

2000

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Recommended Citation

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<https://neiudc.neiu.edu/ced-emer/25>

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TAKING ROOT: JAPANESE AMERICANS IN CHICAGO

BY ALICE MURATA

On the bus to the Tanforan Assembly Center, Kiyoko Fujiu kept thinking of a quote from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, "Ay, deep in the ditches he bides. Ay, deep in the ditches he bides." Unable to figure out its significance then, she repressed her overwhelming sadness, and later related the incident to a classmate, forty years later. After looking up the passage, Fujiu soon realized its significance, for the quote embodied the notion of betrayal. In Kiyoko Fujiu's mind, her country had betrayed and abandoned her, and because of this she felt entitled to express her grief: "I needed to know that I had rage and that was an appropriate human feeling to have."

Incarcerated in one of ten camps away from the West Coast, many Japanese Americans awaited opportunities to leave their barbed wire confines as soon as possible. As early as fall 1942, sizable numbers of Japanese Americans worked as agricultural laborers in Utah, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. As leave clearances changed from temporary to indefinite, migration shifted from the farms of the interior, to cities. Although receptivity varied from region to region, large midwestern cities, such as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, and St. Louis, were generally favorable. These cities offered Japanese American resettlers good job opportunities, and were far more tolerant of their numbers than rural areas.

Narrator Kiyoko Fujiu joined more than 20,000 Japanese Americans who entered Chicago between 1942 and 1946. Chicago was a bustling city, an important industrial center that beat back the economic woes of the Great Depression years with the promise of abundant job opportunities. Furthermore, the city boasted a diverse ethnic population. These two important factors made Chicago conducive to resettlement. In response to Chicago's urgent labor needs, Japanese Americans joined African Americans from the South, and farm workers from rural areas.

The unique personal experiences of ten Japanese Americans and their recollections of resettlement to Chicago were captured in oral history interviews. Unlike many Japanese Americans who eventually returned to the West Coast, these resettlers chose the city or the immediate area as their new home, never intending to move back to their former residences. They wanted, instead, to move ahead and create new opportunities and life experiences in Chicago. In fact those who stayed in Chicago thought themselves more adventurous, progressive, and liberal-minded than their West Coast cohorts. They felt unique; they were able to break free of the segregated lifestyle that characterized their former West Coast existence.

The United States Census of 1940 reported only 390 Japanese Americans as residents of Chicago.¹ In fact, the total number of Japanese Americans living in Illinois

¹ U.S. Department of Interior, War Agency Liquidation Unit, *People in Motion: The Postwar Adjustment of Evacuated Japanese Americans* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1948), 145-46.

totaled 462.² As early as 1892, a few Japanese arrived to erect the Ho-o-den Pavilion for the Columbian Exposition. Viewed as exotic and different, these Japanese workers were regarded with curiosity, as onlookers watched them build the pavilion without nails. In addition, they marveled at the kimono-clad Japanese women who served tea, sandwiches, and ice cream in the teahouse.

Chicago's early immigrants, unlike their counterparts on the West Coast, hailed from Japan's urban areas, with occupational experience as small business operators. Others were skilled in clerical, sales, and service sectors.³ Early residents included Kamenosuke Nishi, who opened a successful gift store at Cottage Grove and 27th Street, as well as Eji Asada who completed his doctorate, in 1893, at the University of Chicago. Yet another early resident, Kokichi Masumoto, settled in Chicago after marrying his American-born English teacher. The couple married in Vancouver, British Columbia, instead of California, where antimiscegenation laws prohibited intermarriage. Despite the couple's ability to marry in Vancouver, Masumoto's wife lost her citizenship.⁴ Fully acknowledging their uniqueness, the Masumotos settled in Chicago, and tried to blend into the Oak Park community, a place with few, if any, Japanese American residents. There, they changed their family name to Masmotte, and enrolled their children in private Catholic schools. Kokichi Masumoto traveled from Oak Park to Chicago to work in a restaurant, a typical job at that time. The Masumotos, like other early Japanese American residents, were stuck in low-paying positions, excluded from white collar and skilled occupations.

