

## **San Francisco Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan Historic Context, 1880s-1980s**

Name: San Francisco Japantown Historic Context, 1880s-1980s

Themes: Early History of Western Addition; Beginnings and Development of Japantown; Area's Diverse Social History; Impact of World War II; Redevelopment and Community Activism; Preserving Japantown

Geographic Area: Steiner Street, California Street, Gough Street and O'Farrell Street

For the purposes of this context statement, Japantown's boundaries are defined by the areas within and along California (north), O'Farrell (south), Gough (east) and Steiner (west) streets. Historically, many Japanese residences and businesses also existed beyond these boundaries, although this area is considered to be the historical core. In addition to Japantown, the Better Neighborhood Plan project area also encompasses a significant portion of the area known as the Upper Fillmore – an area with special significance to San Francisco's African American heritage.

The time period examined spans from the beginnings of development in the Western Addition area during the 1880s through the approximate beginning of Japanese occupancy of the area in 1906, to the 1980s, after Urban Renewal and A-2 Redevelopment had resulted in the demolition of most of the historic Japantown and inspired a wave of community activism and renewal. The unifying theme is the cultural significance of Japantown and the several ethnic communities that have called the area home. Any evaluation of the significance of Japantown necessarily extends beyond the architectural merit of individual resources. Japantown's cultural and social themes are vital in understanding the value and importance of the neighborhood. These include:

- Initial development and expansion of the Western Addition as a residential and commercial area
- The diverse history of the population including Jewish immigrants, African Americans, Filipinos and others
- The impact of the 1906 earthquake and fire
- Historical events that created and shaped Japantown, including the earthquake and fire of 1906; the California Alien Land Law restrictions on property ownership by Japanese; growth of commerce, social, religious and cultural organizations and institutions up to WWII, World War II internment and return
- Impacts of the Redevelopment Agency and urban renewal
- Buildings and sites built during the period of significance that represent these historical eras

The project area includes seven sites that are designated landmarks – three are listed on the National Register: the Fillmore-Pine Building at 1940 Fillmore Street, the Cottage Row Historic District and an individual structure within Cottage Row. The City of San Francisco has designated the Mary Ellen Pleasant trees at Bush and Octavia streets a Structure of Merit, and three buildings as local landmarks: the Stanyan House at 2006

Bush Street, the Madam C.J. Walker House at 2066 Pine Street and the Bush Street Temple. Three additional structures have been deemed eligible for local listing. Of these, only the Bush Street Temple, which is primarily designated for its architecture and role as a Jewish synagogue, reflects Japanese American heritage. This context statement complements the comprehensive planning conducted under the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan and has been developed to guide identification and assessment of historic structures that reflect this area's rich history, especially in relation to Japanese American community heritage. The context statement will also support the plan's overall objectives towards preserving and the enhancing the community's significance as one of the few Japantowns remaining in the United States.

Japantown remains a distinct and coherent place despite significant demographic and extensive physical changes during the course of its history. The area has been, and is, defined by its cultural significance more than its architectural identity. However, the built environment does reflect the history of the *Nikkei* (people of Japanese ancestry) from initial occupancy of existing infrastructure by predominantly Japanese and Japanese Americans, to the eventual construction of purpose-built community institutions and other structures. These events are also followed sequentially by dramatic decline due to wartime internment, and the specific impact of post-war redevelopment policies and urban decentralization.

## **General Background**

Urban neighborhoods commonly experience demographic shifts as a continuous process that may accelerate or decelerate at times due to various factors, both economic and social. In this country, race and immigration have historically been two of the most powerful of these factors.

As the concentration of a particular racial or ethnic group increases in an area, the commercial and institutional makeup of the neighborhood can be expected to shift in order to serve the expanding population group. Distinctive changes may include the early emergence of ethnic food suppliers offering foodstuffs required for traditional cuisine, as well as sources for other culturally significant goods, e.g. wedding or funeral accouterments. Culturally supportive social institutions may be commercial, such as hotels, beauty salons and barbershops, cafes, bars, and pool halls, or non-commercial, such as churches, cultural organizations, or language schools. In addition, businesses serving a broader clientele, e.g. restaurants, drug stores, hardware stores, tobacconists, etc., may come under ownership by members of the ethnic group, and by virtue of linguistic and cultural affinities may develop a specialized ethnic patronage.

At some point in this process, the neighborhood comes to be experienced as the home of the cultural group—the place where members of the group can most fully experience their cultural identity. This perception may or may not be shared by other groups, either from outside the enclave, or even within. In many cases, the true ethnic makeup of a perceived racially uniform area is actually diverse. In dense urban environments, the

granular structure of cultural neighborhoods may be very small —certainly block-by-block, often even smaller. Given this structure, it is difficult to determine historic boundaries from standard sources. Census tabulations are often based on much broader areas. Cross directories are more helpful, but are generally not available for San Francisco until 1953. However, prewar and postwar annual directories published by the Japanese immigrant newspapers in San Francisco provide useful data for reconstructing areas of ethnic concentration by street and block on the basis of addresses of Japanese residents, businesses, and institutions<sup>1</sup>.

Occupancy by the new cultural group may involve few outward changes to the existing built environment of an urban neighborhood. In many cases, the most prominent will be the addition of signage appropriate to the group, sometimes in the native language of that group. More extensive alterations may take place inside buildings, with reconfiguration of spaces to suit new requirements or expectations. Eventually, purpose-built institutional structures may be designed or altered to reflect architectural or ceremonial traditions of the cultural heritage, but local building codes often restrict such expressions.

If the ethnic neighborhood becomes attractive to others in the larger society, whether for cuisine, special goods, entertainment, or general ambiance, more extensive changes or additions may be made to the built environment in order to enhance its marketability. Often departing from actual ethnic traditions, these changes may signal a shift from the construction of an ethnic enclave whose purpose is to provide shelter and other necessities for the group change in response to the forces of assimilation and cultural evolution, to the creation of a marketplace that trades commercially on the notion of exoticism. Alternately, or perhaps in addition, the cultural makeup of the neighborhood may shift once again, with a new group displacing the first, or the old group simply dispersing or becoming culturally assimilated.

This Context Statement for San Francisco’s Japantown describes the neighborhood, its genesis, development, modifications, and continuing significance. Recognition of Japantown as a *Nikkei* neighborhood does not imply that the area does not also hold important heritage for other groups. The dynamic flow of peoples within a community is an invaluable part of the urban complexity.

## **Japantown pre-1906 Earthquake**

### *Development of the Western Addition*

The area encompassed by the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan is part of an area of San Francisco created during the 1850s called the Western Addition. In 1852, the newly incorporated City of San Francisco filed a claim with the United States Land Commission to extend its boundaries to the Pacific Ocean, ultimately adding sections named Potrero Nuevo, Mission Dolores, Horner’s Addition and the Western Addition, which lay north

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<sup>1</sup> Some extant copies include Nichibei Shimbunsha’s directory 1915, 1926, and 1941; *Shin Seika Adoresu Bukku* (Address Book) 1923, 1927; *Shin Sekai Asahi Nenkan* (Yearbook) 1940, 1941.

of Market and between Larkin and Divisadero streets. One of the oldest homes in San Francisco, the Stanyan House at 2006 Bush Street, dates from this era and reflects the simple structures that first appeared in the neighborhood. This prefabricated wooden building was shipped by sea from Boston sometime between 1852 and 1854. Supervisor Charles Stanyan, for whom Stanyan Street is named, purchased the building shortly after it was erected and lived in the house for many years, adding apartments for his extended family on each side in 1885.<sup>2</sup>

The Van Ness Ordinance of 1855-56 determined the expansion of the downtown street grid through the Western Addition and reserved lands for public use, including eleven public squares.<sup>3</sup> The expansion offered by these new lands coincided with the most rapid population growth in San Francisco's history; from 1860 to 1870, the city experienced a phenomenal growth rate of over 160%, from 56,802 to 149,473. As a consequence, housing development during the 1870-80s filled the sparsely populated streets of the Western Addition with elaborate Victorian homes in the Italianate, Eastlake and Queen Anne styles. A row of Italianate homes built by The Real Estate Associates (TREA) in 1875 at 2115-2125 Bush Street, exemplifies the exuberant design of speculative builders from the era. Cottage Row, a smaller 1882 development of Eastlake-style homes built by the same developer, sits in an adjacent alley.<sup>4</sup> In the fifteen years after its founding in 1866 by William Hollis, TREA reportedly built more than one-thousand homes in San Francisco based on pattern books and using mass production techniques.<sup>5</sup> During the 1890s, ornately embellished Queen Anne style houses added to the variety of residential architecture in the area.

Over the last decades of the nineteenth century, as speculative housing was constructed by firms such as TREA, the Western Addition evolved into a neighborhood described by San Francisco historians Issel and Cherny as "largely upper-middle-class and upper-class, home to businessmen and professionals." In contrast to the more working-class neighborhoods south of Market Street, residents of the Western Addition had direct connection via streetcar lines to jobs and shopping in the downtown retail and commercial area. By 1900, the area's predominately white-collar and merchant population was mostly native-born, with three-quarters born to immigrant parents. The families that occupied the Western Addition's mostly two- and three-story homes had roots in Germany, Austria, Ireland, England, Scotland, and France. According to Issel

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<sup>2</sup> "San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board-Final Case Report on Stanyan House" September 4, 1974. Susan Dinkelspiel Cerny, *An Architectural Guidebook to San Francisco and the Bay Area* (Salt Lake; Gibbs Smith Publishers, 2007) p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Vernez Moudon, *Built for Change: Neighborhood Architecture in San Francisco* (MIT Press, 1985) p. 26. Alan Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: A Metropolis in Perspective*, second edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 42-43. Hamilton Square is the closest of these historic public lands to the Better Neighborhood Project area, lying just west across Steiner Street.

<sup>4</sup> Cerny, p. 67-71.

<sup>5</sup> National Register #85000705 The Real Estate Associates (TREA) Houses on <http://www.noehill.com/sf/landmarks>

and Cherny's analysis of census data, the very few non-White residents of this area before the turn of the century were household servants.<sup>6</sup>

A notable exception to the area's primarily White demographics was Mary Ellen Pleasant (1814-1904), prominent African American businesswoman and civil rights leader.<sup>7</sup> Pleasant lived at the southwest corner of Bush and Octavia streets in the home of Thomas and Teresa Bell, a wealthy White couple whose 30-room mansion she shared. Born in Philadelphia, Pleasant arrived in San Francisco in 1850 and soon made a name for herself as a shrewd businesswoman and ardent advocate for civil rights. She successfully sued a San Francisco railroad company for discriminatory treatment and was a leader for the western terminus of the Underground Railroad. Pleasant helped a number of fugitive slaves secure legal papers and was a correspondent and financial supporter of abolitionist John Brown. The location of Bell's mansion became the site of the Green Eye Hospital, which was built in 1929. The only trace of the former occupant is a row of six eucalyptus trees reportedly planted by Mary Ellen Pleasant on Octavia Street south of Bush Street. The trees are designated as a Structure of Merit (No. 7) and the site was recently added as the "Western Terminus" of the National Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.<sup>8</sup>

By the late 1880s, a commercial strip had emerged in the 1900-2100 blocks of Fillmore Street to serve the surrounding neighborhood. Groceries and dry goods stores, bakeries and a few restaurants, shoe stores and dressmakers, hardware stores, locksmiths and carpenters operated out of storefronts concentrated between Sacramento and Bush streets. The Fillmore-Pine building at 1940-46 Fillmore Street reflects the thriving economy of the neighborhood, as well as its strong German heritage. An early example of a mixed-use building containing residential units and neighborhood-serving retail space, the Fillmore-Pine building was designed by German architect Wildrich Winterhalter and constructed at the southwest corner of Pine and Fillmore streets in 1882. The building's developer, German immigrant Jonas Schoenfeld, imported and sold tobacco and cigars. Schoenfeld rented one storefront to Julius Heyman for a shoe store and Nathan M. Jacobs rented the other for his "fancy goods shop" while living in quarters upstairs.<sup>9</sup>

Sanborn maps from the 1890s show a neighborhood characterized primarily by single-family dwellings shaped by the narrow frontage, long-lot pattern of the day. Buildings marked "flats" appear on Geary, Post, Webster, Pine and Bush streets. These residential

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<sup>6</sup> William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power and Urban Development* (University of California, 1986), p. 66.

