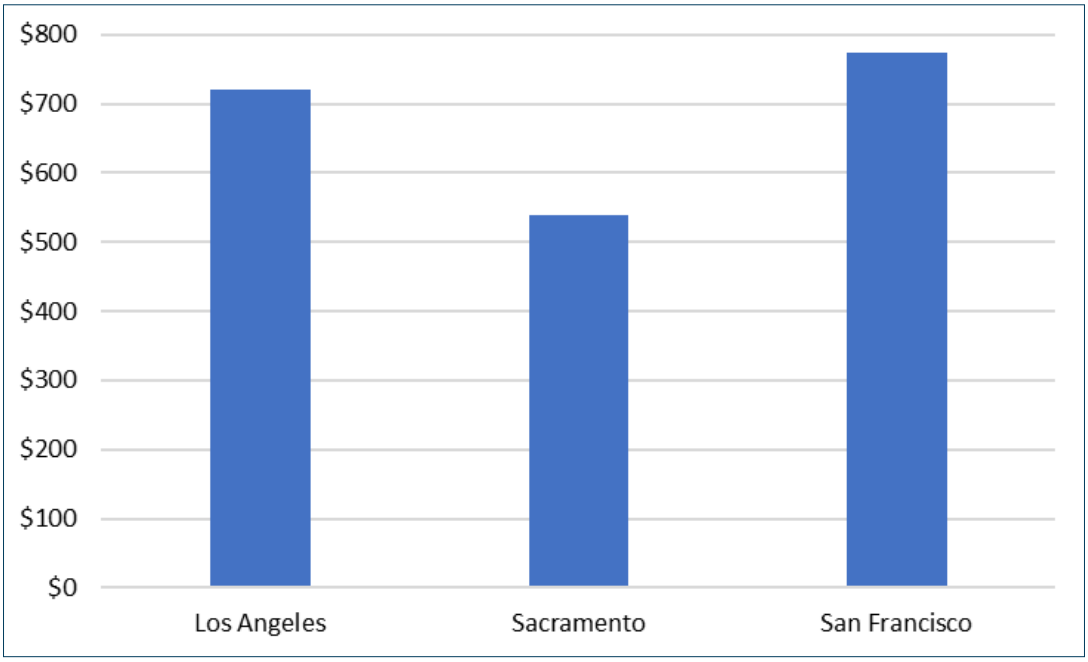
In San Francisco, Nihonmachi emerged in the Western Addition after the 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed the original Japantown located near the South of Market area. (See Figure 8).[56] Like its

49 Ibid
50 Scholars have debated the proper definition of the "ethnic economy" and the "ethnic economy enclave hypothesis." Though these debates are important, we focus on the intuitive definitions.
51 Bonacich, E. (1975). "Small Business and Japanese American Ethnic Solidarity". Amerasia Journal, 3(1), 96–112. https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.3.1.u5252l8538x35661
52 Duranton, Gilles, and Diego Puga. "Micro-foundations of Urban Agglomeration Economies." In Handbook of regional and urban economics, vol. 4, pp. 2063-2117. Elsevier, 2004.
53 California Museum. (n.d.) Kokoro: The Story of Sacramento's Lost Japantown. Google Arts & Culture. artsandculture.google.com/story/kokoro-the-story-of-sacramento-s-lost-japantown-california-museum/
54 Wildie, Kevin. Sacramento's Historic Japantown: Legacy of a Lost Neighborhood. Arcadia Publishing, 2013. Page 25.
55 Jenks, Hillary. "Home is Little Tokyo": Race, community, and memory in twentieth-century Los Angeles. University of Southern California, 2008. Page 37 and 39.
56 Jordan, A. (n.d.), Nihonjin-Machi, San Francisco's Japanese People Town. FoundSF. https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Nihonjin-Machi,_San_Francisco%27s_Japanese_People_Town

counterparts, Nihonmachi became a thriving center of commerce and community life for Japanese Americans.

The variety of economic institutions in the three Japantowns, as expected, resulted in differences in economic outcomes. Figure 11 highlights significant variations in Japanese American earnings across the three neighborhoods prior to WWII. In Los Angeles and San Francisco, for example, Japanese Americans had comparable median earnings, both noticeably higher than those in Sacramento. This disparity may be explained by differences in regional labor markets. Sacramento, being situated in a less urbanized region with an economy heavily reliant on agriculture, offered lower overall compensation compared to the more urbanized and diversified economies of Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Figure 11: Median Annual Earnings of Japanese Americans in Japantowns (1939)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 U.S. Census[57]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi.

As noted above, spatial proximity and clustering were crucial in Japantowns, as they facilitated the efficient exchange of goods, services, knowledge, and capital through an extensive transportation network.[58] To maintain efficiency, businesses in Japantowns relied on strategies such as unpaid family labor, thrift, longing working hours, and honor-and-loyalty system to reduce labor costs. They also established organizations like rotating-credit associations to regulate market prices and sustain the community's economic stability.[59]

For the Nisei, the ethnic economy offered an alternative to the labor market discrimination they faced despite obtaining university degrees in fields such as medicine, engineering, and business.[60] While many aspired to white-collar careers, the Nisei were often excluded from such opportunities and had little choice but to return to Japantowns for employment within the ethnic economy.[61]

57 Steven Ruggles, Matt A. Nelson, Matthew Sobek, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, J. David Hacker, Evan Roberts, and J. Robert Warren. IPUMS Ancestry Full Count Data: Version 4.0 [1940]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. https://doi.org/10.18128/D014.V4.0

58 This is also known as agglomeration in urban economics: O'Sullivan, A. (2011). "Introduction and Axioms of Urban Economics". In Urban Economics. McGraw-Hill Education.

59 Bonacich, E., & Modell, J. (1980). The Economic Basis of Ethnic Solidarity: Small business in the Japanese American Community / Edna Bonacich and John Modell. University of California Press.

60 Hayashi, A. N. (2004). Japanese American Resettlement : The Midwest and The Middle Atlantic States, 1942-1949 / by Amy N. Hayashi. UMI. Page 70 [Hard Copy].

61 Levine, G. N., & Rhodes, C. (1981). The Japanese American Community: A Three-Generation Study / Gene N. Levine, Colbert Rhodes. Praeger. Apart from labor market discrimination, cultural expectations impacted the Nisei's reasons for moving back to these enclaves. Bonacich

Japantowns as Social Spaces

Neighborhoods represent one of the most fundamental constructs of human society—a geographic clustering of people within a shared space.[62] Their proximity to each other can foster opportunities for frequent and meaningful interactions, the establishment of communal institutions, the formation of dense and thick social networks, and the strengthening of human capital. These spaces not only build trust among residents but also serve as a platform for socialization and the construction of place-based identities. While these positive outcomes are often the norm, it is also important to note that neighborhoods can also be a place of great social disorganization, particularly in segregated low-income minority neighborhoods.

Ethnic enclaves are spatialized communities defined by a concentration of specific populations, often tied to immigrant groups. These neighborhoods are dynamic spaces, often characterized by intergenerational changes. While they serve as vital cultural and social hubs for foreign-born residents, they often function as stepping stones for immigrants who succeed economically and for the American-born children to assimilate into the broader society.[63] Pre-WWII Japantowns shared many of these characteristics, except for its role as stepping stone for residential integration because of the racism discussed earlier.

Japanese Americans built Japantowns as spaces to connect with and preserve cultural norms and traditions from mainland Japan. These enclaves became hubs where the Japanese language was commonly spoken, and ethnic identity was celebrated. In a broader society that often excluded them from participation and barred their assimilation into the mainstream, Japantowns served as vital safe havens. Within these enclaves, Japanese Americans established numerous community institutions that anchored their social and cultural lives. For instance, Sacramento's Japantown featured churches, temples, bathhouses, and pool rooms.[64] These spaces hosted activities such as flower arrangement classes, dance lessons, and tea ceremonies, which reflected the traditions of their homeland.[65] Similarly, Little Tokyo in Los Angeles developed comparable institutions, including newspaper offices, community organizations like the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), and mutual aid societies that provided critical support during times of crisis.66 In San Francisco's Japantown, social organizations, along with business associations, thrived in the Western Addition. Its diversity, shared with other people of color and immigrant groups, earned the nickname "Little United Nations."[67]

The community institutions and spatial clustering within Japantowns enabled Japanese Americans to build extensive social networks and accumulate social capital,[68] fostering trust among co-eth-

and Modell (1980) and Hayashi (2004) exemplified the Issei's expectations for the Nisei to continue their family businesses. Oftentimes, they discouraged the Nisei to go to universities so they could work in these businesses; as a result, most Nisei did not like working in them as niche sectors they built were exploitative. The Japanese's economic success, then, is a double-edged sword.

62 The discussion of neighborhoods and enclaves in this section is based on the following sources: Chaskin, Robert J. "Perspectives on Neighborhood and Community: A Review of the Literature." Social Service Review 71, no. 4 (1997): 521-547; Alhusban, Safa A., Ahmad A. Alhusban, and Yamen N. AlBetawi. "Suggesting Theoretical Urban Neighborhood Design Concept by Adopting the Changing Discourse of Social Capital." Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy 13, no. 3 (2019): 391-411; and Sampson, Robert J., Jeffrey D. Morenoff, and Thomas Gannon-Rowley. "Assessing "Neighborhood Effects": Social Processes and New Directions in Research." Annual Review of Sociology 28, no. 1 (2002): 443-478.

63 Logan, John R., Richard D. Alba, and Wenquan Zhang. "Immigrant Enclaves and Ethnic Communities in New York and Los Angeles." American Sociological Review 67, no. 2 (2002): 299-322; Qadeer, Mohammad, and Sandeep Kumar. "Ethnic Enclaves and Social Cohesion." Canadian Journal of Urban Research 15, no. 2 (2006): 1-17.

64 Churches binded the social and economic purpose of Japantowns. Livezey, Lowell W. "Communities and Enclaves." Public Religion and Urban Transformation: Faith in the City 14 (2000): 133; Tong, Guangyu. "Ethnic Churches as an Important Space of Co-ethnic Resources for Immigrant Entrepreneurs." While Livezey (2000) and Tong (2019) only offers general empirical evidence; it is safe to say that churches' and temples' role in Japantowns motivated its retention as an enclave.