The pre-World War II years were difficult for most Japanese Americans, whether they lived in the Chicago area, or elsewhere in the United States. Prevailing attitudes of racial prejudice prevented them from securing such basic needs as adequate housing and employment. However, Chicago's prewar Japanese Americans adapted to these restrictive situations. Occupationally, they operated within the narrow confines of their own ethnic community, while others found employment in the service sector. As far as housing was concerned, availability was found in boarding houses, apartments, and hotels largely owned by Japanese Americans. Still others solved such problems by becoming live-in domestics and accepting other types of employment that offered housing. Predictably, opportunities were few, and because of housing problems, residents were scattered all over the city. Residential dispersal hindered the development of a strong social structure. For example, even the seemingly simple task of gathering news about fellow Japanese American residents was difficult, and because of this, the community relied on informal relationship networks to find and share news about each other. Even an individual that

² Setsuko Matsunaga Nishi, "Japanese American Achievement in Chicago: A Cultural Response to Degradation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1963), 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴ Passed by Congress on September 22, 1922, the Cable Act deprived citizenship to women who married aliens. It discriminated against women since male citizens that married alien women would not lose their citizenship. Additionally, the law adversely affected Nisei women who married Issei men. The movement to repeal the Cable Act was spearheaded by the League of Women Voters and other women's groups. An amended act was signed into law on March 4, 1931, which allowed women citizens to keep their citizenship upon their marriage to an alien. On June 25, 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a bill repealing the Cable Act.

delivered Japanese groceries was considered a valuable news source. Yet despite this, a sense of community still existed.

In 1917, a home at 737 East Thirty-sixth Street was purchased in the YMCA's name to provide not only Japanese students with housing, but also a facility to hold Christian services on Sunday and community events. Moreover, community members provided assistance to Japanese widows with small children and single Issei who passed away without family and funds. Out of this community effort emerged, in 1930, the Mutual Aid Society. Formed by the Issei, the organization soon began providing various social services, including the arrangement of funerals, visitations to residents in ill health, and the operation of a Japanese language school. By 1936 the Mutual Aid Society held Memorial Day services, purchased burial lots at Montrose Cemetery, and built a mausoleum. Other community groups that existed at that time were the Japanese American Citizens League [JACL] and a local photography club. Informally, young people gathered at the International House¹ for dinner dances.

Events following the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 brought significant changes to Japanese American communities throughout the United States. In this regard, Chicago was no exception. Although much more is known concerning the negative public reaction that erupted on the West Coast, similar fears and suspicions were felt elsewhere such as when the Chicago police department discouraged Japanese American churchgoers from congregating. Several months later, Japanese American residents wanted to resume holding church services. In 1942, they were granted use of the University of Chicago's Thorndike Hilton Chapel. Desiring a more central location, they approached Dr. Harrison Ray Anderson about the possibility of holding services at the Fourth Presbyterian Church. The request, when forwarded to the Fourth Presbyterian Church congregation, was met with mixed responses, and as a result divided them. In spite of this, there were church members that supported the idea. One Sunday school teacher remarked, "I will not teach if we do not admit the Japanese worshipers. We are denying the love of God, if we deny them. Where is our God?" Ultimately, the issue was "settled," as Japanese Americans were granted free use of the Stone Chapel. There, they elected to hold non-denominational services rather than join the Fourth Presbyterian Church.

By late-1942, small numbers of Japanese Americans began arriving in Chicago. During this time, the War Relocation Authority [WRA], in its role as advocate for resettlement, opened its first field office in Chicago. Similarly, many individuals and agencies began making assessments and recommendations to assist in resettling Japanese Americans. Some of the city's early Japanese American residents joined Caucasian groups in welcoming Nisei from camp and assisted with resettlement.