<sup>7</sup> The only other place-based historical references locate African Americans in 10<sup>th</sup> century-San Francisco's in the downtown area, see Elizabeth L. Parker and James Abajian, *A Walking Tour of the Black Presence in San Francisco During the Nineteenth Century* (San Francisco: San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> "S.F. Eye and Ear Hospital Former 'Voodoo Queen' Homesite," *Sights and Sounds*, v1, n.1 Spring 1958, p. 1. "Draft Nomination to San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board," 2/20/74. Minutes of the San Francisco Preservation Advisory Board, May 5 2004 at [http://sfgov.org/site/planning\\_page.asp?id=26376](http://sfgov.org/site/planning_page.asp?id=26376)

<sup>9</sup> "Fillmore-Pine Building: National Register of Historic Places Inventory Form" 1980.

blocks are punctuated by scattered commercial structures ranging in size from large establishments such as several livery stables, to small buildings such as a machine shop at Buchanan and Geary. Smaller storefront businesses, including several “Chinese Laundries,” appear along Geary and Fillmore streets. Franklin Hall, at 1859 Fillmore Street, offered a gathering space on the 1800 block of Fillmore Street. A notable collection of churches appears in these maps, including Plymouth Congregational on Post Street between Webster and Buchanan streets, First New Jerusalem Church at 1620 O’Farrell Street, and Hamilton Square Baptist Church on Post Street between Steiner and Fillmore streets. Two synagogues appear on the 1899 Sanborn pages; Beth Israel Synagogue on the south side of Geary Street between Octavia and Laguna streets, and an unnamed synagogue (Congregation Ohabai Shalom) at 1831 Bush Street.<sup>10</sup>

As the presence of these synagogues implies, many of the German-Austrian residents of the Western Addition were Jewish. Like other Jews who arrived in California during or after the Gold Rush, they enjoyed what historians Ava Kahn and Marc Dollinger have identified as the unique qualities of life for Jewish immigrants in the Western United States. With little obvious anti-Semitism and ready access to political power, San Francisco’s Jewish population rose in stature as well as numbers after the first waves of Forty-Niners arrived to seek their fortune and a new life in California. By the 1870s, San Francisco’s Jewish residents made up 7 to 8 percent of the total population, representing the highest percentage in any urban area west of New York.<sup>11</sup>

Wives, rabbis, and culturally specific foods and goods followed as the Gold Rush’s bachelor culture shifted to an urban setting. Jewish merchants bought homes and built businesses in the Western Addition during the last quarter of the nineteenth-century. Simon Koshland, a founding partner of the wool merchant firm Koshland Bros, purchased a new home from The Real Estate Association at 1848 Pine Street in 1875.<sup>12</sup> Other Jewish names associated with the area and prominent in San Francisco history include Philip N. Lilienthal and Mortimer Fleishacker, respectively founder and president of the Anglo-California Bank, which owned a large building at the intersection of Fillmore and Geary streets.<sup>13</sup> These and other leading San Francisco figures were rarely publicly associated with their Jewish roots, but most were connected to San Francisco’s historic synagogues.

In 1851, devout immigrant men formed two Orthodox congregations in San Francisco; Emanu-El and Sherith Israel.<sup>14</sup> Within fifty years of setting down spiritual roots, three of San Francisco’s four pioneer synagogues had moved from downtown or South of Market to the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood. In 1895, Congregation Ohabai Shalom, a conservative offshoot of Temple Emanu-El, built a grand temple at 1881 Bush Street to house its congregation, which had been formed in 1862. Designed by architect Moses J.

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<sup>10</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for San Francisco, 1893 and 1899.

<sup>11</sup> Ava Kahn “Joining the Gold Rush” in Kahn and Marc Dollinger, *California Jews* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2003), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Great Old Houses #28, (article from the San Francisco Planning Department files).

<sup>13</sup> Issel and Cherny, p. 40-41

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

Lyon, the Bush Street Temple's eclectic style is described by historian David Kaufman as a blend meant to create a "Jewish" architecture by recalling the Moorish and Eastern European roots of the Jewish diaspora. This structure, which played a role in the lives of several communities who eventually settled in the Japantown area, is one of three remaining nineteenth-century synagogues in California.<sup>15</sup>

#### Illustration – Temple Ohabai Shalom, 1895, Collection of San Francisco Public Library

Perhaps at the suggestion of longtime rabbi Jack Nieto who lived on the 1700 block of Bush Street,<sup>16</sup> Congregation Sherith Israel moved from a gothic revival building at Post and Taylor streets to a new building at 2266 California Street, in the Western Addition, in 1904. The sanctuary still holds a large stained glass window depicting Moses carrying the Ten Commandments from El Capitan into Yosemite Valley. Historian Ava Kahn describes this image as a visual emblem of Jewish San Francisco's faith in the Golden State's vision of the Promised Land.<sup>17</sup> Often described as a long-time rival to the wealthier Temple Emanu-El, Sherith Israel's congregation selected Ecole de Beaux Arts-trained architect Albert Pissis to design their new home. Architect of landmarks such as the Hibernia Bank and Flood Building, Pissis designed a grand neoclassical edifice for Sherith Israel with a large central dome taller than that of San Francisco's City Hall. One of the few large buildings still standing after the great earthquake of 1906, Sherith Israel served as the San Francisco Hall of Justice while the civic center was rebuilt.<sup>18</sup>

Congregation Beth-Israel constructed a new building on Geary Street near Fillmore Street when the 1906 earthquake struck. Founded in 1860 as a conservative congregation, Beth Israel had moved from earlier quarters on Sutter Street near Stockton Street to an interim home a few blocks east on Geary Street. With help from the wealthier Temple Emanu-El, the congregation rebuilt on the new site by 1908 and used the Western Addition facility until 1948.<sup>19</sup> Later home to Jim Jones' People's Temple, the building was demolished by the Redevelopment Agency in the 1980s.

#### *The 1906 Earthquake and the San Francisco's "Little United Nations"*

The demographics of the Western Addition had begun to shift by the turn of the twentieth century, but it was the 1906 earthquake that transformed the neighborhood into what became widely known as San Francisco's "Little United Nations." As much of the city's downtown smoldered in the aftermath of the post-quake fire, the Japantown-Fillmore provided refuge and a new home for many San Franciscans. Because the neighborhood was largely intact after the quake, many governmental and commercial services shifted to the area. The first streetcar route ran along Fillmore Street and shortly after the

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<sup>15</sup> David Kaufman, "Early Synagogue Architecture," in Kahn and Dollinger, *California Jews*. p. 53-54.

<sup>16</sup> Issel and Cherny note Rabbi Nieto's residence on Bush Street in *San Francisco, 1865-1932*, p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> Ava Kahn and Marc Dollinger, "Introduction: The Other Side" in *California Jews*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Temple Sherith Israel website, [www.sherithisrael.org/main.php/facilities](http://www.sherithisrael.org/main.php/facilities)

<sup>19</sup> Beth Israel website, <http://bij.org/about/histort.html>

earthquake, City Hall, several department stores, and newspapers operated from Fillmore Street and the surrounding blocks. Local boosters hoped to sustain Fillmore Street's new position as a major commercial district, and in 1907 installed a series of illuminated iron arches over fourteen intersections on the now-bustling thoroughfare. However, within a few years it was clear that the area's commercial enterprises would be largely neighborhood-oriented and would not replace Market Street or Union Square as San Francisco's main shopping center.<sup>20</sup>

**Illustration – Fillmore Street looking north toward Sutter, ca. 1916 Collection of the San Francisco Public Library**

Like other residential neighborhoods that survived the 1906 earthquake and fire, the Western Addition was developed intensely in the years that followed as those who had been uprooted staked their claim to homes and jobs in the area. Sanborn maps from 1913 show the neighborhood fully built-out with multi-unit apartments buildings sharing blocks with older single-family residences and flats. Fillmore Street and adjacent blocks hold theaters, a department store, photo studio, shops, liquor stores and restaurants, while smaller concentrations of stores and services appear on Geary, Post and Sutter streets. The Majestic Hall, built in 1910 at the southwest corner of Geary and Fillmore streets by Emma Gates Butler and her daughters, joined Fillmore Street's popular Franklin Hall. James W. and Merritt Reid, well-known San Francisco architects who designed the Majestic (later known as the Fillmore Auditorium), also contributed the design for a five story mixed-use building across Fillmore Street, which was constructed in 1911.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the neighborhood's stately Victorians, which had previously functioned as single-family dwellings, were divided into flats and rooms were let to boarders to satisfy the acute housing shortage. As the neighborhood became more densely occupied, it also grew more ethnically and racially diverse, and home to more working class-San Franciscans. Japanese homes and businesses on Buchanan Street between Geary and Pine streets bloomed into a bustling *Nihonmachi* as residents of Chinatown and the Japanese enclave near South Park sought a new neighborhood. The Jewish population grew and Mexican Americans, African Americans, Filipinos and others soon made the Fillmore area home. Although the Majestic (Fillmore) Auditorium was segregated up to the 1950s, by the 1920s, Dreamland Auditorium at Post and Steiner streets hosted sumo wrestling matches and Franklin Hall held Saturday night dances attended by Filipinos.<sup>22</sup> The area gained its nickname as a "Little United Nations" -- one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the Western United States.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pepin and Watts, *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), p. 30. Robert F. Oakes, *San Francisco's Fillmore District* (San Francisco: Arcadia Press, 2005) p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> The Reid Brothers were responsible for a number of San Francisco landmarks such as the Fairmount Hotel and the First Congregational Church. Pepin and Watts, p. 30. "Fillmore Plaza Apartments Historic Resources Inventory," (Sacramento: California Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> Issel and Cherny, p. 68, Oakes, *Fillmore*, p. 51. Austen, *Around the World in San Francisco*, p.

<sup>23</sup> "The Fillmore" Public Broadcasting System. Pepin and Watts, p. 30

## Illustration – Rafael Weill School students, 1933 Collection of Hatsu Aizawa

While numerous accounts refer to the many ethnic/racial groups who called the Japantown Better Neighborhood Project area home, the ability to find historical records reflecting these residents has varied. Documenting the presence of these various communities has been a complex task, raising many questions even as we begin to sketch the contours of a multi-ethnic neighborhood. For example, the Ellen Ford Home for Women on Pine Street between Laguna and Buchanan streets sheltered single mothers and orphans from the Japanese community, as well as Korean refugee children, yet no other references to pre-WWII Korean presence was found.<sup>24</sup> The Sanchez Delicatessen on Steiner Street made tamales and tortillas and accounts of Latino students at Raphael Weill School attest to the presence of Mexican Americans in the neighborhood, but more detailed information was not located.<sup>25</sup> A closer review of city directories, census records, and interviews would be needed to fully explore these dimensions of neighborhood history. Along with Japanese Americans, whose Nihonmachi is covered more fully later in this document, the history of African American presence in the area and to a lesser extent, Filipino immigrants, was more readily documented.

### *African Americans before WWII*

Even as Los Angeles' African American population surpassed that of San Francisco in 1900, San Francisco's Black community was notable for providing social, cultural and economic leadership for Blacks across California. San Francisco's reputation as an "open, egalitarian town" survived, in no small part, due to African American struggles during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to ride on public transport, secure integrated public schools, obtain the right to vote, serve on juries and testify against Whites in court.<sup>26</sup> However, Black San Franciscans' lives were fundamentally constrained by general racism as well as San Francisco's "closed shop" policies and discriminatory White unions. For these reasons, the city's Black population did not grow as quickly as in other cities. San Francisco's African American population remained stable and small through the first decades of the twentieth century, never climbing to more than 1% of the total population, while cities such as Oakland, which could offer newcomers industrial jobs, saw a large increase in Black residents.

According to Albert Broussard, from 1900 to 1930 legal restrictions on housing were not widely applied to Black residents in San Francisco. Broussard argues that this was because their small numbers did not threaten Whites in the same way as the larger population of Chinese immigrants, whose housing options were severely limited. Despite

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<sup>24</sup> The Ford Home is briefly described in *Generations: A Japanese American Community Portrait* (San Francisco: Japanese Community and Cultural Center, 2000) p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Jerry Flamm's *Good Life in Hard Times* (San Francisco; Chronicle Books, 1977)p. 73 for Sanchez Delicatessen reference. Al Robles also recalled the Delicatessen and the Latino presence in the neighborhood in an interview with the author, January 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1993) p. 3.

San Francisco's wider residential opportunities in comparison to those in many Eastern cities, Black enclaves developed in the downtown, North Beach, South of Market and the Western Addition neighborhoods during the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>27</sup> After the 1906 earthquake, African Americans moved to "the roughhouses and flats along Bush, Pine, Sutter and Post, [and] rooms above stores on Divisadero and Fillmore."<sup>28</sup> As San Francisco's total Black population grew during the 1920s, the community coalesced around the Western Addition, which became its residential, cultural and economic center. By 1930, nearly fifty percent of San Francisco's Black population lived in the Western Addition and the stretch of Fillmore Street from McAllister to Sutter streets and between Divisadero and Webster streets "became the focal point of Black activity."<sup>29</sup>

Industrial and manufacturing work available to African Americans in other cities was made off-limits to Blacks, Asians, and other people of color by the discriminatory policies of White unions, who wielded exceptional power in San Francisco's "closed-shop" workplaces. Except in very rare instances, avenues to employment in civil service and White-collar jobs were closed to African Americans. The majority of Black men and women made their living in domestic service during the 1920s and '30s.<sup>30</sup> Middle-class African Americans in the Western Addition-Fillmore area were primarily ministers, attorneys, musicians, doctors and nurses whose clientele were drawn from their own community. Likewise, small, service-oriented businesses such as barbershops, beauty salons, tobacco stores and billiard halls established by Black entrepreneurs were rarely in competition with the larger White and Asian markets. The exception was the Butler Funeral Home, located at Sutter and Fillmore streets, which served African American, Japanese and Chinese residents. Founded by John Howard Butler in 1923, the funeral home was the only Black mortuary in San Francisco and the most profitable Black-owned enterprise in the city before 1930.<sup>31</sup>