65 Wildie, Kevin. Sacramento's Historic Japantown: Legacy of a Lost Neighborhood. Arcadia Publishing, 2013. Page 27; California Museum. (n.d.) Kokoro: The Story of Sacramento's Lost Japantown. Google Arts & Culture. https://artsandculture.google.com/story/kokoro-the-story-of-sacramento-s-lost-japantown-california-museum/ngWBIz39GH3oLQ?hl=en

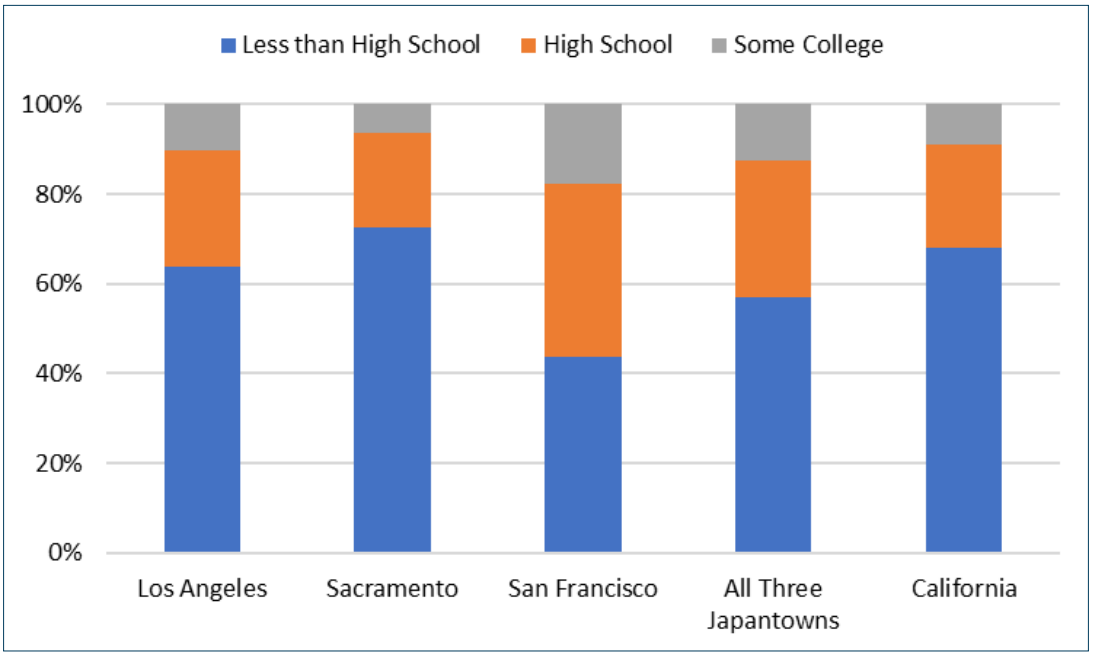
66 Jenks, Hillary. "Home is Little Tokyo": Race, Community, and Memory in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles. University of Southerna California, 2008. More information in Chapter 1: "Something To Hang Your Hat On": Immigrants and Enclaves in Pre-WWII Los Angeles; National Park Service (NPS). (n.d.). Little Tokyo Historic District. https://www.nps.gov/places/little-tokyo-historic-district.htm

67 Jordan, A. (n.d.), Nihonjin-Machi, San Francisco's Japanese People Town. FoundSF. https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Nihonjin-Machi,_San_Francisco%27s_Japanese_People_Town

68 We follow the definition that social capital is the "capacity of individuals to gain access to scarce resources by virtue of their membership of social networks or institutions" defined in Pieterse, J. N. (2003). Social capital and migration: Beyond ethnic economies. Ethnicities, 3(1), 29–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796803003001785. Social capital, then, is a club good within the enclave. Club goods are non-rivalrous and excludable in nature where accessing within-group social capital may not prevent coethnics from using it, but they can exclude outside groups from accessing it. This is consistent with economic opportunities in these enclaves. An overview can be found here: Galbraith, C. S., Rodriguez, C. L., & Stiles, C. H. (2007). Social capital as a club good: the case of ethnic communities and entrepreneurship. Journal of Enterprising Communities., 1(1), 38–53. https://doi.org/10.1108/17506200710736258

nic residents. These networks not only strengthened community resilience but also promoted mutual support, further solidifying Japantowns as essential spaces for cultural preservation and social cohesion.[69] The formation of social capital within these enclaves was bolstered by the relatively high educational attainment of their residents compared to many other marginalized groups and Japanese Americans outside the enclaves.[70] In 1940, Japanese Americans living in the three Japantowns had higher levels of educational achievement compared to Japanese Americans statewide. Over two-fifths (43%) of Japanese American adults aged 25 years and older in these enclaves had completed high school, compared to just under a third (32%) statewide. Similarly, 12% of Japanese American adults in the three Japantowns had some college education, compared to 9% statewide. Educational attainment varied among the three enclaves, as shown in Figure 12, with Japanese American residents of Sacramento's Japantown exhibiting lower levels of educational attainment. However, their attainment levels were likely higher than those of other Japanese Americans in the surrounding agriculture-based regions of the Central Valley. These patterns suggest that better-educated Japanese Americans gravitated toward ethnic enclaves, where they could access the social and cultural advantages communities offered, along with the economic opportunities discussed in the previous subsection.

Figure 12: Educational Attainment of Japanese Americans in Japantowns and California (1940)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 U.S. Census[71]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi, as well as Japanese Americans in California as a whole.

It is important to note that the social meaning, functions and activities of Japantowns varied significantly by generations, particularly between the Issei (first-generation immigrants) and the American-born Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans). These generational differences were deeply rooted in how each group defined the role and significance of these enclaves in their lives. The concept

69 From Williamson, O. E. (1993). "Calculativeness, Trust, and Economic Organization". The Journal of Law & Economics, 36(1), 453–486. https://doi.org/10.1086/467284, opportunism "is a self-interest-seeking assumption" in many transactions; that is, when firms hire employees, a firm's main goal is to maximize profit, while a worker's goal is to maximize their benefits/incentives (i.e., wage, networks). However, as Noorderhaven, N. G. (n.d.). "Opportunism and Trust in Transaction Cost Economics" in Transaction Cost Economics and Beyond (pp. 105–128). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-1800-9_6 capitalizes, Japanese cultural norms regulate opportunism, lessening the "hazards of trading." In essence, transactions, with trust as a catalyst, are less costly in the labor market, especially in these communities.

70 For general discussion on the connection between education and social capital, see Huang, Jian, Henriette Maassen Van den Brink, and Wim Groot. "A Meta-Analysis of The Effect of Education on Social Capital." Economics of education review 28, no. 4 (2009): 454-464.

71 Steven Ruggles, Matt A. Nelson, Matthew Sobek, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, J. David Hacker, Evan Roberts, and J. Robert Warren. IPUMS Ancestry Full Count Data: Version 4.0 [1940]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. https://doi.org/10.18128/D014.V4.0

of space and place[72] helps frame the Issei's view of Japantowns as essential for preserving their cultural identity from mainland Japan. As founders of many community institutions and primary practitioners of homeland traditions, they played a pivotal role in maintaining practices deeply rooted in their heritage. For many Issei, particularly those who immigrated as adults, the ability to communicate in Japanese within these enclaves was crucial, as their limited opportunities to learn English made mainstream integration challenging.

In contrast, the Nisei's perception of Japantowns and their ethnic identity reflected a complex blending of American values and their Japanese heritage. As individuals born and raised in the U.S., the Nisei navigated dual cultural influences, shaping their engagement with Japantowns in ways distinct from their parents. Their experience was more dynamic, reflecting greater interactions with mainstream American society, particularly the educational system.

Within spaces like Buddhist temples, Japanese churches, and leisure venues such as bathhouses, malls, and theaters, the Nisei navigated both their Japanese heritage and American environment, blending traditional practices with contemporary consumerism.[73] They also celebrated cultural and social events, such as Nisei week[74] and the Cherry Blossom Festival, which symbolized their efforts to honor their heritage while embracing their American upbringing. Additionally, the Nisei formed sport organizations, social clubs, and hosted activities like Scouting,[75] furthering reflecting their dual cultural influences and efforts to bridge both worlds. These intergenerational differences illustrate that Japantowns were not static spaces, but evolving constructs, shaped by larger dynamics such as acculturation and the shifting needs of their communities.

Erasure of Japantowns

Soon after America's entry into World War II, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents intensified their surveillance and raids on major social institutions within Japantowns. On March 1, 1942, "voluntary evacuation" notices were issued, encouraging Japanese Americans to leave coastal areas (California, Oregon, and Washington) and relocate to inland regions further from the Pacific. However, this effort proved largely ineffective due to resistance from inland communities and the lack of family ties many Japanese Americans had in those areas.[76] By March 24, 1942, these notices were replaced by a Civil Exclusion Order issued by General John L. DeWitt, mandating the forced evacuation of "all Japanese persons, both alien and non-alien."[77]

Consequently, Japanese Americans were forced to relinquish their livelihoods, including their homes, farms, and stores. Often, they had to sell their properties far below their value.[78] In some cases, Japanese Americans turned their farms over to private corporations, which profited from the crops that had already been planted but failed to reinvest in maintaining the land, leading to its deterioration over time.[79] Additionally, many farms and stores owned by Japanese Americans were vandalized and ransacked.[80]

The initial removal of Japanese Americans was organized by geographically assigning residents from specific neighborhoods to designated Assembly Centers based on their residential location. Fig-

72 Thomas, M., Jonas, A. E. G., & McCann, E. (2015). "Cities for Whom? The Contours and Commitments of Critical Urban Geography". In Urban Geography. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

73 Smith, James M. "Identities and Urban Social Spaces in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles: Japanese Americans in Two Ethno-Spiritual Communities." Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography 90, no. 4 (2008): 389-408.

74 Kurashige, L. (2000). "The Problem of Biculturalism: Japanese American Identity and Festival before World War II". The Journal of American History (Bloomington, Ind.), 86(4), 1632–1654. https://doi.org/10.2307/2567581. Kurashige (2000) offers an important critique of how "ethnic identity" can change depending on the time and context. Before WWII, it was a tool to encourage other Japanese Americans and Whites to buy goods and consumer services within the enclave. As WWII approached, to prove their loyalty, they "authenticated their vision of the ethnic community" by promoting a monolithic view of Japanese Americans, protecting them from nativism.

75 Hayashi, A. N. (2004). Japanese American Resettlement : The Midwest and The Middle Atlantic States, 1942-1949. UMI. Page 55 [Harad Copy] cited Matsumoto, V. (2023). "Japanese American Women and the Creation of Urban Nisei Culture in the 1930s". In Over the Edge (1st ed., pp. 291-). University of California Press.