On April 6, 1942, Reverend H. W. Schloerb, of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago, brought 18 groups together to form the Advisory Committee for Evacuees. Members of the advisory committee included the American Friends Service Committee [AFSC], the YMCA/YWCA, Hull House, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Post War World Council, the Council of Social Agencies, the Illinois Public Aid Commission, the Chicago Housing Authority, and the Women's International League for Peace and

¹ Dormitory at the University of Chicago that housed foreign students.

Freedom. The committee encouraged Nisei to resettle in Chicago, meeting them at the train station, and providing shelter in their dormitory and hostels.

AFSC, an important advisory committee participant was first founded in 1917. Well known for its relief and peace efforts worldwide, AFSC was already turning its attention to helping Japanese American students in camps with provisions of educational materials. Clarence Pickett, executive secretary of AFSC, along with major universities, the YMCA/YWCA, churches, government, and Nisei leaders, formed on May 29, 1942 the National Student Relocation Council [NSRC].⁶ The main function of the NSRC was to help Japanese Americans continue their education. Ultimately, organizational efforts were centralized and the organization was renamed the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council [NJASRC]. AFSC worked closely within NJASRC in providing funds to students for college expenses. Moreover, this valuable assistance enabled greater educational access to those who believed it unfeasible to attend colleges and universities.

The Chicago Resettlers Committee [CRC]⁷ first began when a small group of concerned Nisei met in 1943 to discuss the possibility of forming an organization to assist resettlers. Although immediate concern focused on the plight of the Issei, they recognized the need to address the prevailing difficulties faced by Japanese Americans resettling in Chicago. Officially formed in 1944, the CRC essentially acted as a resource organization, which actively encouraged the use of public and private resources in welfare, education, recreation, and housing. Unlike many organizations that limited their operational activities to resettlement, the CRC endured, and through time, modified their efforts to continue service to Chicago's Japanese American community. In doing this they were in fact unique, for it became an important social organization.⁸ In 1954, the organization was renamed the Japanese American Service Committee [JASC] to coincide with their new focus. Today, the JASC still serves the Japanese American community of Chicago and outlying areas.

The Japanese American Citizens League [JACL] is the largest and most influential Japanese American political organization. Formed before World War II, the JACL had staff representation and an office in Chicago, yet it was not until 1945 that a local chapter was officially established.⁹ While the JACL participated with local efforts, their activities were increasingly directed toward legislative objectives. The organization's emphasis on loyalty, patriotism, and citizenship marked by its strong pro-American philosophy met with considerable controversy during World War II.

⁶ Through the efforts of the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council, about 4,000 Nisei students were able to attend 600 colleges and universities located outside restricted areas.

⁷ Formed in 1945, the Chicago Resettlers Committee [CRC] was an important Chicago-area resettlement assistance organization that helped find jobs and housing for those leaving concentration camps. Although the CRC's operations were originally temporary in nature, they remained in operation even after the War Relocation Authority terminated resettlement responsibilities. In 1954, the agency changed its name to the Japanese American Service Committee [JASC] and is still actively serving the Japanese American community.

⁸ Eugene S. Uyeki, "Process and Patterns, of Nisei Adjustment to Chicago" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1953), 189.

⁹ Nishi, "Japanese American Achievement in Chicago," 159.

During the postwar years, the JACL galvanized their political base to mobilize support for legislation. Through the sponsorship and lobbying efforts of congressional bills, the organization pushed for compensation through the Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act of 1948, and naturalized citizenship for Issei with the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. By the mid-1960s, the JACL was considered the primary organization representing the political concerns of Japanese Americans. In the late-1960s and early-1970s, radical shifts on the national political scene, particularly the potent forces of the Civil Rights Movement, influenced the commitment and activism of the Redress and Reparations Movement in 1970. The issue of redress brought well-organized grassroots support from a number of different organizations, each with different recommendations. Narrator Shigeo Wakamatsu, an active member of the JACL at both the chapter and national levels, recalls the political awareness and concerns of the resettlement and postwar years:

And, that was when most of us first thought about the civil rights idea. It wasn't called civil rights. It was not called a civil rights program or anything, but it was racial prejudice, this racial discrimination that was the evacuation. But now we found out it covered more than us.