Broussard writes in *Black San Francisco* that up until the post-WWII period, Bay Area Blacks had to rely on their own churches, lodges, women's clubs and fraternal orders to serve all community needs. Black churches were a foundation for African American social and spiritual life. Three major congregations were founded in the 1850s: Bethel African Methodist Episcopal, Third Baptist Church and First African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion. Of these, only First A.M.E. Zion at 1669 Geary Street was located in the Western Addition.<sup>32</sup> Outside of church activities, the entire Black community gathered for sporting events, particularly games played by the Bay Area "colored baseball league."<sup>33</sup> Working-class Blacks congregated in the barbershops and beauty salons, pool halls and street corners along Fillmore Street to share news and socialize. Elite Black men and women formed organizations such as the Cosmos Club

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites; A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p. 101.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> Broussard, p. 44, 47.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>32</sup> *Sacred Places of San Francisco* (San Francisco: Presidio Press, 1985) p. 79

<sup>33</sup> Broussard, p. 72.

and the exclusive “Committee of Fifty,” a Bay Area-wide women’s organization founded by Alice Butler, wife of Butler Funeral Home director, John Howard Butler. Middle-class Blacks also formed clubs that organized dances, bridge parties and dramatic performances. Male and female members of the Kalendar Club, which met in the Western Addition’s Booker T. Washington Center, combined social activities with a welfare committee that provided funds for community causes.<sup>34</sup>

Because African Americans were denied access to many White institutions, community leaders developed their own recreational and social services programs and facilities. The Booker T. Washington Community Center, named for the famed Tuskegee Institute founder, was started in 1919 by Black women dismayed at the lack of social services offered to Black families and youth.<sup>35</sup> The center began operations out of a Geary Street basement in the 1920s and, as demand for its youth activities grew, the community raised funds to purchase property at 1433 Divisadero Street. The Western Addition Improvement Association, a group of White property-owners formed in response to the neighborhood’s increasing racial diversity, opposed the sale of the building to African Americans. Claiming that Black and Asian residents reduced property values, the Association held public meetings and hired an attorney, but was ultimately unsuccessful in their attempts to thwart the construction of the new community center. Black ministers and women’s clubs, along with doorbell ringing volunteers, both Black and White, raised contributions toward the cost of the structure.<sup>36</sup> Under the leadership of Black social worker, Ethel Riley Clark, the center offered educational, social and recreational programs to youth and adults from the late 1920s through the Depression.<sup>37</sup> The Booker T. Washington Center still serves the Western Addition community from its current home at 800 Presidio Avenue.

Organizations of Black women were critical to the social life of the African American community and the development of an infrastructure of care for its members. Elite Black women formed clubs that sponsored social events such as teas, formal dances and cultural programs. Covered by the Black press, these gatherings reinforced social distinctions within the community and refuted White stereotypes about African American culture. Perhaps influenced by their neighbor in the Western Addition, the San Francisco Colored Women’s Club organized a gala program in 1915 with a Japanese theme and prizes for the best Japanese costume. Yet these clubwomen also felt a moral imperative of supporting Black San Franciscans with greater struggles. A few years after holding its Japanese-themed event, the San Francisco Colored Women’s Club started an employment bureau for African American job seekers. One of the city’s most active and prominent women’s club leaders, Irene Bell Ruggles, served as President of the California State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs from 1923-24. Ruggles had been instrumental helped found another Black women’s business, literary, and social club in 1919. Like the Booker T. Washington Center, the Walker Club was named in

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 64, 67.

<sup>35</sup> California Office of Historic Preservation, *Five Views: An Ethnic Site Survey for California*, (California Department of Parks & Recreation, 1998.)

<sup>36</sup> Broussard, p. 33-34.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

honor of a national Black figure, in this case entrepreneur Mme. C.J. Walker, who died in 1919 and whose Midwestern-based cosmetics company made her the first female African American woman millionaire.<sup>38</sup> Two years later Ruggles, along with Mildred Dennis and Tulip Jones, expanded the club's charitable work by opening the Mme. C.J. Walker Home for Girls at 2066 Pine Street. According to the 1999 Landmark Designation report for the Walker Home, the structure had housed a Japanese family named Kiuchi earlier in the century.<sup>39</sup>

### Illustration – Meeting of Beautician's Club at the Mme. C.J. Walker Home, 1930s Collection of San Francisco Public Library

An account of the Walker Home's activities, written circa 1920, described the need for the facility as: "There being no colored Y.W.C.A. in the city, the Home must perform to some extent the duties of a "Y." Japanese and Chinese YWCA branches had been established in the 1910s, but the small number of Black women in San Francisco apparently did not merit a dedicated YWCA branch, as did Oakland and Los Angeles.<sup>40</sup> Single women new to San Francisco found lodgings and job referrals at the Walker Home. In addition to providing social services, the house's social hall and large kitchen allowed for community gatherings. The Walker Club sponsored an annual Christmas event "at which time the block is roped off so that the children may safely enjoy the games dancing and music."<sup>41</sup> The Home was the site for meetings of the Mme. C.J. Walker Club, fundraising events and community gatherings. From 1921 to 1972 the Home provided shelter, recreation and community ties for Black women and children until it relocated to a new facility on Hayes Street.<sup>42</sup>

Black political and civil rights organizations were formed during the same era by many of the same individuals who established the social clubs. The Bay Area branch of the NAACP was established in 1915 with headquarters in the more populous Black community of Oakland. But community leaders around the Bay worked together on common protest campaigns, with San Francisco leadership provided by John Howard Butler. NAACP members focused on local issues, such as discriminatory housing and service in public establishments, but also joined in national efforts such as anti-lynching crusades and the Scottsboro Boys defense from the 1910s through the 1930s. A separate San Francisco branch of the organization was established in 1923.<sup>43</sup> New organizations to complement the NAACP's focus on civil rights were organized during the 1930s. John Howard Butler founded the Colored Citizens Committee, a political advocacy group, and the California State Colored Republicans League, with headquarters at 1898

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<sup>38</sup>Madame C.J. Walker profile on *Harlem: 1900-1940* online exhibit, [www.si.umich.edu/chico/Harlem/text/cjwalker.html](http://www.si.umich.edu/chico/Harlem/text/cjwalker.html)

<sup>39</sup> "Brief History of Home," San Flanning Planning Department files. "Landmark Designation for Madame C.J. Walker Home for Girls and Women, 2066 Pine Street," June 1999, p.6.

<sup>40</sup> Japantown task Force YWCA of Greater Los Angeles website historical timeline [http://www.ywcagla.org/topic\\_about\\_us.asp](http://www.ywcagla.org/topic_about_us.asp)

<sup>41</sup> "Brief History of Home."

<sup>42</sup> "Landmark Designation report for Madame C.J. Walker Home."

<sup>43</sup> Broussard, 75-85.

Sutter Street, was established in 1932.<sup>44</sup> Reverend J.J. Byers, pastor of the First A.M.E. Zion Church, led the drive to form a Bay Area branch of the Urban League in 1926, and helped establish an inter-racial fact finding committee to determine the need for a permanent employment and social services agency. Ultimately blocked by perceptions that San Francisco's small, non-industrial Black community was not the highest priority, the Urban League's national secretary, Arnold T. Hill, and White leaders on the inter-racial committee withdrew their support for a San Francisco Urban League. Not until 1946 would the national office recognize that the African American community of San Francisco merited its own Urban League.<sup>45</sup>

### *Filipinos in the Japantown-Fillmore Area*

Most of San Francisco's Filipino immigrants lived in Manilatown, a ten-block area just west of Chinatown on and around Kearny Street. As these immigrants set down roots, many moved to the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood in search of housing that could accommodate their growing families. The co-location of these Asian immigrant groups -- Filipino, Chinese and Japanese -- is a pattern found in many California towns and cities shaped primarily by discrimination. However, unlike Chinese and Japanese immigrants, who began arriving in the United States in the nineteenth century, Filipinos did not come to California in large numbers until the 1920s.

The American occupation of the Philippines, beginning in 1898, set the stage for Filipino immigration to the U.S. This migration began with small groups of upper-class *pensionados* who traveled for higher education, followed by much larger numbers of working-class laborers who immigrated for employment on Hawaiian plantations. Many *manongs*, as first generation immigrants are known, immigrated once again to the mainland as demand for "stoop labor" in Western agricultural states grew. By the time of the 1930 U.S. census, California had over 30,000 Filipino residents. Filipino immigrants occupied a particularly tenuous position in the United States; like the Japanese they were "aliens ineligible for citizenship," and, because the Philippines was occupied by the U.S., had no government to act on their behalf when necessary.

Most *manongs* lived in rural areas, but by 1930 "Manilatowns" had formed in San Francisco, Stockton and Los Angeles.<sup>46</sup> Like Chinese and Japanese immigrants before them, early Filipino enclaves were primarily populated by single men. Their "bachelor society" centered on pool halls, barbershops, gambling rooms and dance halls. San Francisco's Manilatown, located along Kearny Street, shared the transient, male character of enclaves found throughout the West Coast and acted as a point of embarkation for *manongs* who joined the seasonal migrant labor pool in California fields and canneries in

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

<sup>45</sup> Broussard, p. 87-89.

<sup>46</sup> Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Pub. Co. 1983) p. 17.

Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. Even as late as 1930, the male-to-female ratio for Filipinos in the U.S. was nearly fifteen to one.<sup>47</sup>

For Filipinos who married and started families, lodging in the hotels and rooming houses around Chinatown proved less than ideal, and new Filipino communities began in the South Park area below Market Street and in the Japantown-Fillmore area. *Pinoy*s (Filipino Americans) were drawn to the Japantown-Fillmore area during the 1930s for the same reasons many others established households and businesses there – they found relatively affordable building stock in a multiracial neighborhood where they could build families and community. One 1940 account of San Francisco’s ethnic neighborhoods described Filipino “families liv[ing] along Geary and O’Farrell Streets from Laguna to Webster” and commented on the number of “mestizo families, Tagalog-Spanish and Tagalog-Chinese.”<sup>48</sup> Armando Rendon and Sugar Pie deSanto described growing up in such mixed-race families in *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era*. Rendon’s father emigrated from the Philippines in the early 1920s; his mother arrived in the U.S. from Guatemala in 1929. After meeting and marrying in the Fillmore district, they had their first child, Armando, in a house at Bush and Octavia streets. Famed blues singer, DeSanto, recalled her pre-WWII childhood home at Buchanan and Webster streets where her Filipino father and African American mother raised ten children.<sup>49</sup>

While there is scant secondary literature describing Filipino history in the Japantown-Fillmore area, interviews with Filipino Americans who grew up in the neighborhood during the 1930-50s sketch a vibrant community of *Pinoy*-owned businesses, community groups and strong connections to local churches.<sup>50</sup> Joe Julian remembered: “There were a number of Filipino Americans who lived in that neighborhood. The Estrella family lived at Webster and Bush. The Kopico family lived on Bush between Webster and Buchanan. The Anolin family lived at Laguna and Bush. The Anolins owned a restaurant in the neighborhood.” For the primarily Catholic Filipino community, the church and parochial schools were centers for family and community life. Joe Julian fondly recalled his confirmation at St. Francis Xavier Church (1801 Octavia Street) and his years at Morning Star School (1715 Octavia), where he attended grade school and middle school in classes that reflected the neighborhood of Filipino, African American, Japanese American, Latino and White children. Julian remembered that youth in need of guidance were invited for lunch at the Sisters Home around the corner at 1911 Pine Street. Although most of the neighborhood’s Filipinos were Roman Catholic, a small

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<sup>47</sup> Michel S. Laguerre, *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown and Manilatown in American Society*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000) p. 79.

<sup>48</sup> Leonard Austin, *Around the World in San Francisco* (James Ladd Delkin, Stanford University, 1940) p.

<sup>49</sup> Pepin and Watts, p. 39, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Telephone interviews were conducted with Janet Alvarado, Emil de Guzman, Joe Julian and Al Robles in January 2008.

congregation formed the First Filipino Christian Church, a few blocks west at 2012 Pine Street, next to the Nichiren Buddhist Church.<sup>51</sup>

Al Robles recalled over a dozen Filipino-owned grocery stores, barber shops, pool halls, clubs and restaurants in the neighborhood. Most were on Geary Street between Fillmore and Laguna streets. A *manong* named Ralph Yngojo reportedly owned three businesses on Webster Street between Post and Geary streets: the Yngojo Grocery, a pool hall and a Gulf gas station.<sup>52</sup> A barbershop and pool hall provided vivid memories for many Filipino American men. Armando Rendon recalled in *Harlem of the West*: “The place I recall the most was a Filipino barbershop and a pool hall, located on Geary Street near Buchanan Street, and in spaces that were side by side, but with a door cut into the wall, so that people could go back and forth. As a teen, I would go get my haircut and then go play pool with my friends. The crowd was mainly Filipino.”<sup>53</sup>

Benevolent associations and organizations of immigrants from the same town or region of the Philippines were an important part of community life. The Japantown-Fillmore area had clubs named for the towns of Cardona and Pangasinan, as well as a branch of the Knights of Dimas-Alang, whose headquarters were in Manilatown.<sup>54</sup> Joe Julian recalled the annual picnics organized by the local Cardona Club that alternated between San Francisco and the agricultural town of Santa Maria – underscoring ties between urban and rural Filipino communities. The Iloilo Circle – the only one of these organizations still housed in Japantown today and located at 1809 Sutter Street – has reportedly operated in the neighborhood since the 1930s and was known for organizing celebrations for the entire *Pinoy* community from the 1930s to the ‘50s. Saturday night dances at the Franklin Hall were another favorite social event for Filipinos in the neighborhood. Photographer Ricardo Alvarez, part of the first wave of Filipino immigrants, documented scenes of community celebration during the 1940s and ‘50s in the Japantown-Fillmore area. Alvarez created a remarkable photographic record of urban and rural scenes of *Pinoy* community life, as well as images of the lively music scene around him in the Fillmore neighborhood where he lived. His archive, curated by his daughter Janet Alvarez, became the subject for the Smithsonian Institution’s first exhibit to highlight Filipino American life.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> According to Al Robles, the First Filipino Church was active from before WWII until the Redevelopment era. The current building used by Japanese Community Youth Council at this address may be the same structure with a remodeled façade.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Al Robles.