76 Niiya, Brian. "Voluntary Evacuation". (2024, August 8). Densho Encyclopedia. Retrieved September 2, 2024 from https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Voluntary_evacuation/#cite_note-ftnt_ref1-1

77 Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community (BIJAC). (n.d.). Exclusion Order No. 1 and Preparing to Leave. https://bijac.org/history/exclusion-and-internment/exclusion-order-no-1-and-preparing-to-leave/

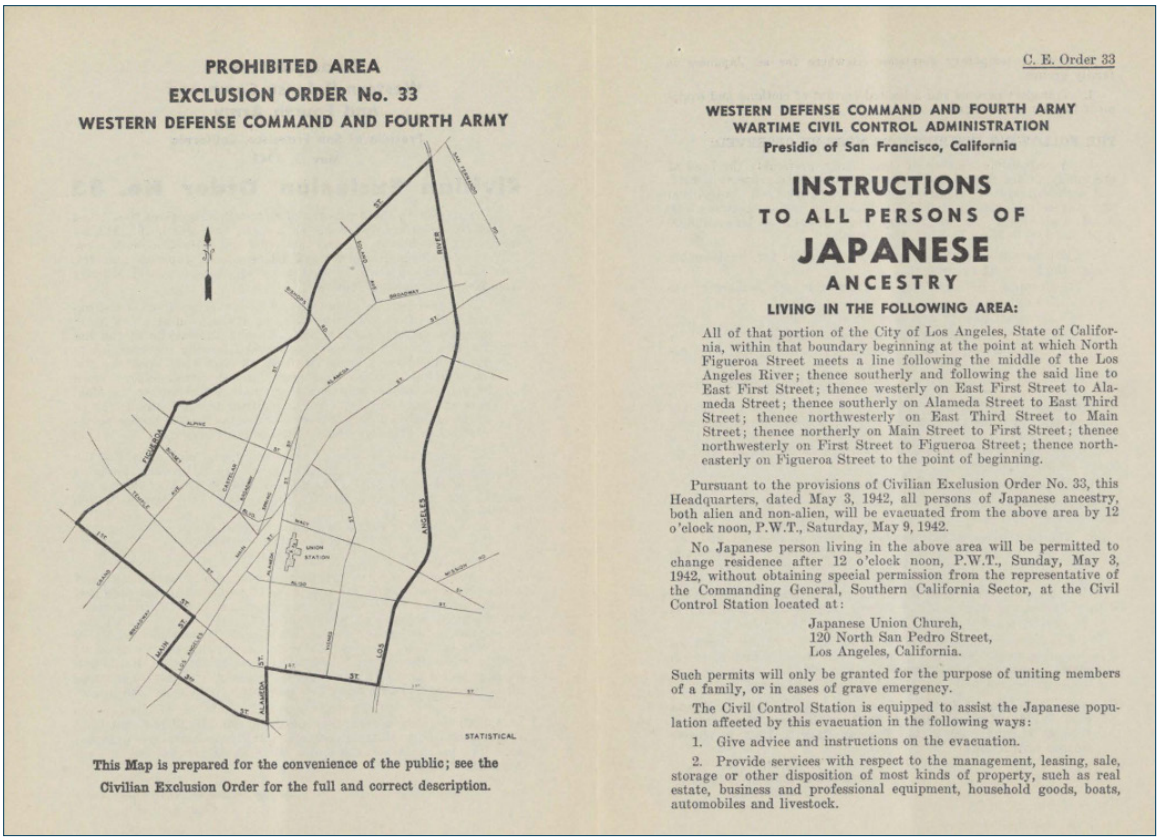
78 https://ddr.densho.org/narrators/400/

79 See oral history: https://ddr.densho.org/interviews/ddr-densho-1000-12-33/ courtesy from Densho; Mitsuko Hashiguchi, interview by James Arima, 7/28/98 (ddr-densho-1000-12-33), Densho Visual History Collection, Densho.

80 See archival material: https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-37-283/ courtesy from the National Archives and Records Administration; Vandalism of Japanese American property (ddr-denso-37-283), Densho, National Archives and Records Administration Collection.

ure 13 provides an example of how Japanese American residents in and around Los Angeles' Japantown were instructed. A plurality of Japanese American residents of Los Angeles were sent to Santa Anita Assembly Center[81], while those in Sacramento were relocated to the Sacramento Assembly Center at the nearby Walerga Engineer Depot.[82] Similarly, Japanese Americans residents of San Francisco were sent to the Tanforan Assembly Center in San Bruno.

Figure 13: Map and Instructions for Civilian Exclusion Order No. 33, Los Angeles (1942)



PROHIBITED AREA
EXCLUSION ORDER No. 33
WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY

This Map is prepared for the convenience of the public; see the Civilian Exclusion Order for the full and correct description.

C. E. Order 33

WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY
WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION
Presidio of San Francisco, California

INSTRUCTIONS
TO ALL PERSONS OF
JAPANESE
ANCESTRY
LIVING IN THE FOLLOWING AREA:

All of that portion of the City of Los Angeles, State of California, within that boundary beginning at the point at which North Figueroa Street meets a line following the middle of the Los Angeles River; thence southerly and following the said line to East First Street; thence westerly on East First Street to Alameda Street; thence southerly on Alameda Street to East Third Street; thence northwesterly on East Third Street to Main Street; thence northerly on Main Street to First Street; thence northwesterly on First Street to Figueroa Street; thence northeasterly on Figueroa Street to the point of beginning.

Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 33, this Headquarters, dated May 3, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P.W.T., Saturday, May 9, 1942.

No Japanese person living in the above area will be permitted to change residence after 12 o'clock noon, P.W.T., Sunday, May 3, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the representative of the Commanding General, Southern California Sector, at the Civil Control Station located at:

Japanese Union Church,
120 North San Pedro Street,
Los Angeles, California.

Such permits will only be granted for the purpose of uniting members of a family, or in cases of grave emergency.

The Civil Control Station is equipped to assist the Japanese population affected by this evacuation in the following ways:

1. Give advice and instructions on the evacuation.
2. Provide services with respect to the management, leasing, sale, storage or other disposition of most kinds of property, such as real estate, business and professional equipment, household goods, boats, automobiles and livestock.

Source: Densho[83]

81 Based on the authors' tabulations of the War Relocation Authority's Japanese-American Internee Data File, 1942–1946. National Archives Catalog. Available at: https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1264228. Approximately 40% of Japanese American residents in Los Angeles were sent to Santa Anita, 30% to Manzanar, and 11% to Pomona.

82 Brian Niiya, correspondence with authors, December 4, 2024.

83 Western Defense Command and Fourth Army. Exclusion Order No. 33: Prohibited Area Map. 1942. Accessed December 31, 2024. https://ddr.densho.org/media/sitesofshame/EO-33.pdf.

Part 4: Reestablishing Japantowns

The erasure of the three Japantowns during World War II and the subsequent resettlement of these enclaves profoundly impacted their characteristics. Returning to the neighborhoods that had constituted the pre-war Japantowns was far from easy. Several external constraints created significant challenges.[84] The housing market was tight, and many of the homes previously occupied by Japanese Americans had been taken over by others, including a significant number of African Americans.[85] Moreover, government policies discouraged the reconcentration of former internees in these enclaves—a goal that was supported by some Japanese American organizations and religious groups.86 Additionally, local groups, particularly in Sacramento's Japantown, strongly "opposed"[87] Japanese American resettlement.[88] For many returning Japanese American veterans, there was a prevailing sense that they had earned the right to full citizenship, which included access to equal employment, housing and other opportunities.[89] Despite these obstacles, all three Japantowns were re-established after WWII, though they never fully regained their pre-war size and function.

This section examines this transformation by comparing the demographic and socioeconomic composition of the Japantowns before and after the war. We focus on total population, the Japanese American population, including foreign-born individuals, educational attainment, and earnings, using data from the 1940 and 1950 U.S. Census records. Detailed information about our data sources and methodology is provided in Appendix A.

While it may seem intuitive to assume that Japantowns were reestablished primarily by former residents returning to their neighborhoods, the available evidence suggests otherwise. Insights into post-war settlement patterns can be gleaned from an estimate of the proportion of the 1950 Japanese American Japantown residents in the three enclaves who had lived outside the immediate region before the war. By cross-referencing the names of the post-WWII residents with internees records from Assembly Centers, it is estimated that just over a third of these individuals had resided outside their immediate region prior to resettling.[90]

A comparison of Japanese American residents' names in Sacramento's Japantown from 1940 and 1950 provides an example of the low rate of return where only about a sixth of 1940 residents resettled[91]—a conservative estimate due to factors such as deaths, marriage (resulting in surname changes for women), name changes (e.g., anglicizing first names), or errors in recordkeeping. Even accounting for these adjustments, the evidence indicates that returnees likely made up at most a third of Sacra-

84 Littmann, William. 2024. "'A Different Kind of Hardship': Landscapes of Japanese American Resettlement During World War II." Buildings & Landscapes 31 (2): 30–54. https://doi.org/10.1353/bdl.2024.a938970.

85 Horiuchi, Lynne. "Mobility and Property: Japanese Americans and African Americans Coming and Going in San Francisco's Japantown." In Landscapes of Mobility, pp. 133-164. Routledge, 2016; and Jenks, Hillary. "Bronzeville, Little Tokyo, and The Unstable Geography of Race in Post-World War II Los Angeles." Southern California Quarterly 93, no. 2 (2011): 201-235.

86 California Migration Museum. (n.d.). "Resettlement". CMM. https://www.calmigration.org/resettlement; Copeland, Jeffrey. 2016. "Stay for a Dollar a Day: California's Church Hostels during the Japanese American Resettlement, 1945–1947." California History (San Francisco) 93 (4): 42–66.

87 Sacramento(Calif.). City Council. Resolution No. 207. [typescript]. Japanese American Archival Collection. California State University, Sacramento, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Sacramento, CA.

88 We acknowledge that opposition to Japanese American resettlement varied across the three Japantowns. For instance, Sacramento's Japantown faced stronger opposition compared to the other two Japantowns. However, racial tension and friction were inevitable as Japanese Americans resettled in these areas. For more information, see Kristen Tamiko Hayashi's Making Home Again: Japanese American Resettlement in Post-World War II Los Angeles, 1945-1955 (University of California, Riverside, 2019, Dissertation). Additionally, Charlotte Brooks explores how these tensions stemmed from the Black-White racial hierarchy in "In The Twilight Zone Between Black and White: Japanese American Resettlement and Community in Chicago, 1942-1945," The Journal of American History, 86(4): 1655-1687 (2000).

89 Banks, Taunya Lovell. "Race, Place and Historic Moment–Black and Japanese American World War II Veterans: The GI Bill of Rights and the Model Minority Myth." Minority Relations: Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation (Robert S. Chang & Greg Robinson eds. 2017), U of Maryland Legal Studies Research Paper 2015-20 (2015).

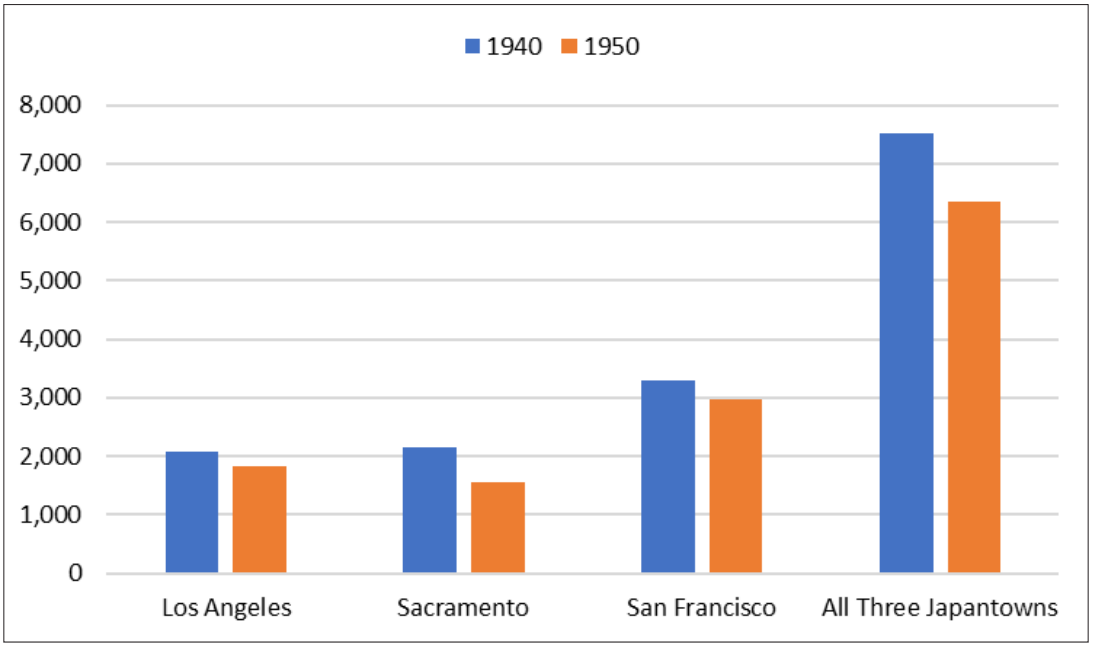
90 This process is conducted separately for each enclave. First, we match the names of residents from the 1950 enclave with those on the internee list derived from Ireizō: Japanese American Memorial (https://ireizo.org/). Using the matched names, we identify the assembly center to which each individual was assigned. If the assigned assembly center does not correspond to the enclave, we designate that individual as having lived outside the immediate region of the enclave prior to World War II. For example, if a resident of Sacramento's 1950 enclave is matched with the internee list and was assigned to the Sacramento Assembly Center, it is inferred that they lived within the Sacramento region. However, there is insufficient information in the internee database to determine whether the individual resided specifically in the region's Japantown before the war.