Jobs were the magnet that attracted Japanese Americans to Chicago. Approvals for clearance leaves from camp necessitated securing jobs beforehand. As a result, low-paying jobs, the most easily found, were often accepted. Yet compared to camp wages, salaries were much better. Chicago was the leading center for high technology and electronics. Moreover, it was the prime producer of weapons, tanks, shells, bullets, bombs, grenades, torpedoes, and even airplanes. Once in Chicago, many quickly changed to better-paying jobs, which soon generated employer complaints. The booming war economy required an enormous workforce, and in many cases, there were not enough workers to fill critical defense jobs. According to narrator Hiroshi Kaneko, "in those days jobs were very easy to find, almost any place would hire you . . . You could work three, four, five jobs at the same time." This was a far cry from the restrictive and circumscribed nature of jobs and opportunities on the West Coast, and even Chicago, during the prewar years. It was now possible to secure many different kinds of jobs commensurate with educational levels—again rarely possible for employable Japanese Americans before the war. Nisei obtained licenses to work as professionals, with physicians, dentists, pharmacists, and optometrists opening their own practices. In some instances, contacts with influential individuals helped Japanese Americans begin working in their chosen careers.

For Hiroshi Kaneko, membership to the carpenters union was possible through the help of a relative's boss. Narrator Noboru Honda went into insurance due to a timely introduction by Dr. Thomas Yatabe, who put him in contact with an insurance agent. Now working in the insurance industry, Honda was able to take advantage of it, offering his services at a time when Japanese Americans wanted insurance. Many Japanese Americans could not afford insurance, or felt no need for it while in camp or in military service. In many cases, such individuals, particularly young married couples, were looking to purchase insurance once they found steady jobs in Chicago. While Honda initially worked as an agent for an insurance company, he eventually opened his own

insurance firm. For Shigeo Wakamatsu, his introduction to the professional career track was similar to Kaneko and Honda. Through the assistance of Tom Coffee, a chemical specialist, Wakamatsu was first encouraged to take a job as a lab technician at the Argonne laboratory at the University of Chicago. He almost accepted a position there before taking a line chemist job in 1943 for a soap company that manufactured glycerin for explosives. Later, again through Coffee's help, Wakamatsu took a job as an industrial chemist for Lever Brothers.

Chicago's wartime industries put many Japanese Americans to work. Paul V. McNutt, chairman of the War Manpower Commission, estimated in a letter to WRA director Dillon S. Meyer, on November 25, 1943, that 75 percent of the Nisei living in Chicago were engaged in work essential to the war. The need for labor effectively lifted racial barriers in the workplace. Although increased job opportunities benefited many, especially the Nisei, many Issei found their occupational possibilities limited. Despite the ability to find jobs easily, these positions were often low paying. The Issei had language concerns. Unable to understand English, they preferred to work for Japanese American companies, like General Mailing Company. Formed by Allan Hagio, James Nishimura, and Ted Uchimoto in 1944, the General Mailing Company at one time employed as many as 700 Japanese Americans. Narrator Pat Amino's Issei mother, Hanako, worked at General Mailing. For others, including Nisei, like Hiroshi Mayeda, General Mailing Company was their first job upon arrival in Chicago. Mayeda, like many others, worked there temporarily until he found more suitable employment. Such jobs also gave resettlers the opportunity to make new acquaintances.

Aside from the many jobs available with various companies, resettling Japanese Americans also found opportunities for self-employment. Recalling his own difficulties in finding a place to live, Hiroshi Kaneko purchased La Salle Mansion in 1944. Kaneko fixed up its 160 rooms and provided housing, making it much easier for Japanese Americans seeking places to live. By 1945, Japanese Americans operated more than one hundred apartment buildings, boarding houses, and hotels.