<sup>53</sup> de Guzman, Julian and Robles all brought up these businesses in their interviews. The Rendon quote is from Elizabeth Pepin and Lewis Watts, *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era* p. 37.

<sup>54</sup> Austin, *Around the World in San Francisco*, states that the Knights of Dimas-Alang was located at 1717 Sutter Street.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Mandel, “Memories of the Manong,” *Washington Post*, January 6, 2002 on the website of The Alvarado Project: Through My Father’s Eyes, [www.thealvaradoproject.org](http://www.thealvaradoproject.org); [www.sites.si.edu/exhibitions/exhibits/father/main.htm](http://www.sites.si.edu/exhibitions/exhibits/father/main.htm)

The war years meant new job opportunities for Filipino Americans, but at the same time many encountered increased racial discrimination when they were mistakenly identified as Japanese. Filipino families moved into quarters left vacant by the interned Japanese. As Emil de Guzman described it “When the Japanese were evacuated, Filipinos moved in. They wanted to expand out of the Kearny Street area.” In 1946, the Julians had to move from their home at 1812 Bush Street when a Nikkei dentist returned to reclaim his house. 1946 was a critical year for the entire Filipino community as a second wave of immigrants who had fought in the U.S. military during WWII arrived in San Francisco. The Filipino community in the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood persisted during the post-war period until Redevelopment tore apart their homes in both Manilatown and the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood. A guide to the Filipino community published in the early 1970s described San Francisco’s 12,327 *Pinoys* as being scattered throughout the city with concentrations in the South of Market and Mission Districts. It listed no Filipino businesses in the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood.<sup>56</sup>

## **Nihonmachi – Historical Background**

### *Early Japanese Immigration to California and San Francisco*

Japanese began to arrive in California in 1869, when a handful of men and women migrated to San Francisco. Most of these initial immigrants made their way inland to the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony in El Dorado County, the earliest chapter in the long intertwined history of Japanese settlement and agriculture in the Golden State. The U.S. Census of 1870 showed 55 Japanese in the United States; 33 were in California, with 22 based near the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm. The census of ten years later demonstrated a slight increase to 86 Japanese in California, with a total of 148 nationally. After Japan liberalized emigration restrictions in the mid-1880s, the number of Japanese coming to the United States climbed more rapidly as young men sought to leave sparse economic opportunities in their home communities. By 1890, 2,038 Japanese lived in the United States, with 1,114 residing in California.<sup>57</sup>

As Yuji Ichioka wrote in his study *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924*, Japanese immigrants occupied a tenuous position in the United States. While Congress had grudgingly granted citizenship status to African Americans, “Japanese immigrants, being neither white nor black, were classified as ‘aliens ineligible for citizenship,’ without the right of naturalization.”<sup>58</sup> These restrictions, and the racism that underlay them, shaped the lives of Japanese immigrants and their descendants for many decades. Ichioka divides Japanese immigration into two periods: 1885 to 1907 and

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<sup>56</sup> Rodolfo I. Necesito, *The Filipino Guide to San Francisco* (San Francisco: Technomedia, 1978?), np.

<sup>57</sup> “A History of Japanese in California” by Isami Arifuku Waugh, Alex Yamamoto and Raymond Okamura in *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California* (Office of Historic Preservation, California Department of Parks and Recreation, 1988) republished online at [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/5views/5views4a.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/5views/5views4a.htm)

<sup>58</sup> Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924* (New York: The Free Press, 1998) p. 1.

1908 to 1925. The first period brought *dekasegi* laborers who, like many European immigrants, intended to return eventually to their native country – hopefully with new wealth in hand. However, unlike European immigrants who could journey as families, restrictive policies and custom meant that the first immigrant waves from Japan were overwhelmingly male. Initially, male students arrived from Japan to attend American universities. Starting in the late 1860s, the Meiji government’s political and economic policies fueled immigration out of financial and employment needs, as well as desire to escape political and social boundaries. The second broad period of immigration identified by Ichioka began around 1908 as Japanese immigrants set down roots in rural agricultural communities and in cities like San Francisco, Sacramento and Los Angeles. Encouraged by community leaders to make an economic stake in their new land, permanent homes were also made possible by the Japanese government’s regulations that allowed businessmen and farmers to arrange for wives to emigrate from Japan.<sup>59</sup>

### *San Francisco’s Nihonmachi*

San Francisco’s Nihonjinmachi (as it was known before WWII) is the first and oldest of its kind in the continental United States<sup>60</sup> and one of only 3 remaining Japantowns in the U.S. Until 1906, San Francisco, chief port of entry for Asian immigration, had the largest *Nikkei* population of any mainland American city. Numerous social, economic, and political organizations originated in the city, including several churches, such as the Japanese Reformed & Evangelical churches, the Buddhist Churches of America, the Presbyterian Church, the Japanese Young Women’s Christian Association and Young Men’s Christian Association, the Japanese Salvation Army, and civic organizations such as Japanese Benevolent Society, Japanese Association of America, and the Japanese American Citizens League

The first Japanese immigrants arrived in San Francisco in 1869. Their numbers were small, and consisted mainly of young men. Within a year, the first Japanese Consulate in the United States was established in San Francisco.<sup>61</sup> As immigrant ranks gradually increased, social institutions arose to serve them. In 1877, the *Fukuin Kai* (Japanese Gospel Society) believed to be the first Japanese organization in the U.S., began meeting at the Chinese Methodist Mission in Chinatown. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century several more Japanese Christian organizations were founded and grew in San Francisco, subsequently spreading to a number of other Japanese communities on the West Coast, and in the Central Valley, Pacific Northwest, Midwest, and South. By 1898, San Francisco was also the location for the headquarters of Buddhist churches and social organizations that had branches throughout the West. Other important institutions included prefectural associations, or *kenjin-kai*, and Japanese American newspapers.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> Significant Japanese immigration to Hawaii predates this.

<sup>61</sup> Kenji Murase, “Timeline of Nikkei in San Francisco, 1850-1942” *Nikkei Heritage*, Summer 2000. p. 11.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the size of the Japanese population continued to increase, racist opposition to Japanese immigration began to coalesce, led by San Francisco Mayor and later California Senator James D. Phelan, and involving existing labor unions. Hostility worsened after Japanese victory in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War raised fears of Japanese military power. However, much of the animus was still couched in economic rivalry between Japanese immigrants and surrounding communities. San Francisco was a center for this antipathy. Following the 1906 earthquake, the San Francisco Board of Education adopted a policy intended, for the first time, to restrict Japanese students to the segregated school previously established for Chinese American students. When the Japanese government protested, an international dispute arose. President Theodore Roosevelt intervened to urge that the policy be rescinded, and the school board agreed in return for a promise by Roosevelt to stem Japanese immigration. In response, Roosevelt negotiated the 1908 “Gentlemen’s Agreement” between the United States and Japan, by which further immigration of Japanese laborers was drastically reduced. Some immigration, most importantly that of Japanese women, continued until the passing of the Immigration Act of 1924, which completely curtailed immigration from Japan until 1952.<sup>62</sup>

In 1913, California law, in the form of the Heney-Webb Alien Land Act, forbade property ownership by “aliens ineligible for citizenship.”<sup>63</sup> (At the time, immigrants from Asia were not permitted to become naturalized citizens.) Given the population of California at the time, this restriction applied almost exclusively to Japanese immigrants, and remained in effect until 1952. The Japanese American community was further restricted by anti-miscegenation laws, which prevailed through the 1960s and prohibited interracial marriages. The Gentlemen’s Agreement, however, did provide a few exceptions to the above-mentioned legislation. It permitted the immigration of Japanese women whose husbands were already living in the U.S., including “Picture Brides,” who may never have met their husbands prior to immigrating. This provision marked an important shift in the nature of the Japanese community in San Francisco, by facilitating the establishment of families, and of a *Nisei* generation who were citizens by birth and thus legally able to own property. Institutions to serve this changing community quickly arose, including Japanese language schools and pre-schools for the rapidly Americanizing *Nisei*. So, although immigration was limited and civil rights restricted, the existing Japanese American community continued to grow socially and culturally within itself.

### *Changing Locations of Japantown*

Early Japanese immigrants to San Francisco had settled in Chinatown. This co-location of Asian immigrants fit a pattern that was replicated across the Western United States

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<sup>62</sup> *Japanese Americans in California*. National Park Service, (Isami Arifuku Waugh, Alex Yamamoto, Raymond Y Okamura) 2002.

[http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/5views/5views4a.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/5views/5views4a.htm)

<sup>63</sup> Federal law, since 1790, had limited naturalization to “free white persons”. However, due to ambiguities over the definition of “white” some 400 Japanese immigrants had been naturalized over the years prior to 1910.

during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Communities of Japanese and Chinese immigrants have distinctive but related histories shaped by immigration policies, changing demands for cheap labor, restrictions on land ownership, and racial animus. Chinese immigrants pioneered many of the occupations and neighborhoods in which Japanese immigrants later settled. They also shared a marginalized status as non-citizens, which was physically represented in the enclaves they created with fellow countrymen. Areas of town already inhabited by Chinese immigrants, who began arriving in the California during the Gold Rush, were often the only neighborhoods that permitted the first waves of Japanese immigrant men to find residences and set up small businesses.

By 1900, there was a second cluster of Japanese people and commercial establishments South of Market, along Jessie and Stevenson streets, between 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> streets. When both these areas were destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906, the majority of the Japanese American community relocated to the present Japantown area in the Western Addition, with another smaller enclave remaining in the South Park neighborhood (a more concentrated area in the South of Market district). The latter location was convenient to piers then in use by Japanese shipping companies, as well as to the railroad station, a point of entry for the large rural Japanese population. There, a collection of hotels, baths, and other establishments came into being to serve travelers. However, the 1924 Immigration Act, which blocked further immigration from Japan, and the 1933 relocation of the Japanese shipping companies to the northern waterfront meant the end of the South Park Japanese neighborhood.

#### Illustration – South Park Japantown, ca.1910s Collection of Japanese American Historical Archive

The Western Addition site of the present Japantown was an established Victorian-era neighborhood, home to a mix of European immigrants and their native-born offspring, before becoming a Japanese American enclave. The 1900 Census shows a concentration of residents born in German speaking parts of Europe, the second most prevalent national group in San Francisco. A large proportion of these residents were Jewish, and the area still includes a number of synagogues or former synagogues and other Jewish institutions. There were no Japanese households in the area at that time.<sup>64</sup> However, immediately after the 1906 earthquake, San Francisco's Japanese population relocated here in significant numbers. This process was recorded and encouraged by editorials in *Shin-Sekai* (*The New World*, originally a publication of the Japanese YMCA until it split off in 1897) which predicted that rents in the area would soon be forced down as ruined parts of the city were rebuilt.

By the time of the 1910 Census, the core area was home to more than 50 Japanese-owned commercial establishments, and to most of the 4,700 Japanese residing in the city<sup>65</sup>. The commercial infrastructure included ethnic mainstays such as Japanese grocery stores,

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<sup>64</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States (1900), Population Schedules, Enumeration Districts 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209 & 210

<sup>65</sup> Thirteenth Census of the United States (1910), Population Schedules, Enumeration Districts 181, 186, 187, 188, 194, 243, 244, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 256

importers, and restaurants. Support for the still largely single male population was visible in several Japanese pool halls, residence hotels, and employment agencies. The growing presence of families was reflected in a Japanese kindergarten, a dressmaker, and several midwives. Property records from the same time show no Japanese property owners in the area<sup>66</sup>. However, given the fairly common practice of recording property ownership in legal trust under the name of a cooperative white partner, these records may be suspect.

### Illustration – Japantown Businesses along Geary Street, 1910s. Collection of National Japanese American Historical Society

The community prospered through the 1920s and 30s. By 1940, the Japanese population of Japantown, although by then second in size to Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, numbered over 5,000—with more than 200 Japanese-owned businesses.<sup>67</sup> Japanese names begin to appear as property owners in the area in the 1920s. By 1930, at least fifty-five parcels were Japanese-owned. Prior to American entry into World War II, this number had more than doubled to one hundred twenty-two.<sup>68</sup> While some Japanese purchased property and recorded it in the name of their American-born children, many continued to use the convention of land trusts because of the ongoing political agitation against the Japanese, which included efforts to divest American-born children of Japanese descent of their U.S. citizenship.

#### *Growth of Nihonmachi's Commercial Sector*

San Francisco's first Japanese entrepreneurs established businesses that addressed the needs of migrant laborers who passed through the city. One of the most prominent early immigrants from Japan, Kyutaro Abiko, operated a restaurant and laundry that served his fellow countrymen from 1885 to 1906 when he shifted his efforts to forming utopian agricultural settlements known as Yamato colonies. Abiko, also founded the period's most influential Nikkei newspaper, *Nichibei Shimbun* in San Francisco in 1899.<sup>69</sup>

Boarding houses, restaurants, pool halls and barbershops served the first permanent residents of the early Japantowns in Chinatown and South Park. San Francisco's current Japantown was born of the trauma and dislocation wreaked by the 1906 earthquake. Japanese immigrants joined in the rush to find a more hospitable neighborhood for their homes and businesses in the Western Addition. Michel Laguerre credits the earthquake with giving Japanese an opportunity for upward residential mobility that would not have

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<sup>66</sup> *Block Book of San Francisco*, 1910.