91 The match is based on the following criteria: (1) the difference in reported birth years between the two decades are within three years; (2) gender is the same in both decades; and (3) the surname and given name are exactly or approximately the same. The results vary with how much of a difference is allowed in the names. Relaxing the criterion threshold increases the number of matches but also increases the number of false positives. Tightening the criterion decreases the number of matches but increases the number of false positives. The estimate is based on a low threshold.

mento's Japanese American residents in 1950 Japantown, confirming they were a minority. These estimates highlight the complexity of Japantown reestablishment after the war, involving both returning residents and newcomers who had previously lived elsewhere.

One of the consequences of the obstacles to rebuilding the enclaves was a collective 16% decrease in population of the three Japantowns between 1940 and 1950, declining from about 7,500 residents to under 6,400.[92] However, population recovery varied significantly across the three Japantowns as shown in Figure 14. Sacramento's Japantown experienced the steepest decline, with its Japanese American population dropping by 28%, from over 2,100 in 1940 to under 1,600 in 1950. Los Angeles' Japantown saw an 18% decrease, with its population falling from nearly 2,100 to roughly 1,800. San Francisco's Japantown experienced the smallest decline, with its population decreasing by 10%, from approximately 3,300 to under 3,000. These decreases were larger than the overall decrease in the Japanese American population in California (8% decline). Despite these declines, the recovery of the Japantowns were remarkable given the tight housing market and the pressure to spatially assimilate,[93] rather than resettle in their pre-war enclaves.

Figure 14: Japanese American Population in Japantowns (1940, 1950)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 U.S. Censuses[94]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi.

As in the pre-war period, Japanese Americans in the reestablished Japantowns continued to live in racially diverse neighborhoods. However, due to the decline in the Japanese American population, their share of the total population in these Japantowns decreased between 1940 and 1950. As shown in Figure 15, Sacramento experienced the greatest drop, with Japanese Americans comprising 24% of the population in 1940, falling to 14% by 1950. San Francisco saw a similar decline, with the share decreasing from 25% to 17%. These changes were driven by both a reduction in the number of Japanese American residents and an increase in non-Japanese American populations within these neighbor-

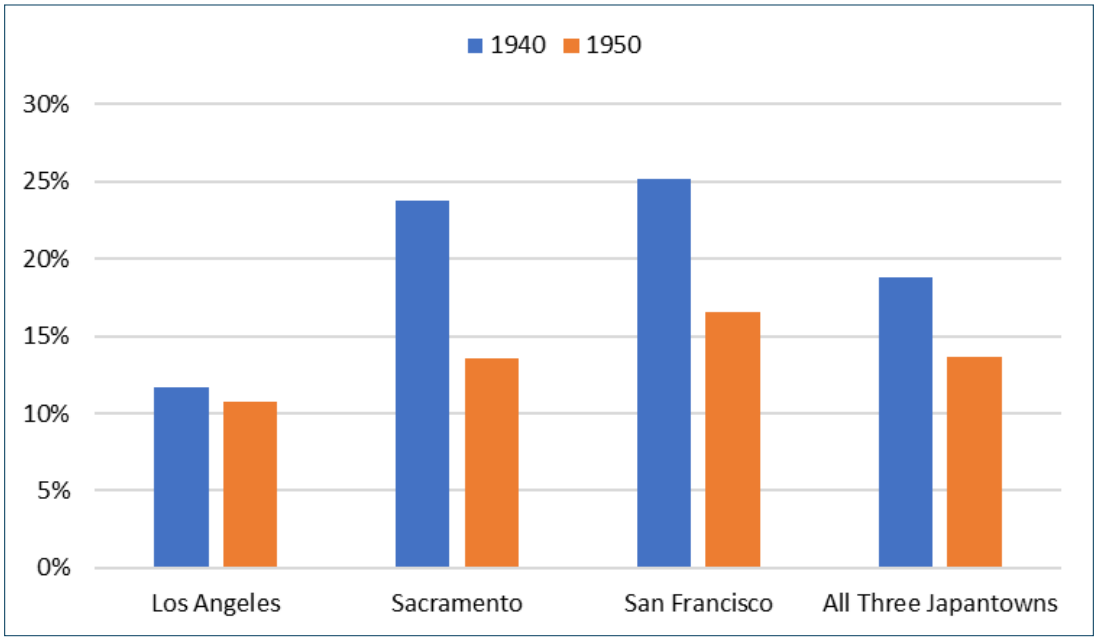
92 We rounded the estimates to the nearest hundred because the enumeration counts were not precise, owing to potential errors such as missed housing units, misreporting, and transcription mistakes.

93 Spatial assimilation refers to the process of residential integration of a minority group. For further reading, see Massey, Douglas S., and Nancy A. Denton. "Spatial Assimilation as a Socioeconomic Outcome." American Sociological Review (1985): 94-106.

94 Steven Ruggles, Matt A. Nelson, Matthew Sobek, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, J. David Hacker, Evan Roberts, and J. Robert Warren. IPUMS Ancestry Full Count Data: Version 4.0 [1940]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2024. https://doi.org/10.18128/D014.V4.0; Ancestry. (2024). 1950 Census District Finder. Ancestry. Retrieved between July to September 2023, from https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/district-map/62308.

hoods. In contrast, Los Angeles' Little Tokyo experienced only a marginal decline in Japanese American population share, dropping from 12% to 11%. Unlike its northern counterparts, however, Los Angeles' Japantown saw a slight decrease in total population, rather than growth in the non-Japanese American residents.

Figure 15: Japanese Americans as a Share of the Total Population in Japantowns (1940, 1950)



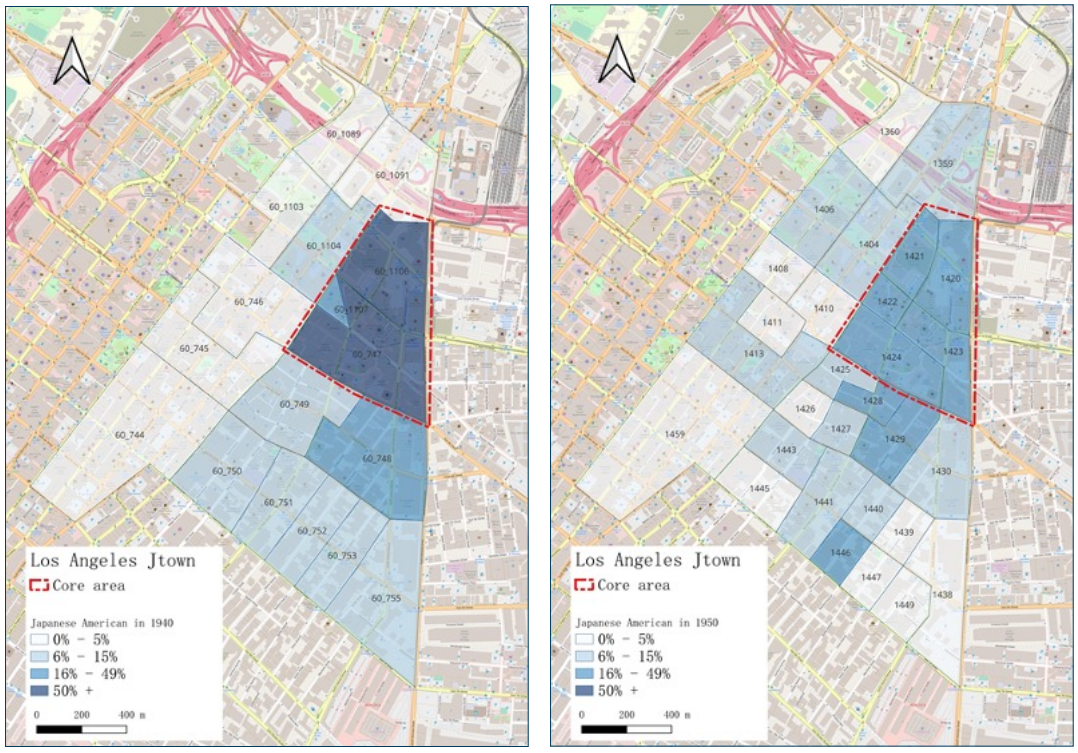
Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 U.S. Censuses[95]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi.

The Japanese Americans population in the Japantowns were not only absolutely and relatively smaller, but it was also more geographically dispersed within the enclave. The maps in Figure 16, 17 and 18 display this geographic dispersal, shown by Census Enumeration Districts. The core areas, outlined in red, reveal that Japanese Americans comprised a majority of the population in the core before the war, but this was no longer the case in 1950. Instead, there was a relative increase in the population within the adjacent areas.