Hiroshi Kaneko's family, in addition to purchasing an apartment building, acquired a forty-acre farm in Indiana. Unable to get good prices for their crops, the Kaneko family opened a grocery store on Clark and Division. The produce on Kaneko's farm was not only distributed to their grocery store, but also to other Japanese American-owned grocery stores and restaurants. Narrator Kay Kuwahara ran the Mark Twain Beauty Shop on Division Street. Originally recruited out of camp to run the beauty shop, Kuwahara became its owner within a couple of years.

While resettlers may have found Chicago's job situation advantageous, the search for adequate housing was fraught with difficulties. Whether in search of temporary or permanent residences, resettlers faced not only housing shortages, but also blatant discrimination. Public housing, although under construction, was unfortunately unavailable to many minorities, including Japanese Americans. Instead, Japanese Americans were forced to live in WRA designated areas, which served as buffer zones between Chicago's Caucasian and African American communities. These early settlements included the Woodlawn, Kenwood-Oakenwald, and the Clark and Division areas. Resettlers commonly encountered discrimination, which further exacerbated problems in finding housing. Ben Chikaraishi disclosed his frustrations when attempting to find an apartment:

You walk up and down the street. And you look at the signs and it says, 'Rooms for rent.' I didn't go pushing every doorbell because I only wanted a sleeping room. Whenever there was . . . I rang the bell and said I'd like to rent a room. But in practically all cases, they would just tell you that the room was rented already. And you ask them, 'Gee the sign is still in the window.' And they said, 'Oh, I forgot to take the sign off.' But then there's some of them that weren't that polite. They would just shut the door in your face.

Eventually, despite such setbacks, Chikaraishi was able to find a place to live. In fact, the existence of Japanese-owned housing helped alleviate such instances as those described by Chikaraishi.

Whatever the difficulty, the problem of housing soon proved critical, as more Japanese Americans entered the city. Building codes were altered to permit apartment subdivision, thus creating smaller units. Consequently, overcrowding became a serious issue, as more people squeezed into smaller living spaces. Pat Amino lived in a two-flat building that was subdivided into twelve smaller apartments. The six members of Amino's family rented the attic, where five shared a bedroom, while one slept on the living room couch. The bathroom was shared in common with other families. For Kay Kuwahara, her stay in an apartment was brief, because her landlady raised the rent. Steady rent increases became another problem for many resettlers, particularly for minorities. Eventually some relief was found through the implementation of rent control measures.

Many Japanese Americans sought more permanent housing after their lives had become settled. Some desired finding larger living space to accommodate additional family members. In 1945 Noboru Honda tried to purchase a home from a co-worker who was in the midst of a divorce. The mortgage firm advised Honda's friend not to sell to Japanese Americans because the neighbors would not like it. In spite of this, Honda's friend responded, "I'm Dutch enough to fight that and I'll sell it to you." Honda wanted a house to also accommodate his family, and concurred with his friend: "I'm gonna buy because I had four brothers in the service, my wife had two brothers in the service, I'll do my fighting here." Eventually, Honda bought the house and moved in without the realtor's knowledge. Noboru Honda's assertiveness in home buying contrasted with his friend Togo Tanaka's unsuccessful experience. Contemplating the purchase of a home, in Harvey, just south of Chicago, Tanaka visited the Chamber of Commerce to see if they would let him purchase a home. Tanaka visited one group after another, with no success. Afterward, according to Honda, Tanaka advised him against consulting with others when buying a home. In fact, Tanaka encouraged him to "go and buy it, and move in."

When Pat Amino and her husband Yosh decided to buy their first home, they had already heard of problems experienced by their friends. When the Aminos were ready to purchase an apartment building on North Ashland, they anticipated possible difficulties:

When we moved there, it was a very nice neighborhood. We were apprehensive, because, at that time, a lot of my friends were buying homes, also. They were rejected in so many neighborhoods and so you go with

apprehensions. So, naturally, you get a Japanese realtor. That way, he can pave the way. That's what we did.