<sup>67</sup> Sixteenth Census of the United States (1940), Census Tracts J-2, J-3, J-6, J-7 and J-8 (bounded by Gough, Eddy, Steiner, Fulton, Geary, Baker, & California streets) Although these Tracts together encompass an area slightly larger than that defined as the Japantown Core, it is not possible to break the census data into more precise increments, and it may be assumed that the non-white, non-Negro population of these Tracts was concentrated in the Core.

<sup>68</sup> City and County of San Francisco Sales Ledgers, Assessor's Blocks 649, 659, 651, 652, 653, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 685, 686, 687, 688, 697, 699, 700, 701, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712.

<sup>69</sup> Takaki, pp. 194-95. Niiya, p. 94-95.

occurred in a more stable period. White property owners rented to Japanese quake refugees, which prompted the *San Francisco Chronicle* to publish an alarmist piece on March 24, 1907 titled “A Greater San Francisco or Lesser Nagasaki – Which?” about the Japanese “invasion” of the Western Addition.<sup>70</sup>

Within four short years of the quake, Nihonmachi housed dozens of businesses and community organizations primarily between Sutter and Geary, and Webster and Octavia streets, with secondary concentrations around the intersections of Pine Street with Fillmore and Gough streets. More than twenty hotels and boarding houses, and a number of employment agencies attest to the continued role of San Francisco Nihonmachi as a stopping-off place for migrant laborers. Despite these patterns of immigrant bachelor culture, a handful of midwiferies indicate that immigrant families were forming in Japantown by this date. Some establishments such as the Teikoku and Hashimoto Hospitals, as well as shipping companies and insurance agents provided culturally-sensitive services that no doubt drew immigrants from smaller Japanese communities around the Bay Area along with patrons from Japantown itself. Two Japanese newspapers, the *New World* on Geary Street, and *Japanese American News* on Laguna Street, connected San Francisco’s Japantown with Nikkei communities across Northern California.<sup>71</sup> Yet many Japantown businesses such as restaurants, shoe stores, laundries and art good stores presumably drew their clientele from the non-Nikkei communities as well as fellow immigrants.<sup>72</sup> These businesses often operated out of small storefronts added to the fronts of Victorians residences that had been built two decades earlier.<sup>73</sup>

As the community grew in subsequent decades, old-time businesses begun in the wake of the 1906 earthquake moved and were joined by new establishments. These transitions were due to the general growth of the area and these neighborhood-serving businesses, but were also presumably caused by the inability of most Nikkei to own the properties from which they ran their businesses. For instance, by 1925, the Uoki K. Sakai Fish Store from its original location one block south on Geary Street near several Nikkei hotels, groceries and the Benkyodo Confectionery. The Sakai family moved to a large Victorian at 1628 Post Street that could accommodate their nine children in upstairs quarters.<sup>74</sup> Sakai Fish shared its new block on the north side of Post Street between Buchanan and Laguna streets with the Nippon Drugstore, Namiye Murayama Kinmon Maternity Hospital, and Gosha-do Books and Stationery; all established by the late 1920s.<sup>75</sup> The drugstore down the block at 1609 Post Street, run by a Mrs. Misawa, was the first

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<sup>70</sup> Michel Laguerre, *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown and Manilatown in American Society* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000) p. 64-65.

<sup>71</sup> Laguerre, p. 64.

<sup>72</sup> Ben Pease, *1910 Map: San Francisco’s Japantown Relocates after the Earthquake and Fire* (San Francisco; Peasepress) 2006.

<sup>73</sup> The Japantown Task Force, Inc, *San Francisco’s Japantown* (San Francisco: Arcadia 2005)p. 22.

<sup>74</sup> Wong, *Generations*, p. 17.

<sup>75</sup> Ben Pease, Map of Western Addition and Japantown, 1920s (San Francisco: Pease Press, n.d.), and *San Francisco’s Japantown*, p. 39.

Japanese pharmacy registered in San Francisco.<sup>76</sup> Prominent and longtime establishments, the Aki Hotel and Nichibei Bussan dry goods store, were located on the south side of Post Street. As Harry L. Kitano noted, “by 1924, next to agriculture, the major occupation of the Japanese was in small shops and businesses.”<sup>77</sup>

### Illustrations – Gosha-do Books and Stationery, 1698 Post Street, 1928. Collection of Hatsu Aizawa

Although Los Angeles’s Little Tokyo overtook San Francisco’s Japantown in size by 1907, the thriving community supported connections to Nikkei throughout the city, the Northern California region and back in Japan. Within San Francisco, Nihonmachi businesses were tied to Nikkei establishments in other areas of the City, such as the California Flower Market in the South of Market area, and Japanese art goods stores in Chinatown. Nippon Gold Fish at 1919 Bush Street shipped its fish to out-of-town customers via rail. Some businesses had related operations in other Japantowns, like Mizuhara Bros., which sold and repaired antiques and arts from a shop at 1823 Sutter Street, and also operated a second establishment in Berkeley’s Japantown at 1538 Parker Street.<sup>78</sup> Nikkei newspapers and banks headquartered in San Francisco had branches and agents in smaller Japantowns across the state.

As the largest Japantown in Northern California, and a port city, San Francisco’s Nihonmachi continued to draw Nikkei from smaller communities to its businesses and services. Shipping and importing concerns maintained the flow of Japanese goods to Nikkei customers in the United States and material goods back to families in the home country. Activities in Japantown were heightened when ships from Japan came into port every two weeks. Local hotels garnered business from Nikkei from out-of-town who came to greet arrivals or to get passports and visas before departing, as well as newcomers who stayed in San Francisco before moving on to other locations.<sup>79</sup>

Hard work, frugality, and a largely family-based labor pool allowed Japantown businesses to weather the Depression. Nikkei shops and restaurants were community gathering places, as well as sites for economic transaction; Hatsu Aizawa recalled that his parents’ business, Gosha-do Books and Stationery, was a place people browsed and played cards, even when they had no money to buy the Aizawa’s merchandise.<sup>80</sup> By 1940, Japantown boasted more than 200 Japanese-owned businesses and a population of over 5,000. The thriving community included its own professionals – doctors, dentists and lawyers – as well as Nisei architect Gentoko “George” Shimamoto, whose practice at 1534 Geary Street had designed Buddhist churches in San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose. There were stores to fill every need – dry goods, groceries, books, bicycles and hardware. Hungry diners had choices of American-style soda fountains, sushi and chop

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

<sup>77</sup> Harry H.L. Kitano, *Japanese Americans: the Evolution of a Subculture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1969) p. 21.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>79</sup> “Japantown in the 20s and 30s,” *Nikkei Heritage*, Summer 2000, p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> The Fillmore (San Francisco: KQED).

suey restaurants and freshly made manju. Nikkei auto mechanics, plumbers and cobblers worked on cars homes, and shoes. The photograph below of the Mikado Cafeteria show a diverse group of White, Black and Asian patrons at the family-run businesses, which serves hot dogs and ham-and-egg sandwiches, as well as its popular fried noodles.<sup>81</sup> Japantown of 1940 was part of the web of modern American commerce, but still featured four traditional *sentos*, or public bathhouses. And employment agencies still helped Issei newcomers find connections to prospective employers.<sup>82</sup>

### Illustrations – Mikado Hotel and Cafeteria on Post Street, 1930s. Reproduced in *Generations*

Even as Nihonmachi grew in population, prominence and complexity, restrictions on property ownership meant that most Nikkei businesses were operated out of buildings that had been constructed by others and often originally for other uses. These structures, like most found in early twentieth-century urban ethnic enclaves, did not announce the origins of their immigrant residents – the did not “look Japanese.” Yet historic photographs indicate that some Japantown businesses, like the Mikado Cafeteria and Hotel on Post Street, featured architectural flourishes meant to communicate the Japanese heritage of their proprietors and nature of their goods and services. However, few purpose-built structures from the pre-war period exist that reflect Japanese American development and design – those that do were investments in the community’s social and spiritual life.

#### *Social and Cultural Life of Nihonmachi*

Japantown residents were supported by social, religious, cultural and political organizations that fostered and protected the close-knit community. Christian churches, Buddhist temples, and Japanese language schools, or *gakuen*, served as the primary gathering places where Japanese immigrants and their children passed on and preserved traditional cultural practices. In addition to their fundamental significance to all Japantowns before Executive Order 9066, these institutions played a central role during and after wartime evacuation. Throughout California, these facilities often stored belongings for interned Nikkei, and rapidly converted into hostels to welcome back those returning from concentration camps who had lost their homes.

The 1941 Japanese American Directory lists over forty churches and religious organizations, and seventeen schools and kindergartens in San Francisco, nearly all of them in the Western Addition’s Japantown.<sup>83</sup> Japanese Christian churches outnumbered Buddhist temples in most pre-war Japantowns for several reasons; most prominent being that White Christian missionaries eagerly proselytized to new immigrants from Japan and established missions in many Nihonmachi that developed into full-fledged churches. Various Christian sects, most commonly Methodist and Presbyterian, each developed

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<sup>81</sup> Wong, *Generations*, pp 20-21.

<sup>82</sup> The Japanese American Directory 1941 (San Francisco: Japanese American News, Inc.) pp. 1-26.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

their own institutional bases and the buildings to house them. Although several Buddhist traditions were present in California, the Jodo Shinshu or Shin sect, under the San Francisco leadership of Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) was by far the most dominant. Therefore, most Nikkei communities housed only one Buddhist temple, and the absolute number of Buddhist churches was therefore smaller than Japanese Christian churches of varying denominations. A typical pre-war California Japantown might feature two or three Christian churches representing various denominations, with one Buddhist church under the BCA umbrella.

San Francisco is notable for the variety of Japanese American religious institutions and as the first place where major Nikkei spiritual traditions, were practiced. According to the *The Eighty-fifth Anniversary of Protestant Work Among Japanese in North America*, “When Kanichi Miyami was baptized by Dr. Gibson in San Francisco in 1877, he became the first Japanese Christian in America.”<sup>84</sup> Methodist and Presbyterian congregations, the most common denominations throughout California Japantowns, are represented in San Francisco, as well as Episcopal and Evangelical. The Japanese Methodist Episcopal Church (later Pine United Methodist Church) and Japanese Presbyterian Church date back to the 1880s, with Christ Church (Episcopal) formed in 1895. By the 1910s, the First Reformed Church (later First Evangelical and Reformed Church) had moved into a large building vacated by Plymouth Congregational Church at 1760 Post Street.<sup>85</sup> San Francisco’s Japantown also included a more unusual example of a Catholic Nikkei Church. St. Francis Xavier Mission, a Catholic order named for the first Jesuit missionary in Japan, was founded in a small Buchanan Street building in 1912. By 1939, the Church had moved to its present location at Octavia and Pine streets and was housed in a new edifice designed by architect H.A. Minton to reflect the church’s Eastern and Western connections. Just down the hill sat the church’s Morning Star School, a similarly imposing blend of Asian and Mission Revival styles that began serving kindergarten through sixth grade in 1929.<sup>86</sup> Although the student body of the 1920s was a diverse mix of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Filipino children, the Japanese community was reportedly most closely involved with the school’s construction, which included an auditorium “built for the staging of Japanese plays.”<sup>87</sup>

#### Illustration – First Evangelical Church on 1760 Post Street, 1934 Collection of Hatsuro Aizawa

Even with the strong presence of Christian churches, more than three-quarters of Japanese Americans were Buddhist prior to World War II. The United States’ major Japanese Buddhist institution grew from the Young Men’s Buddhist Association formed in San Francisco in 1898. Officially titled the Buddhist Church of San Francisco in 1905, the church served Japantown first from a building at 1617 Gough Street, and since 1914

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<sup>84</sup> *The Eighty-fifth Anniversary of Protestant Work Among Japanese in North America, 1877-1962* (Los Angeles:1964), p. 51.

<sup>85</sup> *San Francisco’s Japantown*, p. 51.

<sup>86</sup> *Scared Places of San Francisco*, p. 185.