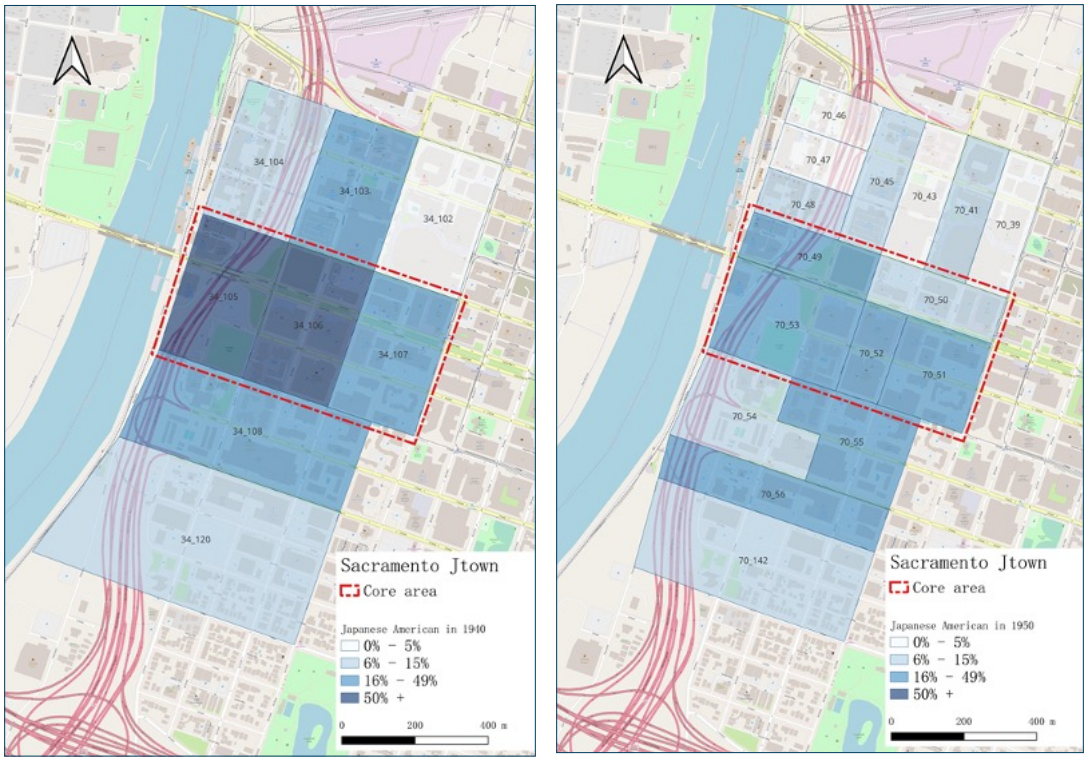
95 Ibid.

Figure 16: Japanese-American Percent of Total Population by Enumeration Districts, Los Angeles (1940, 1950)



Source: Map created by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 U.S. Censuses[96]

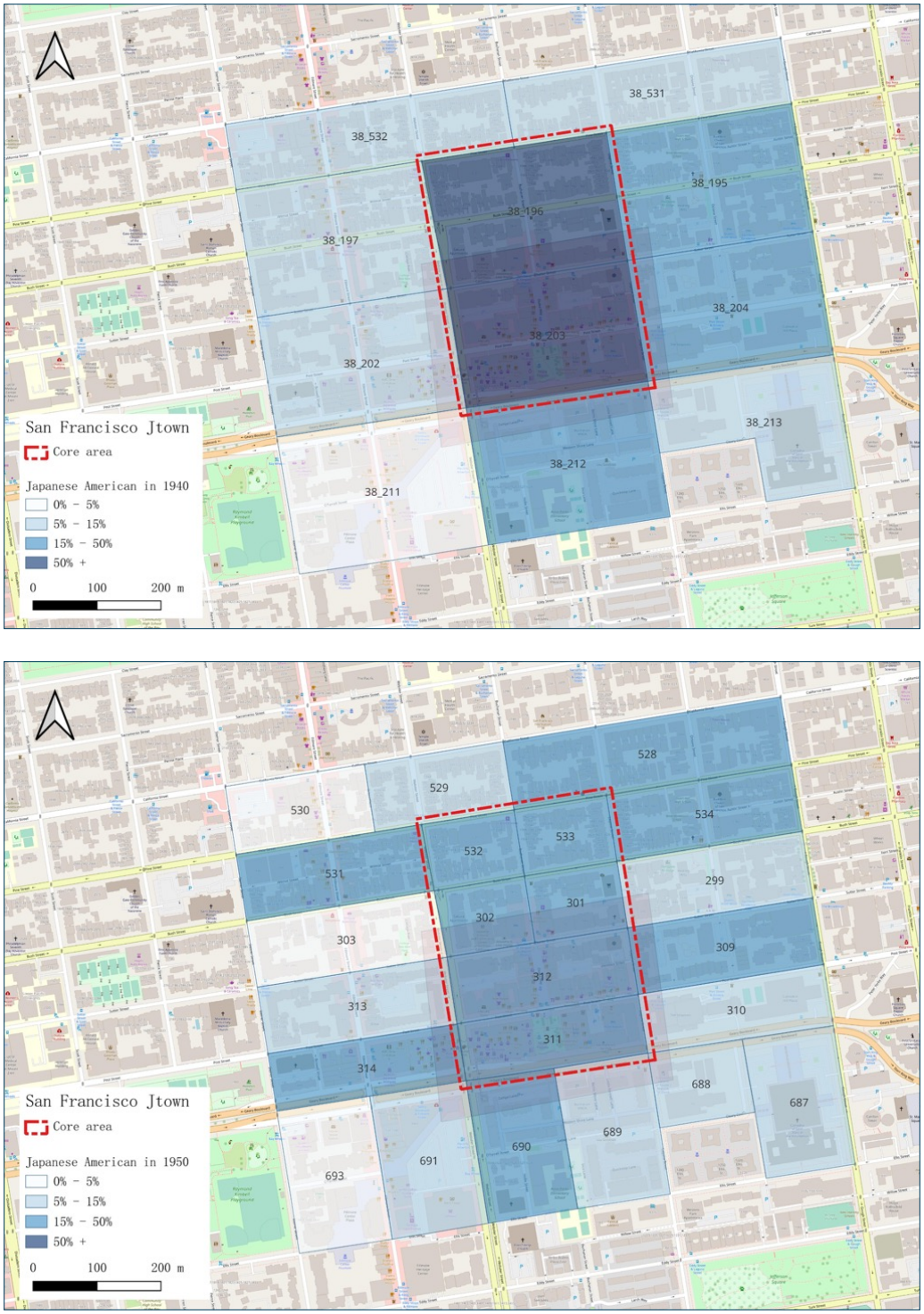
Figure 17: Japanese-American Percent of Total Population by Enumeration Districts, Sacramento (1940, 1950)



Source: Map created by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 Censuses[97]

96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.

Figure 18: Japanese-American Percent of Total Population by Enumeration Districts, San Francisco (1940, 1950)



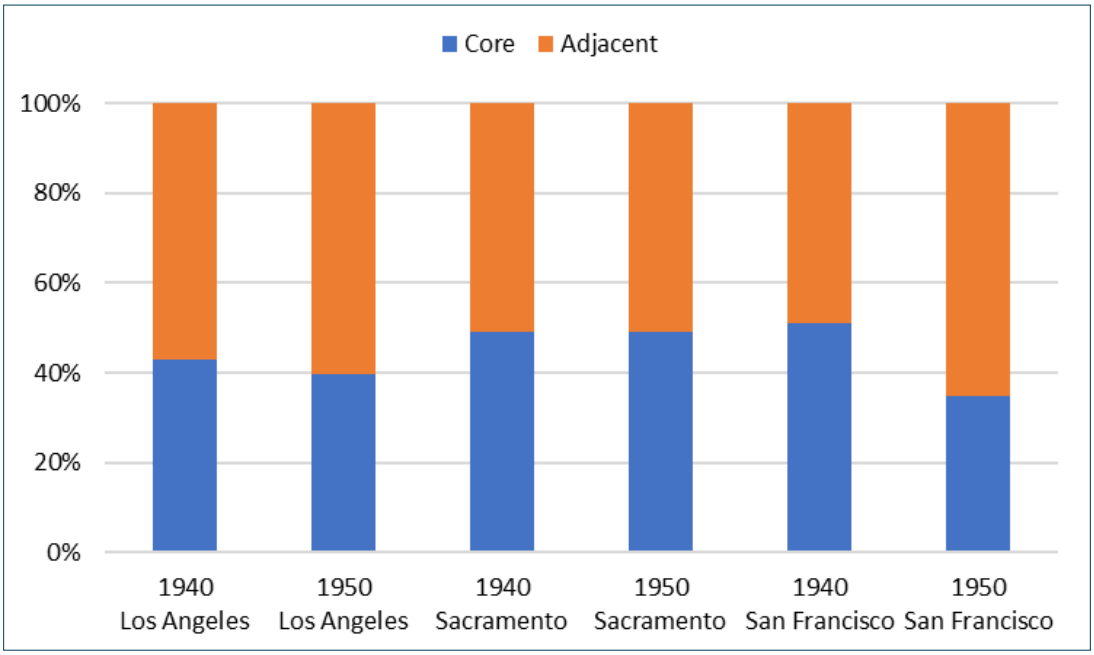
Source: Map created by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 Censuses[98]

98 Ibid.

Figure 19 disaggregates the Japanese American population into those residing in the core areas of Japantowns and those living in the adjacent areas. Across all three Japantowns, the data reveals a greater decline in the numbers of Japanese Americans residing in the core areas compared to the adjacent areas. In 1940, nearly half (48%) of the Japanese American population lived in the heart of the three enclaves combined. By 1950, this proportion had decreased to two-fifths (40%).

In Sacramento, the proportion of Japanese Americans residing in the core remained relatively stable at 49% in both time periods. Los Angeles saw a modest decline, dropping from 43% to 40%. San Francisco experienced the most significant change, with the proportion of Japanese Americans in the core plummeting from 51% to 35%. This dispersal within the enclaves was likely influenced by the challenges Japanese Americans faced in reclaiming housing units they had occupied before WWII.

Figure 19: Percent of Japanese Americans Living in Japantown Core and Adjacent Areas (1940, 1950)



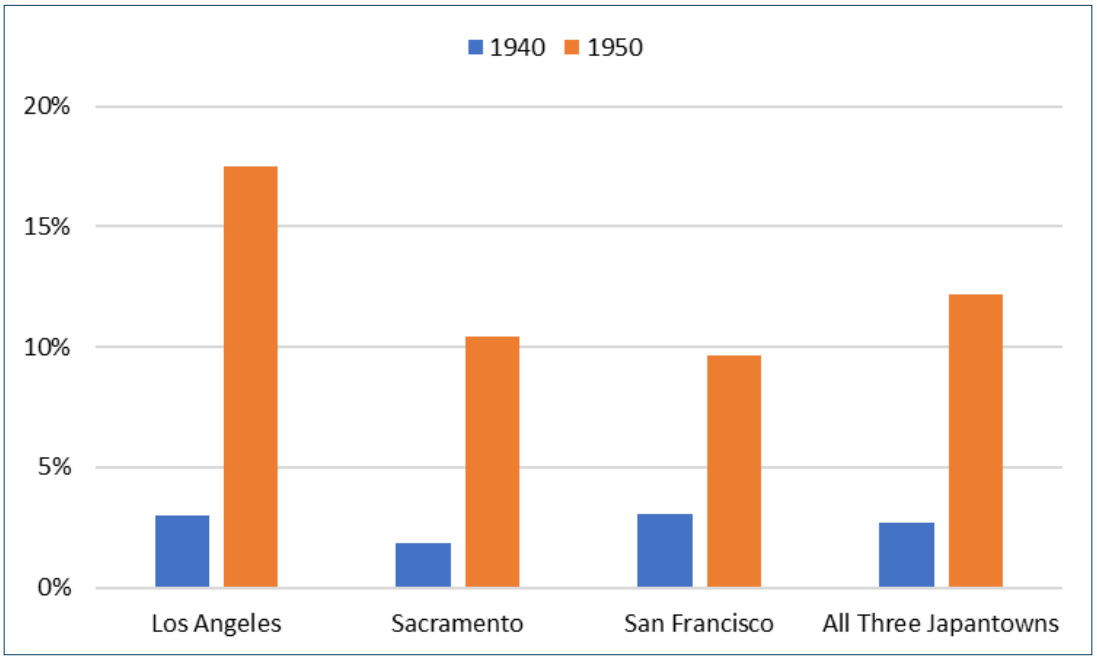
Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 U.S. Censuses[99]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi.