Both Noboru Honda and Pat Amino were aware of the unpleasant experiences of others, and the problems involved buying homes or other properties. Indeed it was because of such difficulties that Honda and Amino enlisted the assistance of others to make their transactions easier. Because of the realities of housing shortages and discrimination, Japanese Americans were hard pressed to disperse in the way the WRA intended. On arrival, most resettlers lacked the money needed to find more suitable places to live. With rent increases and discrimination, ideal dispersal seemed impossible. Ben Chikaraishi reveals this predicament:

. . . the WRA policy was to try to disperse the Japanese so they won't congregate in any one area. But the places they tell you to look for accommodations, my friend told me, 'Don't even try to go there because the rents are too high.' And naturally when you're working for only \$16 a month or \$12 a month in camp, you had no money. You had enough just to get by for a short time before you find a place to live and start work.

During the war, churches played a significant role in strengthening Japanese American community life. They served as community centers that cared for the spiritual and emotional well-being of resettlers. Fellowship developed as Japanese Americans increasingly began participating in social, recreational, and athletic activities. Ray Smith of the Church Federation wanted to establish a single Christian church that conducted Japanese language services. Smith envisioned a church without group divisions, and encouraged individuals and families to attend existing Japanese services at the Fourth Presbyterian Church. In response, Reverend Chiaki Kuzuhara objected, wanting instead to establish various denominations. Kuzuhara felt it important to permit the practicing of faith in their chosen manner. Nisei of the Christian faith joined existing churches and formed separate groups within them. For instance, the St. Paul Methodist Church sponsored four girls who lived in their parsonage in May 1942. The dramatic increase of Nisei participation grew from 50 at a Christmas party that year to 250 for a spring 1943 meeting. Nisei wanted to be together to socialize and get support as they integrated into the larger community, forcing the Church Federation to back down and its United Ministry to Resettlers to dissolve.

Those following the Buddhist faith also encountered difficulty. Prior to 1940 Buddhism was not practiced in Chicago, and was viewed as barbaric. A WRA meeting convened at the University of Chicago sought to discourage Buddhists from congregating. Nisei attendees were particularly worried about attracting negative attention. Concern was voiced about the sizable numbers attending Midwest Buddhist Church [MBC] services at the Southside Parkway Community Center, and a suggestion was made that Buddhists follow their faith through correspondence. Aside from actually conducting services, the MBC was considered by many an important social center. In addition to offering a place for Issei Buddhist followers, the church wanted to develop a family focus. The Midwest Buddhist Church members wanted to avoid being noticed as they continued holding services. They divided the group into two when membership

grew, but soon as many as 500-600 worshippers attended the northside services at Old Town Players Hall even in the coldest weather. Members were asked to leave services, two at a time, at five-minute intervals, to avoid looking conspicuous.

By 1945, the formation of community organizations showed a growing Chicago Japanese American community that recognized the importance of having their own groups. In spite of efforts by mainstream agencies to accommodate the varied needs of the Japanese American community, many groups were unable to help Japanese-speaking Issei and Nisei, who were hesitant and uncomfortable with Caucasians. Some Nisei, like the Kibei (second-generation Japanese Americans educated in Japan) comprised a unique group, with needs and expectations quite different from their American-educated counterparts. Despite this, social activities were extremely popular, and were well attended.

Fourteen organizations and churches were members of the Japanese American Council by 1946 when they jointly sponsored a Veterans Testimonial Dinner,¹⁰ on Memorial Day, to honor 16 gold star parents, 340 veterans, and 64 honored Caucasian guests. Noboru Honda remembered the dinner, held in the Grand Ballroom of the Stevens Hotel, as "a grand affair to give thanks to the Yanks as well as the [European American] community . . ." Proceeds from the event helped to plant a hundred cherry trees in Lincoln Park.

Considerable attention went into developing organized recreational programs for all ages. Soon, there were more than 130 clubs under the direction of Japanese American social agencies, with their activities coordinated by the City-Wide Committee on Recreation. In addition, small close-knit groups, with greater ability to service smaller numbers, were purposely created to provide companionship and support to resettlers as they moved toward assimilation. Most interests were accommodated by the available variety of business, sports, music, poetry, and church groups.