<sup>87</sup> Alex Yamato, “Morning Star School (Gyosei Gakko) Historic Resources Inventory” (Sacramento: Office of Historic Preservation) 1979.

from its current location at 1881 Pine Street. 1914 was also the year that San Francisco became the location of the headquarters for the Buddhist Mission of North America, which administered all Jodo Shinshu (Pure Land) Buddhist churches and temples, the predominant form of Buddhism practiced by Japanese in the U.S. In 1935, the San Francisco Church and Buddhist Mission decided to construct a new temple with funds raised from districts outside of San Francisco, as well as local members. The San Francisco Japanese Carpenter's Association carried out a design by local architect, Gentoko Shimamoto, which included a large dome, or stupa, holding relics of the Buddha gifted from Japan.<sup>88</sup>

#### Illustration –Buddhist Church of San Francisco. SFPL historic photograph collection.

San Francisco's Japantown also included the Konko-kyo Church founded in 1930, and smaller Buddhist sects such as Tenrikyo, Soto Zen and Nichiren Buddhist churches. The Tenrikyo Church, which stood at 1440 O'Farrell Street, is no longer extant, but the Nichiren Church still resides in its historic structure at 2016 Pine Street. The Sokoji Zen Center remains active in a post-war Japanese-style building at 1691 Laguna Street. In 1934, the Soto Zen *sangha* (congregation) bought the former Ohabai Shalom Temple at 1881 Post Street when dwindling membership and the neighborhood's changing demographics caused the Jewish congregation to leave. For over forty years, the building housed the Japanese Zen community and was the place where Shunryu Suzuki introduced Zen Buddhism to many non-Nikkei in the 1960s and '70s. Japanese Buddhism in the U.S. had adopted a number of customs from Christian churches, such as pew seating, which the new students of traditional *zazen* (sitting meditation) wanted to change. George Hagiwara, a Sokoji member whose family was revered in San Francisco's Japantown for their role in the creation of the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park, helped organize the purchase of tatami mats and meditation cushions for the non-Nikkei students. But as the predominately Caucasian San Francisco Zen Center grew under Suzuki Roshi's leadership, the Japanese members of the sangha decided to withdraw in the 1970s and build new quarters nearby.<sup>89</sup>

Christian affiliated groups were responsible for some of the most impressive building efforts in pre-war Japantown. The Salvation Army, YMCA and YWCA all built community facilities that still stand as landmarks in Japantown today. The Japanese Division of the American Salvation Army was formed in 1919 under the leadership of Major Masasuke Kobayashi, who led its mission to serve the elderly, widows and orphans. Kobayashi spearheaded a fundraising drive in both the U.S. and Japan to raise money for a dedicated building, which was initiated with a \$5,000 donation from the Emperor of Japan and completed at the corner of Geary and Laguna streets in 1937.<sup>90</sup> One year earlier, the Japanese Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) dedicated a

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<sup>88</sup> *Sacred Places of San Francisco*, 163-65.

<sup>89</sup> San Francisco Japantown Task Force Data Sheet: 1881 Post Street (Kokoro Assisted Living). 2004. David Chadwick, *Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teachings of Shunryu Suzuki* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), pp. 258-9, 178-9.

<sup>90</sup> Alex Yamato, "Japanese Salvation Army Building Historic Resources Inventory," (Sacramento: Office of Historic Preservation, 1979).

new building one block to the west. Founded in 1886, the Japanese YMCA had operated out of several locations until 1926, when it moved into a Victorian house at 1409 Sutter Street, which still stands today. By the late 1920s, the need for space to accommodate recreational and social activities for growing numbers of Nisei members led to fund-raising campaign for a purpose-built YMCA. The \$25,000 raised within San Francisco's Japantown community was matched by approximately \$15,000 donated by supporters in Japan. The new building at 1530 Buchanan Street was dedicated in 1936 and boasted meetings rooms, a small chapel and a gymnasium, along with Y-sponsored football and baseball teams and a summer camp program for Japanese American youth.<sup>91</sup>

**Illustrations - Original home of Japantown YMCA at 1409 Sutter Street, 1930**

**Collection of National Japanese American Historical Society**

**Buchanan Street YMCA, 1964 Collection of San Francisco Public Library**

Japantown's Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) building is a rare public emblem of the struggles and accomplishments of Issei women in the United States. Barred from membership in the main YWCA chapter, the Japanese Young Women's Christian Association was founded in 1920 to address social and service needs of Nikkei women and children. The organization was briefly located on Gough Street, then moved to 1826 Sutter Street and ultimately to its home at 1830 Sutter Street. Although other cities had Japanese YWCA organizations, San Francisco's Japantown YWCA appears to be the only structure purpose-built for a Japanese chapter in the United States.<sup>92</sup> Designed by noted architect Julia Morgan, whose many YWCA projects also included San Francisco's Chinatown YWCA, the building was funded by monies raised within the Japantown community, as well as donations from the National and San Francisco YWCAs.<sup>93</sup> Because the alien land law prevented Issei from owning property, the San Francisco YWCA held the property in trust for the Nikkei community.<sup>94</sup> In addition to dormitory rooms for ten, the building held classrooms and meeting rooms, a library and an office.

**Illustration – Japantown YWCA Building Fund, late 1920s campaign. Reproduced in *Generations***

Along with the Japanese Salvation Army, YMCA and YWCA, Kinmon Gakuen (Golden Gate School) is one of four community facilities created through organization and fundraising by residents of the pre-war Nihonmachi. Kinmon Gakuen first enrolled their students in 1911 and by 1926 was housed in a new building at 2031 Bush Street. Children enrolled at Kinmon Gakuen studied culturally relevant subjects such as ikebana,

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<sup>91</sup> Exhibit Text at Buchanan YMCA, 2007. Alex Yamato, "Buchanan YMCA Historic Resources Inventory" (Sacramento: Office of Historic Preservation, 1979).

<sup>92</sup> Communication with Karen Kai, January 2008.

<sup>93</sup> Alexander Yamato, "Western Addition YWCA Historic Resources Inventory" (Sacramento: Office of Historic Preservation, 1979).

<sup>94</sup> The Japanese YWCA in San Francisco on Discover Nikkei has good coverage of the struggle to reclaim the Japantown YWCA during the 1990s.

[www.discovernikkei.org/wiki/index.php/Japanese\\_YWCA\\_SFO](http://www.discovernikkei.org/wiki/index.php/Japanese_YWCA_SFO)

Japanese musical instruments, and etiquette, as well as Japanese language.<sup>95</sup> Japanese language schools allowed Issei parents to educate their children in the language and customs of their home country, with the additional benefit that the youth would be prepared should the family decide to return to Japan.<sup>96</sup> The first recorded gakuen in California was San Francisco's Shogakko, established in 1902.<sup>97</sup> Japanese schools flourished throughout the state as Nisei children grew in numbers and age. Similar to Japantowns across California, San Francisco had a variety of language schools sponsored by Buddhist and Christian churches, as well as independent organizations. The Sano School was established in 1906 as part of the community's response to the Board of Education's policy toward segregated schools. Issei parents formed the school as a boycott measure. It was located at 1761-65 Post Street, now the site of the national JACL headquarters.<sup>98</sup> In 1912, the Japanese Association of America countered attacks on Japanese schools as promoting "Emperor worship" by described their purpose as inculcating Japanese character and American spirit to develop permanent U.S. residents.<sup>99</sup>

San Francisco's Japantown relied on numerous organizations to weave the community together and to advocate for its interests. Kenjinkai, associations of immigrants from various prefectures in Japan, played both economic and social roles for Nikkei. Shared identities and connections were reinforced at annual picnics, dinners, and other social functions; Issei would also pool their funds to help a fellow Kenjinkai associate in need.<sup>100</sup> Even though the allegiance to prefectural associations shrank as ties to the home country diminished, Kenjinkai flourished up until WWII. The 1941 *Japanese American News* directory lists over a dozen *kenjinkai* in San Francisco's Japantown.

The leading economic and political organization for early Japanese immigrants was established in San Francisco in 1900. Begun as the Japanese Deliberative Council of America, the organization sought to "expand the rights of Imperial subjects in America and to maintain the Japanese national image" in the face of growing anti-Japanese activism. By 1908, a consortium of local councils was formed and overseen by the Japanese Association headquarters in San Francisco. In addition to fighting the anti-Japanese crusade, the Japanese Association was given bureaucratic functions by the Japanese government, which treated the Association as its representative in many areas. Just prior to WWII, the San Francisco Japanese Association, Japanese Association of America, and the Japanese Benevolent Society all shared quarters at 1619 Laguna Street.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> San Francisco Japantown Task Force "Data Sheet: Kinmon Gakuen Building – Japanese Language School," 2004.

<sup>96</sup> Brian Niiya, ed. *Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to the Present* (New York: Facts on File, 1993) p. 189-90.

<sup>97</sup> Five Views: An Ethnic Site Survey

<sup>98</sup> *San Francisco's Japantown*, p. 26.

<sup>99</sup> Alexander Yamato, "Golden Gate Institute (Kinmon Gakuen) Historic Resources Inventory," (Sacramento: Office of Historic Preservation, 1979).

<sup>100</sup> Niiya, *Japanese American History*, p. 200-01.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 187. *The Japanese American Directory 1941*, p. 1.

The Japanese American Citizen's League also began in San Francisco. Founded in 1918 by a small group of Nisei students as the American Loyalty League, within a decade chapters of the renamed Japanese American's Citizens League were active across the West promoting citizenship, loyalty, and patriotism to the United States. In 1941, the organization's offices were at 1623 Webster Street. The JACL's cooperation with the U.S. government as WWII unfolded has led to its controversial place in Japanese American history. Yet the organization, whose national headquarters are at 1765 Sutter Street, has been the largest and most prominent Japanese American political organization for decades and a leader in advocating for Asian American civil rights.<sup>102</sup>

### Illustration – Japanese American Citizen's League 1929 Collection of Japanese American National Library

#### *World War II and Internment*

The Japanese Navy's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 abruptly ended the prosperity established by Japanese immigrants in the U.S. In Japantown, prominent Japanese American businessmen, Japanese clergy, and school teachers tagged as "enemy aliens" were rounded up in FBI sweeps and detained in jail and eventually in Department of Justice internment camps. Ichiro Kataoka, owner of the Aki Hotel, was among the first arrested; guests in the hotel's banquet room attending a gathering of the Hiroshima Kenjinkai were held that night and questions for hours. Japantown residents were scrutinized by automobiles filled with curious outsiders who drove through the streets of Nihonmachi. "They just kept coming and coming...staring at us," remembered Yo Hironaka.<sup>103</sup>

Anti-Japanese hysteria in San Francisco intensified with American entry into World War II, fanned by editorials in San Francisco newspapers and by nativist and agricultural interest groups. Under the authority of Executive Order 9066 signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in February 1942, General John L. DeWitt issued a series of military proclamations from the headquarters of the Western Defense Command at the Presidio of San Francisco. The proclamations first established restricted military zones on the West Coast within which "all enemy aliens and all persons of Japanese ancestry" were subject to military regulation. By late March 1942, DeWitt began issuing Civilian Exclusion Orders expelling "all persons of Japanese ancestry, including aliens and non-aliens" from the West Coast military zones. In a little over 4 months, more than 120,000 Americans of Japanese Ancestry were forced from their homes and interned by the government under the guise of national security. Forty years later, after extensive research and testimony, the Congressional Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians would find that Executive Order 9066 and the internment of

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<sup>102</sup> Niiya, p. 182-84. *The Japanese American Directory 1941*, p. 2

<sup>103</sup> Wong, *Generations*, p. 39.

Japanese Americans was "a grave injustice" arising from "race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership."<sup>104</sup>

### Illustration – Japantown residents registering at Kinmon Gakuen, 1942 Collection of Bancroft Library

The entire Japanese community of San Francisco, both citizens and foreign-born, was ordered to register and eventually report for processing to various sites throughout San Francisco including the *Kinmon Gakuen* building on Bush Street and the YMCA Building on Buchanan Street. By April, they were sent to various "Assembly" centers, like Tanforan, a converted racetrack in San Bruno, used as a temporary detention camp. From there, they were shipped out to permanent internment camps where they lived under armed guard and surrounded by barbed wire. Most San Francisco residents were relocated to a camp known as Topaz, located near Delta, Utah. Without charges, hearings, or trials, many families remained in the camps until 1945.

During the war, the Japanese Salvation Army and the Buddhist Church facilities were used to store family belongings and personal property. The Devolet Brothers, proprietors of a furniture store on Geary Street, also stored Japanese families' items for the duration of the war. Unfortunately, a number of storage sites that could not be secured were raided or vandalized by looters. The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco also took responsibility for the oversight of real estate belonging to some of those who were in the camps. Not all Japanese American property ownership was able to be maintained, however. Thirteen properties in the core of Japantown passed from Japanese to non-Japanese ownership during the war, as well as three other properties that were taken over by the Alien Property Department of the federal government.<sup>105</sup>

Despite such treatment and obstacles, Japanese Americans showed tremendous courage and fortitude. A few resisted the government's restrictions, such as Fred Korematsu, an East Bay resident who challenged the constitutionality of the internment before the Supreme Court. His wartime conviction was reversed only in 1983. Others resisted in the camps or refused the draft on the basis that the government violated their rights and freedoms with the incarceration of their families. They served up to three years in federal penitentiaries, and at war's end, President Truman granted them pardons.

Many complied with the draft, from which they had been excluded until 1944,<sup>106</sup> and agreed to fight for the United States Armed Forces, or to support the American war effort in tangible ways. The famed Japanese American 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team, which fought in Europe, became the most decorated unit in American military history.

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<sup>104</sup> Personal Justice Denied, Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, December 1982, p. 18.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> tenBroek, Jacobus et al., *Prejudice, War and the Constitution*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1954, p. 166.

Others served as soldier linguists in the Pacific Theater as members of the Military Intelligence Service. Building 640 in the San Francisco Presidio served as the Military Intelligence Service Language School and was the birthplace of the Defense Language Institute, where Japanese American enlisted men secretly started training one month prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Eventually, the MIS language students served in the US Army, attached to every unit in the Pacific Theater. They served as linguist soldiers; translating, decoding documents, interrogating Japanese prisoners, and interpreting commands, which ultimately resulted in hastening the War's end. In all, many Japanese Americans died in service.