Along with changes in the size of the Japanese American population and their geographic distribution within the enclaves, there were notable shifts in the characteristics of the Japanese American residents. A key aspect to consider is the elderly segment (65 years and older). In 1940, the proportion of elderly Japanese Americans in the enclaves was roughly comparable to that of Japanese Americans statewide at 3% and 2%, respectively. By 1950, however, the share of elderly residents had grown significantly in both contexts, with about 12% of the enclaves' Japanese American population being elderly compared to 8% statewide, as shown in Figure 20. This indicates that elderly Japanese Americans were twice as likely to reside within the three Japantowns compared to elderly Japanese Americans across the state. The disparity was especially pronounced in Los Angeles Japantown, where more than one in six (18%) were elderly.

99 Ibid.

Figure 20: Percent of Elderly Japanese Americans in Japantowns (1940, 1950)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 U.S. Censuses[100]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi.

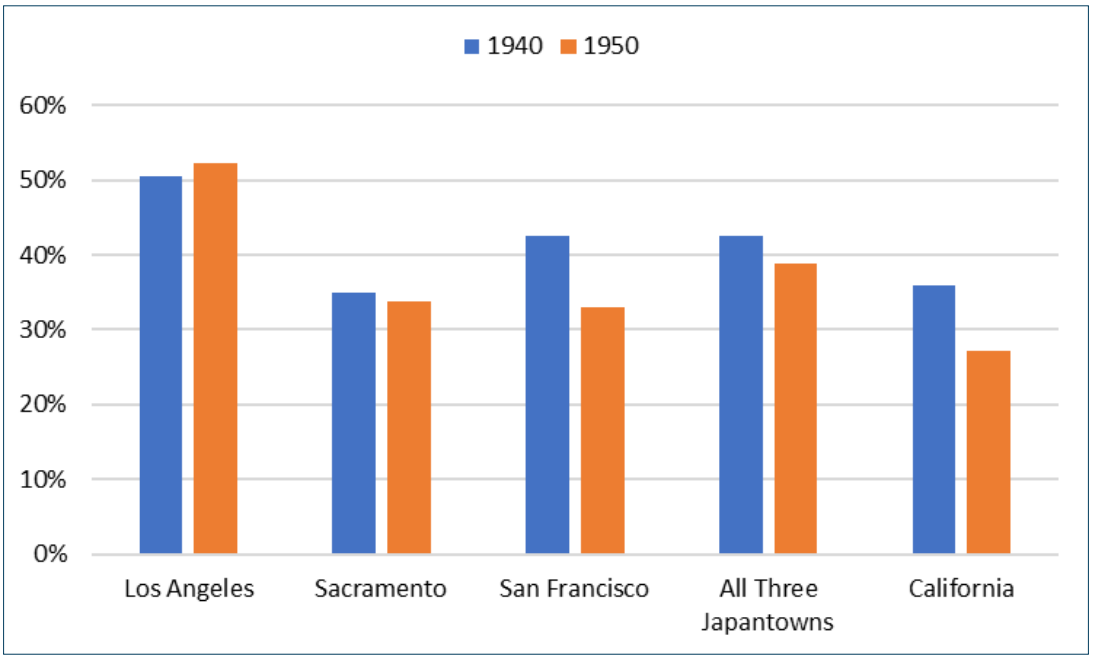
Following this, we examined shifts in nativity patterns. One significant change was the relative size of the immigrant population within the enclaves compared to the state as a whole. Between 1940 and 1950, the foreign-born as a share of the Japanese American population in the three Japantowns collectively declined by 4 percentage points, from 43% to 39%, while California's Japanese American population experienced a sharper decline of 9 percentage points, from 36% to 27%. These declines are not unexpected, given the decrease in the Issei population through deaths and the increase of Nisei and Yonsei through births.

What is particularly noteworthy is the growing difference in the foreign-born share between the three enclaves and the state, from 7 percentage points in 1940 to 12 percentage points in 1950. This suggests that immigrants were either less able to spatially assimilate, preferred living in an ethnic community, or sought safety from continued anti-Japanese sentiments.

There was, however, variation in the foreign-born share across the three Japantowns. (See Figure 21.) While the proportion of foreign-born residents in Los Angeles and Sacramento's Japantowns remained steady, it is noteworthy that the overall immigrant share of the Japanese American population in California decreased between 1940 and 1950. In other words, neither Los Angeles nor Sacramento Japantowns followed the statewide trend. However, San Francisco's Japantown did reflect this broader demographic shift, with a sizable decline in the immigrant share.

100 Ibid.

Figure 21: Percent of Foreign-Born Japanese in Japantowns and California (1940, 1950)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 U.S. Censuses[101]

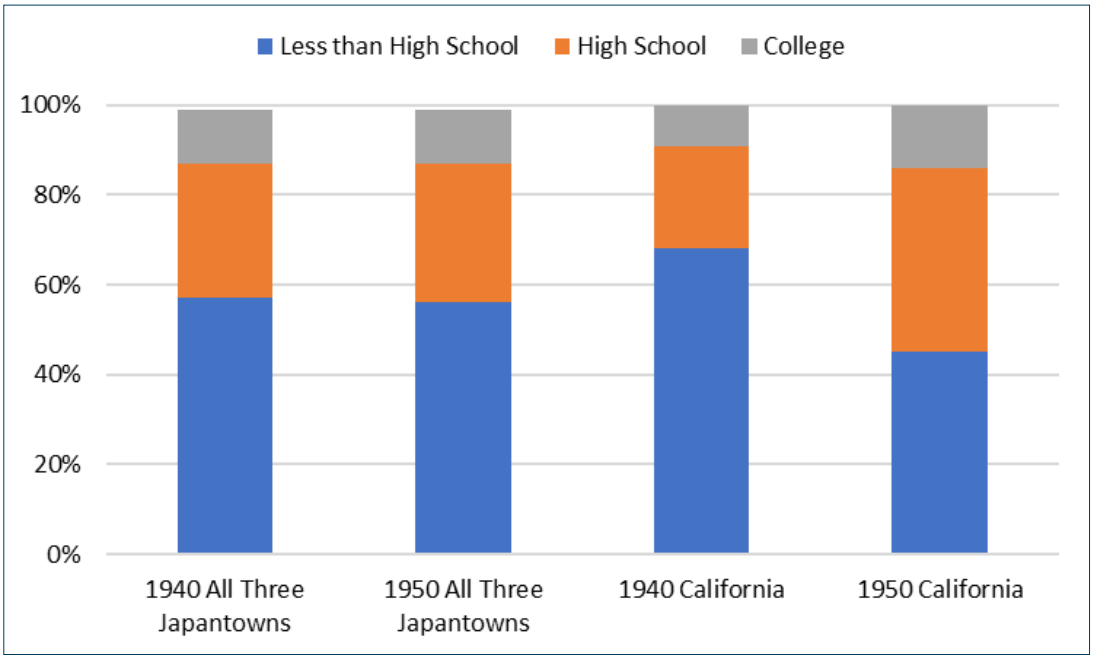
Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi, as well as Japanese Americans in California as a whole.

Moreover, there were notable changes in the socioeconomic characteristics of the Japanese American population residing in the enclaves compared to all Japanese Americans in California, suggesting that individuals with lower socioeconomic status were more likely to return or move to the enclaves. This shift reflects a change in the relative role and function of the enclaves after World War II.

For instance, the change in educational attainment among enclave residents was as pronounced as the shift in composition by nativity as evident in Figure 22. In 1950, a higher percentage of Japantown Japanese American adults had not completed high school (56% versus 45% of all Japanese Americans in California). Additionally, enclave residents were less likely to have attended college (12% versus 14%). These shifts indicate that the enclaves increasingly became home to more socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals, highlighting a transformation in their demographic and economic roles.

101 Ibid.

Figure 22: Educational Attainment of Japanese Americans in All Three Japantowns and California (1940, 1950)



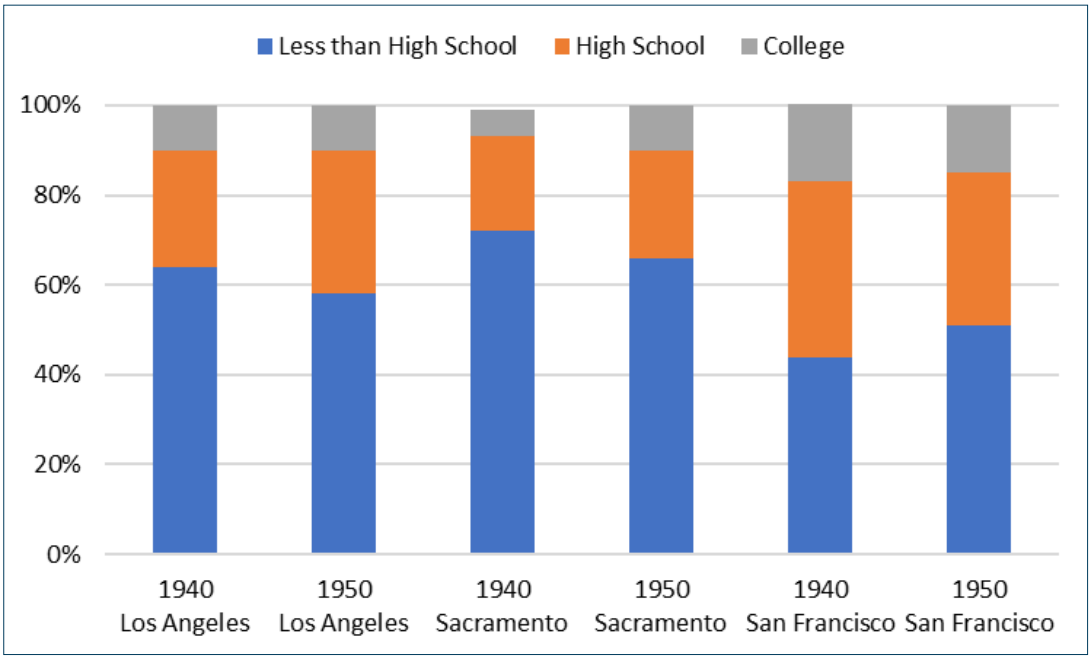
Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 U.S. Censuses[102]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi, as well as Japanese Americans in California as a whole.

Moreover, there were noticeable differences in educational attainment among the three Japantowns. (See Figure 23) Before the war, Sacramento had the lowest educational attainment, while San Francisco had the highest. Between 1940 and 1950, both Los Angeles and Sacramento experienced an overall increase in educational attainment, whereas San Francisco saw a decline. This suggests a narrowing of differences in educational levels among the three enclaves. The overall temporal pattern aligns with that trend stated in the previous paragraph: better educated Japanese Americans were less likely to resettle in the enclaves, contributing to the observed shifts in educational composition over time.