Youth clubs offered activities for the young in supervised social and sports activities. Social mixers provided opportunities for young men and women to meet, while sports activities drew young men and interested onlookers through competitive sports. Formed in 1946, the Chicago Nisei Athletic Association [CNAA] provided competition in baseball, softball, and basketball. Teams included the Dandies, Saints, Comets, Penguins, and Collegians, along with older teams, like the prewar Washington Huskies. The Robabes, younger members of the Romans, consisted of about 30 guys from the South Side, which had as many as six basketball teams at a time. Their offshoots were the Lancers and Bruins. Those were fun days for Ben Chikaraishi, who played tournament games on an inter-city basis with teams from Detroit, Cleveland, Toronto, and other locations.

In addition to youth groups, social relationships with the larger Chicago community developed as Japanese Americans came into contact with fellow Chicagoans, whether at work or at social events. Kay Kuwahara's diverse clientele at the Mark Twain

¹⁰ Chicago REgenerations narrator Noboru Honda recounts, in detail, this dinner honoring Japanese American veterans on Memorial Day 1946. The event was held at the Stevens Hotel (now the Conrad Hilton). Various Japanese American organizations, including the Chicago Resettlers Committee, the Japanese American Citizens League, church and business groups participated. For further information, see Noboru Honda's interview.

Beauty Shop offered interesting daily interactions with different segments of the city's population. She described her unusual cross section of beauty shop patrons in this way:

I used to have the most wonderful clients . . . we had the nice Issei people, [they] used to come in because most of us couldn't speak Japanese, but at least we understood them. Then the Moody Bible Church people and then the nightclub girls [a]nd all the prostitutes of the world, I think, came in.

Kay Kuwahara's patrons, within this unique atmosphere, came from all walks of life—nightclub entertainers, including gays and strippers, prostitutes, Mafia girlfriends, churchgoers, and elderly Issei women—all of her customers freely interacted with one another. Comfortable within the confines of the beauty shop, people forgot about their prejudices, and chatted with fellow customers:

Well, Rush Street had strippers. The one big thing was that my Nisei girls were my magic touch at the beauty shop. They did not judge what the people did. We didn't care, we didn't know. I mean, it wasn't ordinary. I wish that I could write because I would have written how wonderful the people were. The Moody Church people were talking to these prostitutes, and it was just so sweet. (laughs)

In some respects, the Mark Twain Beauty Shop mirrored the diversity found in the city, beyond its front doors, where life did not consist of parallel experiences, but rather dissimilar ones.

Kuwahara remembers it as a "friendly shop." The shop also represented an important meeting place for those who didn't have family. They brought food and candy, and frequently bought take-out Chinese food from Ding Hoe, a Chinese restaurant next door. Kay Kuwahara fondly remembered that they "used to pitch in a dollar a piece and have a big buffet. Everybody would just dig in and eat." In this sense, Kuwahara's shop presented a curious duality. First, it recreated a unique "family" of those with shared interests, namely having their hair styled by those at the shop. Secondly, Kuwahara's beauty shop revealed, in an exceptional way, a microcosm of Chicago's diversity. The Mark Twain Beauty Shop was a safe and neutral ground to conduct and create relationships with others.

Social interactions were less obvious, but equally important, in terms of political action. Historically, Chicago politics have always involved some elements of politicking among ethnic minorities. Because of this, ethnic constituents represented important members of the electoral process. To some extent, political mingling was necessary, for immigrants constituted a sizable majority of Chicago's population. Within this immigrant population, no single group dominated, and as a result, winning elections required successfully forging coalitions between groups. By 1947, Japanese Americans helped elect congressional candidates like Sidney R. Yates, who could then be counted on to support their causes. Hiroshi Kaneko describes how politicians who actively courted votes quickly perceived the potential voting power of Japanese Americans:

I knew how the Democrats in the city worked from the first. I got acquainted with the precinct captain because we had a lot of boarders in our building. I remember one time he got about 25 pairs of nylon stockings . . . almost impossible to get . . . and says "Give it to the Nisei ladies." If they vote, they used to send them to this place called Ted's Restaurant and let them have breakfast.