### *Japantown Without Nikkei*

Non-Japanese residents of the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood felt the impact of evacuation. Joe Julian recalled the departure of fellow students at St. Francis Xavier as one of his saddest childhood memories. Others described the surprisingly abrupt change to a thriving neighborhood. Reverend Wilbur Hamilton echoed many who witnessed the evacuation when he said, "One day they were there – and the next day they were gone." Maya Angelou commented that none of her friends and no member of her household on Post Street mentioned the absence of the former Nikkei neighbors. However, her celebrated memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, described the changes in the Western Addition wrought by WWII as a "visible revolution.... The Japanese shops which sold products to Nisei customers were taken over by enterprising Negro businessmen, and in less than a year became permanent homes away from home for the newly arrived Southern Blacks. Where the odors of tempura, raw fish and *cha* had dominated, the aroma of chitlings, greens and ham hocks now prevailed."<sup>107</sup>

African Americans found new opportunities during the war years, but apart from the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, San Francisco's organized labor unions continued the discriminatory policies that had kept people of color out of permanent industrial jobs.<sup>108</sup> As an example, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, the largest union representing shipyard workers, fought admission of African Americans bitterly, and finally set up separate and unequal Jim Crow auxiliary unions. These policies meant that, even as jobs were plentiful, they did not lay the foundation for Black workers to climb the economic ladder when the war ended. Wartime migrants to the Bay Area found that housing was as scarce as employment was abundant. San Francisco's "small but established" African American population in the Japantown-Fillmore area, along with increasing residential segregation throughout the rest of San Francisco, made the neighborhood a logical magnet for incoming Black migrants participating in what many historians have called "California's second gold rush."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, (New York: Random House, 1969). p. 203-204.

<sup>108</sup> Broussard, pp. 153-58.

<sup>109</sup> Watts and Pepin, p. 32.

Illustration – Mayor Rossi visiting new residents in Japantown, 1943 Courtesy of San Francisco Public Library

The acute housing shortage caused by tens of thousands of workers who flooded in from the South and Midwest for defense jobs was partially eased by homes made vacant by Japanese internment. However, a 1943 hearing before the House Naval Affairs Committee raised alarms about the extreme overcrowding in the Western Addition, one of the few neighborhoods where Black San Franciscans could find housing. The City's Director of Public Health, Dr. C.J. Geiger, paid special attention to supposed deficiencies in Black newcomers' "careless housekeeping" of already dilapidated structures.<sup>110</sup> In contrast, the Black press argued that people who worked "all day for the maintenance of democracy" faced intolerable housing conditions.<sup>111</sup>

San Francisco's African American population increased during WWII by 600%, with most of the 43,000 Black residents living in the Fillmore.<sup>112</sup> Prominent African American sociologist Charles S. Johnson led a pioneering study of San Francisco's Black population in 1943, which concluded that "Black migrants were ambitious, enterprising, and industrious young men and women in the prime of life."<sup>113</sup> The increased population and disposable income granted by relatively well-paying defense jobs brought with it need for recreation and services that were soon supplied by restaurants, shops, and clubs that made the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood a hub for Black culture throughout the Bay Area.

Illustration – 1944 Advertisement for the California Theatre Restaurant formerly the Cherryland Sukiyaki Restaurant, reproduced in *Harlem of the West*

From this energetic new community charismatic Black leadership emerged. Physician Carleton B. Goodlett arrived in San Francisco in 1945 and began his involvement with two leading Black newspapers based in the Fillmore; the weekly *San Francisco Reporter* and the *Sun-Reporter*.<sup>114</sup> Influential minister Reverend Hamilton Boswell was Pastor at Jones Memorial Church, which began out of a storefront at 1901 Bush Street in 1943 and moved to its current location at 1975 Post Street with over 300 members just two years later.<sup>115</sup> Internationally acclaimed theologian, Howard Thurman, arrived from the East Coast and founded the nation's first inter-racial congregation, the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, whose first home was in the Japanese Presbyterian Church at

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<sup>110</sup> Alan Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: A Metropolis in Perspective*, 254.

<sup>111</sup> Broussard, p. 174.

<sup>112</sup> Jill Stoner and Michael Willis, *Digging in the Fillmore: The Search for the Soul of a San Francisco Street*, Report for the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, 1996.

<sup>113</sup> Broussard, p. 138.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 182.

<sup>115</sup> "Church History" on Jones Memorial United Methodist Church website at [www.jonesumc.org/jones\\_history.html](http://www.jonesumc.org/jones_history.html)

1500 Post Street.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, Thurman's wife, Sue Bailey Thurman, organized a local chapter of the National Council of Negro Women.

During the first half of the twentieth century, African Americans, like most other San Franciscans, especially working-class immigrants, made do with existing structures to create the physical landscape of their community. Residential and commercial buildings designed and developed by others were reinhabited and, in some instances, repurposed, to meet the burgeoning Black population's need for shelter, space for commerce, and entertainment venues. Not surprisingly, given wartime restrictions and lack of access to capital, no purpose-built structures reflect this thriving community during the war. Post-war urban renewal's assault on Japantown also erased many of the sites that hold the history of San Francisco's "Harlem of the West." Yet, the Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan area still holds structures that embody this complex history. An art deco commercial structure at 1843-47 Fillmore Street held the Yokohama Art Goods Store before World War II and the offices of Black dentist, Lloyd Dickey, by the 1950s. Traces of Black community life also include a modest storefront at 1902 Fillmore that held Roberta's Millinery. Minnie's Can-Do Club, which opened in a former radio shop in 1940, had the longest run in one location of any of the Fillmore jazz clubs.<sup>117</sup> The club closed in 1974, but its former home at 1915 Fillmore Street still stands, as do the structures that housed the Blue Willow Inn and Restaurant at Bush and Buchanan, and the Binford Hotel and Town Club at 1961-69 Sutter Street.

## **Resettlement and Redevelopment**

### *Resettling in Japantown*

Following the war, many Japanese Americans returned to Japantown, which had largely become occupied by wartime defense industry workers. Starting over was a particular hardship for most Japanese American families returning from the camps, as temporary housing was often full and re-entry into society was met with hostility and mistrust. The experiences of Japanese Americans in the decade after WWII has only recently become the subject of attention, most prominently in the RE:generations oral history project that has documented post-war resettlement in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Jose and Chicago.<sup>118</sup> Few scholars have explored resettlement in San Francisco's Japantown in detail; San Francisco State University Professor Ben Kobashigawa is currently researching post-WWII resettlement in the San Francisco Bay Area and Reid Yoshio

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<sup>116</sup> *Sacred Places*, p. 221.

<sup>117</sup> Pepin and Watts, p. 83.

<sup>118</sup> REgenerations was a collaborative project with the Japanese American National Museum, the Chicago Japanese American Historical Society, Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego and the Japanese American resource Center/Museum of San Jose.

Yokoyama wrote an undergraduate thesis on Japanese American resettlement in San Francisco in 2007.<sup>119</sup>

Former evacuees held complex, and often ambivalent, feelings about returning to the communities from which they'd been forcibly uprooted. Nisei journalist, Bill Hosokawa, argued, in a *Pacific Citizen* editorial that moving eastward “offered unexpected possibilities for advancement and social assimilation...in the long run, the integration and acceptance of Japanese Americans would be speeded by widespread dispersal.”<sup>120</sup> Given vituperative pronouncements against Nikkei returning to California by organizations such as the American Legion and Native Sons of the Golden West, this perspective is understandable. Following a 1944 tour of San Francisco’s Japantown to assess post-war prospects, Japanese American Citizens’ league (JACL) president Saburo Kido identified four major areas of concern – housing, jobs, labor union antipathy, and potentially difficult relations with the many African Americans who had moved into the neighborhood. “Since they occupy the former Japanese residential district, they will resent being displaced by returning evacuees,” Kido wrote.<sup>121</sup>

The federal War Relocation Authority (WRA), the Committee on Resettlement of Japanese Americans, and the American Friends Service Committee were the most active forces outside the community involved with resettling Japanese Americans during the war and at its close. In part, their policies, designed to disperse Japanese students and workers across the U.S., were based on the notion that this would prevent the reestablishment of “Little Tokyos” and “Little Osakas”, and would assist with a broader assimilation into mainstream American society. Yet, despite these policies, and a fear of violence that was born out of sporadic incidents across California, former Japantown residents longed to return to their homes and Nikkei from other communities also desired to relocate to San Francisco based on the former strength of its Japanese American community.

The War Relocation Authority coordinated formal resettlement of San Francisco’s Japantown after Proclamation 21 of December 18, 1944 rescinded the West Coast ban on persons of Japanese ancestry. From its San Francisco base, the Northern California WRA office oversaw resettlement of evacuees from San Jose to Santa Rosa up until May of 1946, when the WRA regional office in San Francisco closed. The WRA, the American Friends Service Committee, and local civic groups such as the Council for Civic Unity organized support to ease the transition, but it was still a difficult and painful process for most.<sup>122</sup> Approximately 2,500 Japanese returned to San Francisco in the first months of 1946 – nearly half of the pre-war population, and almost two-thirds had come

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<sup>119</sup> Reid Yoshio Yokoyama, *Return, Rebuild and Redevelop: Japanese American Resettlement in San Francisco, 1945-1958*, undergraduate honors thesis, Stanford University, May 2007.

<sup>120</sup> Yokoyama, p. 13, 100.

<sup>121</sup> Saburo Kido to Members and Friends, Bulletin #33, November 14, 1944, 1. Box 35, JA Relocation – Non-Printed Matter, John W. Nason Papers, Hoover Institution Archives cited in Yokoyama, p. 58.

<sup>122</sup> *Iid.*, p. 55.

home by October of that year to begin the complex task of rebuilding individual lives, businesses and community organizations.<sup>123</sup>

Within two years, San Francisco's Nikkei population was back to its pre-war numbers; however, other California communities, such as Fresno, Berkeley and San Jose, saw their Japanese American population rise beyond pre-war numbers.<sup>124</sup> San Francisco State professor Ben Kobashigawa's current research indicates that the post-war population of Nikkei consisted predominately of newcomers to San Francisco. Kobashigawa's analysis of residential listings from 1948 and 1952 in directories published by the *Nichi Bei Times* and *Hokubei Mainichi* newspapers show that though San Francisco's listings doubled in those four years, only about one-third of the 1952 listings were names of people who had been residents prior to the war. If many of these people were new to San Francisco, they had no trouble identifying which neighborhood would be the most amenable. Nearly seventy-five percent of all of the post-war listings Kobashigawa found were for addresses in the Western Addition, with most of those located in Japantown.<sup>125</sup>

The post-war housing shortage was extreme throughout the Bay Area, and many Nikkei lived in short-term hostels while they scrambled to find more permanent lodgings. Sturge Memorial Hall at 1516 Post Street offered housing under the auspices of the Japanese Presbyterian Church next door.<sup>126</sup> The Church was able to regain its property from the Church of Fellowship of All Peoples. Portions of the Pine Street Buddhist Church and the Evangelical and Reformed Church on Post Street also served as hostels into 1946. Even the Booker T. Washington Hotel at 1540 Ellis Street reserved space for returning Nikkei.<sup>127</sup> Some apartments were made available in defense housing, so that over 150 Nikkei families lived in the Hunter's Point area project in 1946. But this too was only temporary as most of the structures built for war workers were intended to be destroyed when peace prevailed.

Finding jobs was an equally daunting task for returning Nikkei. Potential employers told WRA job counselors that current employees would never accept working alongside "a Jap,"<sup>128</sup> an argument that had also been heard just three years earlier about African American workers in defense industries. San Francisco's largest post-war employer of Nikkei was reportedly the Simmons Mattress Company, which employed over 150 Issei and Nisei laborers.<sup>129</sup> Yet, most older Issei found it impossible to restart the businesses they had built before incarceration and many of them turned to work as gardeners and domestics. Lily's Employment Agency at Steiner and Post streets helped Nikkei find

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ben Kobashigawa, "San Francisco Returnees and Newcomers Map," August 2006.

<sup>126</sup> Yokoyama, p. 82.