102 Ibid.

Figure 23: Educational Attainment of Japanese Americans in Japantowns (1940, 1950)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 U.S. Censuses[103]

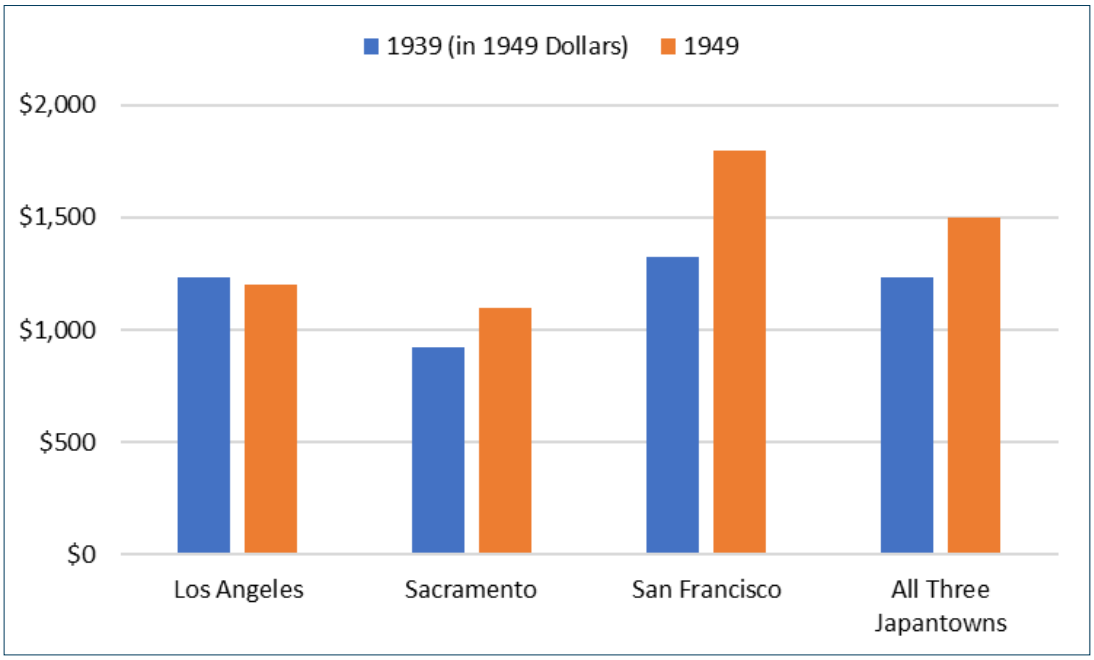
Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi, as well as Japanese Americans in California as a whole.

The recomposition of Japantown residents by nativity and educational attainment had a significant impact on wages and salaries. Within the Japantowns, reported annual earnings in the year prior to the enumeration doubled in nominal terms, with the 1949 median reaching 208% of the 1939 median. However, after adjusting for inflation, earnings increased by only 20% (see Figure 24). Real wage growth varied across the three Japantowns. In Los Angeles and Sacramento, average earnings grew modestly between the two decades, by 4% and 11%, respectively. In contrast, San Francisco saw a more substantial increase of 34%.

While earnings within Japantowns increased in absolute terms, they declined relative to all Japanese Americans workers across the state. In 1939, earnings in Japantowns were 111% of the statewide median, indicating that enclave workers earned more than their counterparts statewide. By 1949, this advantage had reversed, with earnings in Japantowns falling to just 83% of the statewide median. In other words, workers in the enclaves went from being comparatively better off to being worse off. This suggests that the financial benefits traditionally associated with the enclave economy had largely evaporated by 1950.

103 Ibid.

Figure 24: Median Annual Earnings (in 1949 Dollars) of Japanese Americans in Japantowns (1939, 1949)



Source: Calculated by authors using data from 1940 and 1950 U.S. Censuses[104]

Note: The statistics reported represent data for Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sacramento's Japantown, and San Francisco's Nihonmachi.

104 Ibid.

Part 5: Conclusion

The reestablishment of the three Japantowns after the mass internment of Japanese Americans is a remarkable testament to the resilience and community-building capacity of a marginalized group confronting an uncertain future in the post-WWII years. The rebuilding of these enclaves reflects a persistent desire to create neighborhoods that met their cultural needs while offering a sense of security amid ongoing anti-Japanese sentiments.

Unfortunately, these enclaves did not fully recover as evidenced by the decline of the Japanese American population in the three Japantowns between 1940 and 1950. The shrinkage was partly due to the numerous barriers that made it difficult to secure housing, reopen businesses, and rebuild community institutions. Additionally, efforts to deconcentrate the population—driven both by government policies and some Japanese American organizations—further contributed to the reduction in enclave size. It is possible that, without these obstacles, Japantowns could have retained larger populations and experienced a more robust recovery.

Equally important is the shift in the functions of Japantowns, or at least the relative importance of those functions. Post-war Japantowns remained social and economic spaces, but they were no longer at the heart of the Japanese American experience. By 1950, these enclaves increasingly served as a refuge for those who were less assimilated and more marginalized, including a higher proportion of immigrants, lower-income individuals and elderly.

This transformation was also driven by the expanding economic and social opportunities available to many Japanese Americans, who could move into better neighborhoods rather than remain confined to society's marginalized spaces. For those with higher incomes and greater acculturation, spatial integration became more appealing. As a result, for an increasing number of Japanese Americans, Japantowns evolved into places to visit rather than live, offering a way for them to maintain cultural ties and identity while participating more fully in mainstream society.

It is likely that the enclaves would have continued to decline gradually with generation changes as the Issei generation aged and passed away, replaced by the more acculturated Nisei and the even more assimilated Sansei. This progression in the geography of Japanese American residential patterns was influenced by their increasing socioeconomic status, contributing to their emergence as what many have termed the "model minority".[105] However, this gradual assimilation and upward mobility were not the primary forces that led to the dramatic decline in the enclaves.

Instead, the second major blow to these Japanatowns came from deliberate government actions. All three in this study were systematically dismantled through urban renewal projects, as cities sought to revitalize central business districts and implement "slum" clearance programs.[106] This systematic deconstruction marked another devastating chapter in the history of these communities, further eroding the cultural and social hubs that had once been central to Japanese American life.

This project has hopefully contributed new insights by empirically quantifying the location, size, characteristics and changes in three Japantowns. However, the findings also raise important questions. As shown, there were distinct differences among the three enclaves, but we are unable to fully explain the causes of this variation. To what extent were these differences driven by internal factors, such as the educational-attainment and nativity composition of the Japanese American population in the region? Were there systematic differences in the belief and desire to assimilate? Alternatively, how much were they shaped by external forces, such as regional differences in the levels of racial

105 The model-minority concept is highly controversial. At one level, it is a description of the increasing socioeconomic status of Japanese Americans, and other Asian Americans. However, it is a term that has also been used politically, to argue that it is possible for a population that had suffered extreme racism to nonetheless achieve success. This argument infers that other minority groups have not advanced because they lack the drive demonstrated by Japanese Americans and Asian Americans. See Kitano, Harry HL, and Stanley Sue. "The Model Minorities." Journal of Social issues 29, no. 2 (1973); and Suzuki, Bob H. "Asian Americans as the "Model Minority": Outdoing Whites? Or Media Hype?" Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning 21, no. 6 (1989): 13-19.

106 Tatsuno, Sheridan. "The Political and Economic Effects of Urban Renewal on Ethnic Communities: A Case Study of San Francisco's Japantown." Amerasia Journal 1, no. 1 (1971): 33-51; Lai, Clement. "The Racial Triangulation of Space: The Case of Urban Renewal in San Francisco's Fillmore District." Annals of the Association of American Geographers 102, no. 1 (2012): 151-170; Joo, Thomas W. "Urban Renewal and Sacramento's Lost Japantown." Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 92 (2017): 1005; Toji, Dean, and Karen Umemoto. "The Paradox of Dispersal: Ethnic Continuity & Community Development Among Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo." AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community 1, no. 1 (2003): 21-46; and Nakaoka, Susan. "Cultivating a Cultural Home Space: The Case of Little Tokyo's Budokan of Los Angeles Project." AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community 10, no. 2 (2012): 23-36.

hostility, the housing market and employment opportunities? Were there differences in adhering and implementing the policy of dispersing the returnees? Answering these questions would provide a deeper understanding of the factors and dynamics that shaped Japantowns, as well as other ethnic neighborhoods. Future research would also benefit from a comparative analysis that includes smaller Japanese enclaves, including those in more rural areas. How do unique local conditions, constraints, and opportunities influence their establishment and post-war fate? Expanding the scope in this way could shed light on broader patterns of ethnic neighborhood development and transformation.

To fully understand the history of Japantowns, it is essential to examine the impact of urban renewal. While this more recent and tragic chapter in their history has been documented qualitatively by other scholars, there remains a pressing need to quantify its impacts. Measuring the extent of displacement, loss of businesses, and changes in demographic and economic patterns could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how urban renewal reshaped these communities. Quantitative analysis would complement existing qualitative work, offering a fuller picture of the forces that contributed to the decline of Japantowns and their enduring legacies.

APPENDIX A: Data Sources and Analysis

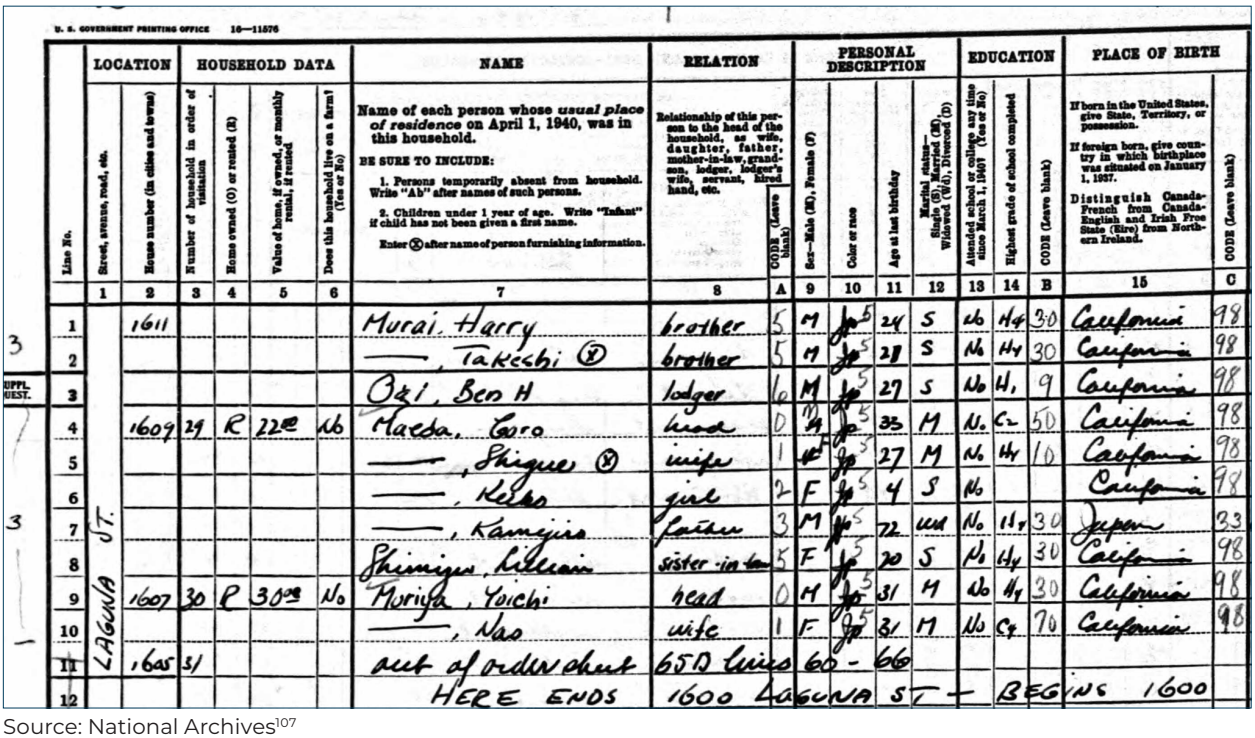
This study relies on two primary datasets—the 1940 and 1950 U.S. Census individual-level records—to examine and compare the characteristics of the three Japantowns before and after World War II. Unlike aggregated Census data, these records provide detailed information at the individual level, enabling the construction of demographic and socioeconomic profiles of Japanese Americans within the enclaves. When relevant, published aggregated Census data for both the Japanese American population and the general population were also incorporated (See Appendix B). The datasets used in this study required significant processing, particularly for the 1950 Census, which is not yet fully digitized, cleaned and verified. Because of the large amount of time and energy to do the processing, we were able to do this only for the residents in the Japantowns. Below, we outline the sources and methods used to prepare and analyze these records.