In conclusion, the Chicago Japanese American community, although small, had unique opportunities to create and restore their own communities. While their numbers were small during the pre-World War II period, through forced resettlement policies of the WRA, Chicago's Japanese American population increased in dramatic fashion, when many answered the call to work and settle in Chicago. In some cases, labor shortages effectively eliminated racial barriers, giving Nisei opportunities to seek jobs once considered impossible to secure. For many Japanese Americans, this was the first opportunity to hold mainstream jobs and consider a greater variety of occupational choices. Living in urban anonymity, few people paid attention to Japanese American ethnicity. This was different for many that remember their prewar West Coast experiences. Job performance, for many, was judged on diligence rather than ethnic identity. Faced with such differences, resettlement in Chicago offered unique and often better alternatives in rebuilding or creating individual lives. For some, resettlement was a time to rebuild and recapture what was lost, while others endeavored to create a life anew—specifically fashioned by them.

Once the West Coast was reopened to Japanese Americans, more than half left Chicago. Yet it is important to understand why some remained. Were there advantages in staying? Was the quality of life in Chicago inherently better? Did staying in Chicago represent more opportunities to individually create their own lives? Did the West Coast still remain important to them?

Whatever the reason, many Japanese Americans remain satisfied with their decisions to stay in Chicago. Whether because of historical circumstance or luck, many feel they could not have progressed as far as they did career-wise. In addition, the Japanese Americans of Chicago strongly believe that they enjoy greater economic success having remained in the Midwest rather than returning to the West Coast. While many encountered prejudice in housing this was eventually alleviated as newcomers entered the city for jobs. As people moved into newer homes in outlying communities, Japanese Americans were able to replace them and settle into better dwellings and neighborhoods.

Socially, sanctions prevented the small prewar Japanese American community from active interaction with individuals outside their own ethnic group. Because of this, informal networks were important social vehicles to share and learn from each other's experiences. Again, with the tumult of Japanese American resettlers during and after the war, community networks were created. In achieving this end, Japanese American organizations, like the Chicago Resettlers Committee facilitated communication between mainstream Chicago and resettlers.

All of the Chicago area REgenerations Oral History Project narrators are respected community leaders, who have devoted considerable time and effort to volunteer work. Furthermore, many are active in Japanese American churches. The project has sought to define and illuminate the life experiences of Chicago's Japanese Americans.

They exhibit strong generational components with stratification determined by age, not socioeconomic levels. The experiences of older Nisei differ markedly from those of younger Nisei. Similarly, Issei and Kibei lived different lives from their Nisei counterparts. Yet despite the differences, there are similarities. Whatever the generational considerations, each of Chicago's Japanese Americans have a shared past. Whatever their decisions and outcomes, each endeavored to rebuild their lives and define their individual roles within the developing Japanese American community. They all lived and operated within the restrictive environment of the West Coast, and considered it home until other opportunities arose. Still others examined their prewar lifestyles, and if too young to do so, understood to some extent the hardships other family members endured. Most shared the common experience of incarceration in a concentration camp, knowing the extent to which discrimination was wielded.

As they relate their experiences in oral histories, many not only remember and understand their lives more clearly; they were able to go beyond their suffering and difficulties to find deeper and profound meanings within them. As anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff states, the end product provides "opportunities to write history as it should have been, demonstrating a culture's notion of propriety and sense."¹¹ In many ways, the ten narrators that shared their stories were able to do this. These stories transcend government misdeeds and betrayal. Resettlement represents not only a means to rebuild and address these wrongs, but also resiliency. While objectives may change with time, the essential importance of life creation and rebuilding remains a constant component in our daily lives. This is no different for the Japanese Americans featured in the REgenerations Oral History Project. Today, the Nisei seek justice in order to give their offspring a positive link to the future.

¹¹ Myerhoff, Barbara, *Life History Among the Elderly: Performance, Visibility, and Re-membering*.