1. 1940 U.S. Census Records

The 1940 U.S. Census individual-level records are publicly available through the National Archives as digital images of the books used by enumerators. Released in 2012 under the 72-year confidentiality rule, these records were digitized and made accessible through the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS).

Each page of the 1940 Census provides detailed information, including age, race/ethnicity, nativity, education, earnings, and housing. For example, Figure A.1 displays a section of a Census page from San Francisco's Japantown.

Figure A.1. Example 1940 Census Record from the National Archives



Line No.	Street, avenue, road, etc.	House number (in cities and towns)	Number of household in order of visitation	Home owned (O) or rented (R)	Value of home, if owned, or monthly rental, if rented	Does this household live on a farm? (Yes or No)	Name of each person whose usual place of residence on April 1, 1940, was in this household. BE SURE TO INCLUDE: 1. Persons temporarily absent from household. Write "Ab" after names of such persons. 2. Children under 1 year of age. Write "Infant" if child has not been given a first name. Enter ⊗ after name of person furnishing information.	Relationship of this person to the head of the household, as wife, daughter, father, mother-in-law, grandson, lodger, lodger's wife, servant, hired hand, etc.	CODE (Leave blank)	Sex—Male (M), Female (F)	Color or race	Age at last birthday	Marital status—Single (S), Married (M), Widowed (W), Divorced (D)	Attended school or college any time since March 1, 1940? (Yes or No)	Highest grade of school completed	CODE (Leave blank)	If born in the United States, give State, Territory, or possession. If foreign born, give country in which birthplace was situated on January 1, 1937. Distinguish Canada-French from Canada-English and Irish Free State (Eire) from Northern Ireland.	CODE (Leave blank)
							1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	A	9	10	11	12	13	14	B	15	C
1		1611					Murai, Harry	brother	5	M	J	24	S	No	H4	30	California	98
2							—, Takeshi ⊗	brother	5	M	J	28	S	No	H4	30	California	98
3							Ozi, Ben H	lodger	6	M	J	27	S	No	H,	9	California	98
4		1609	24	R	22[50]	No	Maeda, Taro	head	0	M	J	35	M	No	C2	50	California	98
5							—, Shigue ⊗	wife	1	F	J	27	M	No	H4	10	California	98
6							—, Keiko	girl	2	F	J	4	S	No			California	98
7							—, Kameji	father	3	M	J	72	wid	No	11,	30	Japan	93
8							Shimizu, Lilleum	sister-in-law	5	F	J	20	S	No	H4	30	California	98
9	LAGUNA ST.	1607	30	R	30[00]	No	Morioka, Yoichi	head	0	M	J	31	M	No	H4	30	California	98
10							—, Nao	wife	1	F	J	31	M	No	C4	70	California	98
11		1645	31				out of order sheet	65 Units	60 - 66									
12							HERE ENDS	1600	LAGUNA	ST	—	BEGINS	1600					

Source: National Archives[107]

To analyze spatial patterns, this study relies on enumeration districts (EDs) as the geographic unit of analysis. Enumeration Districts were areas manageable by a single enumerator during one Census

107 National Archives and Records Administration. 1940 United States Federal Census. Enumeration District 38-196, San Francisco, California. Roll: T0627-00305, Image: 709. Accessed via Ancestry.com: https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.

period, with their size varying based on population density. The geographic size of a district varied depending on population density. Census data is reported by EDs, which we used to approximate the boundaries of Japantown areas for both 1940 and 1950.

While the Census records include addresses in the original handwritten enumeration books, this level of detail is not available in the digitized versions provided by IPUMS. If needed, the addresses could be geocoded to street segments or blocks, but this study focuses on ED-level data. By identifying the EDs that contained the highest concentrations of Japanese Americans, we delineated core Japantown areas. Adjacent EDs with noticeable Japanese American populations were designated as "Adjacent Areas". The same ED framework was applied to analyze both the 1940 and 1950 Census data.

Figure A.2 shows the 1940 EDs for northeast San Francisco, including a portion of Japantown (Nihonmachi). For this study, EDs encompassing the three Japantowns were digitized into GIS shapefiles to support geographic analysis.

Figure A.2. Example of Enumeration District Maps

Source: National Archives[108]

108 National Archives and Records Administration. 1940 Census Enumeration District Maps - California (CA) - San Francisco County - Map 1 of 2. Record Group 29: Records of the Bureau of the Census. Catalog ID: 373959084. Accessed December 31, 2024. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/373959084.

2. 1950 U.S. Census Records

The individual-level records from the 1950 U.S. Census were released in 2022 under the same 72-year confidentiality rule. However, unlike the 1940 records, the 1950 Census data have not yet been fully digitized or made available to researchers by IPUMS. This necessitated extracting and assembling data manually from the digitized manuscripts available through Ancestry.com.

In addition to transcription, the data were georeferenced by converting PDF maps of enumeration districts into geospatial shapefiles. Like the 1940 records, the 1950 Census provides information on housing, age, race/ethnicity, nativity, education, and earnings.

3. Data Accuracy and Coverage

Census enumeration has historically faced issues of undercounting, particularly among minority populations.[109] For example, the undercount for Black Americans in 1940 was over 5 percentage points higher than for the rest of the population. Unfortunately, no systematic assessment of undercounts exists for Japanese Americans.

A comparison of Census counts with administrative records from internment camps offers some insights. According to the DeWitt report, there were 96,988 evacuees and migrants from California in 1942, compared to 92,785 Japanese Americans reported in the 1940 Census—a 3.5% increase, which aligns with expected natural population growth.[110] Additionally, during the Great Depression,[111] net out-migration from the U.S. and Japan's restrictive immigration policies led to fewer arrivals (under 1,000) and significant emigration (over 7,600 departures) from 1934 to 1941.[112] These trends suggest that any undercount was likely minor, though it may have varied regionally.[113]

4. Analytical Framework

For analytical purposes, each Japantown was divided into two subareas:

- Core Areas: Enumeration Districts with the highest concentration of Japanese Americans in 1940, containing historical commercial districts identified in the Japantown Atlas.[114]
- Adjacent Areas: Adjacent Enumeration Districts that experienced noticeable Japanese American populations in 1950.

Maps in section 4 outline the core areas of the three Japantowns. To analyze changes over time and across geographies, we compared Census data from 1940 and 1950, focusing on shifts in demographic and socioeconomic characteristics such as population size, age distribution, housing, education, and income. This analysis allowed us to document how the Japantowns changed before and after World War II.

We also conducted comparisons across the three Japantowns to identify patterns of similarity and difference in recovery and resettlement. Additionally, the combined data from all Japantowns were compared to broader trends for Japanese Americans in California, providing a state-level context to the experiences of the Japantown residents.

109 Schirm, Allen L. "The Effects of Census Undercount Adjustment on Congressional Apportionment." Journal of the American Statistical Association 86, no. 414 (1991): 526–41. https://doi.org/10.2307/2290604; and Deborah Stempowski, :"Counting Every Voice: Understanding Hard-to-Count and Historically Undercounted Populations," U.S. Census Bureau, 2023, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2023/10/understanding-undercounted-populations.html. Accessed August 26, 2024.

110 DeWitt, John Lesesne. Final Report, Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast, 1942. No. 1. US Government Printing Office, 1943. Page 387.

111 For earlier Japanese emigration, see Suzuki, Masao. "Success Story? Japanese Immigrant Economic Achievement and Return Migration, 1920–1930." The Journal of Economic History 55, no. 4 (1995): 889-901.

112 U.S. Dept. of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service, "Report of Special Assistant to the Attorney General Lemuel B. Schofield in Charge of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (1941)" and "Annual Report of Lemuel B. Schofield, Special Assistant to The Attorney General in Charge of The Immigration and Naturalization Service (1942)". Accessed at https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/488273, September 3, 2024. Numbers rounded because some statistics are difficult to interpret because of the poor quality of the electronic images.

113 The amount of cooperation provided by the Census Bureau to the WRA represented the most serious breach of confidentiality in the agency's history. Anderson, Margo. "The Census and The Japanese "Internment": Apology and Policy in Statistical Practice." Social Research: An International Quarterly 87, no. 4 (2020): 789-812.

114 Japantown Atlas, http://www.japantownatlas.com/. Accessed August 27, 2024.

APPENDIX B: Published Census Data Sources

The following published Census data sources were used to compile statistics for the Japanese American population in California and the nation. Unlike the individual-level records used in this study, published aggregated Census data summarize information at broader geographic levels, such as counties and states. In this study, we primarily use national, state, and county-level aggregated data to provide context and compare trends for the Japanese American population at a higher level.

Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 To 1990, For The United States, Regions, Divisions, And States," Working Paper No. 56m U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2002;

Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States," For The United States, Regions, Divisions, And States," Working Paper No. 56m U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2005.

Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990," Working Paper No. 76, U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2005

U.S. Census Bureau, "Chinese and Japanese in the United States, 1910," Bulletin 127, 1914.

U.S. Census Bureau, "Chapter VI, Country of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population," 1920 Census: Volume 2. Population, General Report and Analytical Tables, 1922.

U.S. Census Bureau, "Chapter 2, Color or Race, Nativity and Parentage," 1930 Census: Volume 2. Population, General Report, Statistics by Subjects, 1933.

U.S. Census Bureau, "Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Characteristics of the Nonwhite Population by Race," 1943.

U.S. Census Bureau, "1940 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population. Pt. 1. United States summary and Alabama – District of Columbia," 1943

U.S. Census Bureau, "1950 Census of Population: Volume 2. Characteristics of the Population, Part 5 California," 1952.

U.S. Census Bureau, "Racial Composition of the Population, for the United States by States: 1950," 1950 Census of Population. Advance Reports. PC-14. Summary Reports, Series PO-14, No. 13, 1953.

U.S. Census Bureau, "Nonwhite Population by Race," 1950 Census of Population. Special Reports, 1953.