<sup>127</sup> Buddhist Churches of America: A Legacy of the First 100 Years, p. 306. Rosalyn Tonai, "Memo to Japantown Task Force Regarding the Evangelical and reformed Church: San Francisco Japantown's Japanese Christian Church and Dormitory and its relevance to the former Hokubei Mainichi Building site." April 23, 2006. Yokoyama, p. 82.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>129</sup> Yokoyama, p. 83, 105.

work as window washers, seamstresses, domestic servants, and gardeners. A handful of small businesses, such as the Sugaya family's Pine Street Laundry and Honnami Taieido art goods store at 1630 Buchanan Street, were reestablished quickly. The Honanami family's possessions had been safeguarded and returned by their African American landlord.<sup>130</sup> But for others reclaiming space and clientele took great effort. Goshado Bookstore reopened in 1947 at 1705 Post Street; their former site at 1698 Post Street became the home of Soko Hardware. The Matsumoto family also struggled to purchase the property at 1919 Fillmore Street that had housed their dry cleaning shop and residence before wartime evacuation. The family persisted, however, and was able to move back into the building and reestablish the California Cleaners.<sup>131</sup>

### Illustration – Pine Street Laundry, 1946 Reproduced in *Generations*

By 1949, Japantown had regained a lively, if reduced, commercial sector centered at Post and Buchanan streets. A 1948 Evacuation-Resettlement Directory published by the *Nichi Bei Times* listed over 150 businesses and services, down from pre-war listings of more than 400 Nikkei businesses.<sup>132</sup> Some pre-war establishments, such as the Ota Sewing Machine Co. at 1932 Buchanan Street and the Suzuki Apartments at 1802 Laguna Street, were revived. New businesses were opened by longtime residents such as Hatsuto Yamada, a former partner in the pre-war Nippon Drugstore, who founded Jim's Drug Company at 1698 Sutter Street.<sup>133</sup> The Takahashi Trading Company opened in 1947 at 1661 Post Street. Some landmarks of Nikkei commerce, such as the Azumaya Tofu Factory, Nippon Goldfish, and the Aki Hotel resumed operations in their former locations. Japanese-run hotels also thrived and included the Annex Hotel at 1612 Fillmore Street and the Anglo Hotel Apartments (over the Anglo California Bank) at the corner of Fillmore and Geary streets.<sup>134</sup>

Community institutions were also reclaimed and revived. The Japanese YMCA, which had been rented to the USO to serve African American troops, was returned to the Japanese American community under the leadership of newly elected President Fred Hoshiyama and was renamed the Buchanan YMCA.<sup>135</sup> Most of the churches were able to resume services within a year of the community's return, although several had to negotiate reuse of their spaces with the African American congregations that had come to occupy the facilities in their absence. An inter-denominational organization, *Shukyoka Konwakai*, was formed in 1948 "to foster communication, understanding, and better relationships among religious leaders in the community."<sup>136</sup> By 1949, language schools at the Buddhist Church and St. Frances Xavier Church, as well as Kinmon Gakuen, had reopened. Nisei social life thrived as Boy Scout Troops resumed, athletic teams were formed and dances were hosted in community spaces such as the Buchanan Street Y.

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<sup>130</sup> Wong, *Generations*, p. 55.

<sup>131</sup> KQED, *The Fillmore*, 2000.

<sup>132</sup> Yokoyama, p. 107.

<sup>133</sup> Japantown Task Force, San Francisco's Japantown, p. 74.

<sup>134</sup> Yokoyama, p.

<sup>135</sup> Buchanan YMCA exhibit text.

<sup>136</sup> Japantown task Force Data Sheet: Japanese American religious federation,

**Illustration The “Arbees,” a Nisei women’s bowling team, 1953 reproduced in *Generations***

Political organizations were renewed and began campaigns to tackle discriminatory legislation. The JACL and Nikkei newspapers worked to promote the Japanese American cause in 1946 when Proposition 15 threatened to increase enforcement of the Alien Land Law. The proposition was soundly defeated, but the law was not completely erased until 1956. A new Anti-Discrimination Committee was also formed by the JACL to fight restrictive covenants and barriers against Issei citizenship.<sup>137</sup> Japanese and other Asian immigrants were finally able to become naturalized citizens after passage of the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. San Francisco’s City Hall hosted naturalization ceremonies for hundreds of Issei over the following months.<sup>138</sup>

Nikkei were rebuilding the Japantown community within a neighborhood that had witnessed a dramatic transformation during the war years. The area was still multi-racial, but now widely known for its African American population, and especially a thriving nightlife supported by Black jazz and blues clubs. Nightclubs such as Jimbo’s Bop City on Sutter Street, and Fillmore Street’s Club Flamingo and Minnie’s Can-Do Club formed a new “Harlem of the West” that coexisted with the shops and restaurants of revitalized Japantown. By the time of the 1950 Census, although Nikkei population in the Japantown area were nearly back to their pre-war levels, both Whites and African Americans far outnumbered them.<sup>139</sup>

**Illustration – Jimbo’s Bop City and Uoki Sakai on Post Street, Collection of National Japanese American Historical Society**

Although tension over critical resources such as housing and jobs was probably not uncommon, the communities coexisted and many recall the post-war years as a thriving, polyglot era. Judy Hamaguchi described post-war Nihonmachi as a “great neighborhood for a child to grow up,” despite living in a cramped subdivided Victorian flat on Post Street. Hamaguchi poignantly recalled the nights that next-door neighbor Jim Edwards, owner of famed Jimbo’s Bop City, shepherded she and her 3-year-old brother to find their mother as she waitressed across the street at the Miyako restaurant.<sup>140</sup> In 1947, the Buchanan YMCA and the Japantown YWCA inaugurated an interracial youth program to

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<sup>137</sup> Yokoyama, p. 112-13.

<sup>138</sup> *San Francisco’s Japantown*, p. 76.

<sup>139</sup> Seventeenth Census of the United States (1950), Census Tracts J-2, J-3, J-6, J-7 and J-8 (bounded by Gough, Eddy, Steiner, Fulton, Geary, Baker, & California streets) The population of these Tracts included 14,716 Whites, 14,652 Blacks, and 4,820 other non-whites, who, it may be assumed were almost all Japanese. Although these Tracts together encompass an area larger than that defined as the Japantown Core, it is not possible to break the census data into more precise increments.

<sup>140</sup> Judy Hamaguchi, “Japantown, The Way We Were.” *Nikkei Heritage*, v. XII, no. 4, Fall 2000/Winter 2001, p. 5.

serve African American and Japanese American children and teens.<sup>141</sup> Steve Nakajo recalled the 1950s neighborhood of his youth; “I had a mixed group of friends. Japanese. Filipino. Black. Mixed, like the neighborhood. We had the J-town walk. The J-town feel. When we got down to the Fillmore, we’d check everyone out and they’d check us out, because you had to know who your rivals were. The Fillmore was tough, but happenin’.”<sup>142</sup>

### *Redevelopment: Western Addition*

In 1948, a portion of San Francisco’s Western Addition including much of Japantown was selected as one of the first large-scale urban renewal projects in the nation. New federal policies under the National Housing Act of 1949 designed to address “urban blight,” assigned penalty points to neighborhoods for major influxes of new residents, overcrowding, tuberculosis, and non-White population – all characteristics of the Japantown-Fillmore area. San Francisco’s planning department had already begun establishing a case for rebuilding older neighborhoods with maps of blighted areas and a pilot study of redevelopment possibilities for the Western Addition.<sup>143</sup> One survey of the blocks between California and O’Farrell streets, Buchanan and Laguna streets documented overcrowded homes, many without utilities, and some with sleeping quarters and cooking areas contained within the same room; a code violation and indicator of poverty conditions. A 1947 city map produced to promote the public health benefits of urban renewal compared the city’s costs in the Western Addition and the Marina districts. Not surprisingly, the number of County hospital cases and associated cost to the city posed by wealthy Marina district residents was just a small fraction of that in the Western Addition.

### Illustration – Graphic Argument for Public Health as Urban Renewal Issue, 1947 Courtesy of San Francisco Public Library

San Francisco’s political and business elite sought to position their city for economic growth, especially in relationship to the Bay Area’s booming suburbs.<sup>144</sup> The Western Addition fit the needs of city planners and downtown developers, who saw the neighborhood as the best site for new commercial and housing developments that would increase tax revenues and provide new vehicle access through the city, connecting downtown with the middle-class neighborhoods of the Richmond and Sunset districts. By cataloguing the Western Addition’s “substandard and slum housing conditions, overcrowding, lack of recreational space and intermixture of deleterious influences,”<sup>145</sup> economic and social arguments were made for removing the businesses, residences and residents of the neighborhood.

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<sup>141</sup> Buchanan YMCA exhibit text.

<sup>142</sup> Pepin and Watts, p. 40.

<sup>143</sup> Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area*, p. 288.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. “The Tentative Plan for the Redevelopment of Western Addition Project Area Number One and Related Documents.” September 1952..

From its inception, leaders of the ethnic communities that now called the neighborhood home were alarmed and worked to rally opposition to the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's (SFRA) plans. In July 1948, the Buchanan Street YMCA hosted a meeting of over 300 residents, who heard NAACP President and publisher of the *Sun-Reporter*, Dr. Carleton Goodlett, speak about the threats posed by urban renewal. *Progressive News* publisher, Michi Onuma, cautioned the gathered throng that "no guarantees have been provided that new housing built in the area will not be priced out of the range of the average worker living there" and that "scores of small businessmen would be wiped out by the plan." The Council for Civic Unity organized a meeting of Japanese American property owners and pledged to fight for "protection of minority groups in redevelopment plans."<sup>146</sup> The JACL expressed its acute concern about redevelopment impacts and demanded that the SFRA incorporate several points into its plan to protect the rights of residents and small business owners:

1. Non-segregation and non-discrimination in new dwellings.
2. Construction of permanent, low-cost public housing.
3. First priority to people displaced from the area into newly built units.
4. First priority to small businessmen and professional people in commercial areas of new building projects.
5. Full protection of present property owners in selling, plus equal and full opportunity to participate in construction of new units if financially able to do so.<sup>147</sup>

Despite these prophetic voices, and years of delay caused by lawsuits and the complications of developing a plan for relocating residents, the SFRA began acquiring properties in the late 1950s and mass clearance of the neighborhood through the use of eminent domain was accomplished within ten years. This undertaking was conducted in two project areas: A-1 and A-2<sup>148</sup>.

#### *Redevelopment: Western Addition Project Area A-1*

#### **Illustration(s) – Redevelopment areas A-1 and A-2 maps**

The A-1 redevelopment area encompassed an irregular area of 27 blocks, including much of Japantown south of Post Street. The SFRA's Western Addition Project Office was established in the Buchanan YMCA building in 1958. Project Area evictions were non-negotiable and there was precedent established for relocation assistance to residents and businesses in this area. Yet some business owners found that the SFRA had a strategy for driving their purchase prices down. Vernon Thornton's thriving bowling alley on Fillmore Street lost its clientele as buildings around it fell to the wrecking ball. By the

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<sup>146</sup> Pepin and Watts, 166-67. Yokoyama, p. 115.

<sup>147</sup> "San Francisco JACL Opposes Present Western Addition Redevelopment Plan," *Nichi Bei Times*, July 3, 1948, 1. cited in Yokoyama, p. 116.

<sup>148</sup> See Pease, Ben. "Japantown & Vicinity" map.

time the SFRA made an offer on his property, Thornton calculated that he received a fraction of its former worth.<sup>149</sup>

### Illustration – Demolition for Geary Street Expressway, 1960 Collection of San Francisco Public Library

Eight thousand residents were evicted by the A-1 phase of redevelopment, displacing the neighborhood's multi-ethnic populace without a comprehensive plan for finding new homes. Nearly all of the area's residents rented or leased their homes and commercial establishments before urban renewal and thus received no relocation assistance or compensation. Additionally, only 686 units of the 2,014 new housing units constructed under the SFRA plan were offered at low to moderate rental prices, making it almost impossible for previous tenants to return to the neighborhood.<sup>150</sup> The demolition of single- and two-family residences and the construction of large, low-income, multi-family complexes south of Geary Boulevard changed the mix and fabric of the community as well. Loss of housing and urban decentralization led Japanese American families who could afford to move to relocate elsewhere. The gradual lessening of restrictive covenants allowed some Nikkei to move to the outer suburbs of the Richmond and Sunset districts of San Francisco and to the East Bay cities of Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, and El Cerrito. African Americans, however, found fewer options for relocation as racial discrimination shaped their housing opportunities even more drastically. By 1960, African Americans represented 50 percent of Western Addition residents, up from 34 percent ten years earlier. The absolute number of Nikkei dropped from 5,383 to 3,914 in the same decade, but due to the neighborhood's overall population decline, their percentage of the total population remained at about 12 to 13 percent.<sup>151</sup>

Many people were displaced numerous times as they moved from homes in the A-1 area. Yayoi Tsukuhara described being evicted, with her husband Taro and young son, Michael, at least six times during the urban renewal period. The Tsukuharas were among the lucky few that finally gained a new permanent resident in one of the few affordable housing projects that were built. Taro Tsukuhara was a member of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and a trusted associate of ILWU leader Louis Goldblatt, who spearheaded the establishment of the St. Francis Square Cooperative Apartments.<sup>152</sup> SFRA had assembled three blocks south of Geary Boulevard to be developed for low- and moderate-income families. Through a competition to select a developer/designer team, the partnership of the ILWU and Pacific Maritime Association, with the architectural firm of Marquis and Stoller, and landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin, were chosen to provide 300 units of affordable and safe housing that would

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<sup>149</sup> John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). pp. 182-83.

<sup>150</sup> Shizue Siegel, "Nihonmachi and Urban Renewal," *Nikkei Heritage*, v. XIII, n. 4 Fall/Winter 2000-2001, p. 20-21.

<sup>151</sup> Siegel, "Nihonmachi and Urban Renewal," p. 9.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Yayoi Tsukuhara, November 2007.

retain families who were “fleeing to the suburbs.”<sup>153</sup> The progressive policies of ILWU leadership met the multi-ethnic neighborhood’s need through a policy of racially integrated housing. The original formula for tenants was to be 50 percent White, 27 percent African American, 21 percent Asian, and 2 percent other ethnicities. However, as the first president of the Cooperative Association, Taro Tsukuhara was instrumental in shifting the racial percentages to equal numbers of White, Black and Asian residents. Yayoi Tsukuhara remembered seeking out Nikkei friends who had lost homes in Nihonmachi and inviting them to join them at St. Francis Square, “We were so happy to be able to tell them ‘no more evictions’.”<sup>154</sup> The 300 units were completely sold out within six months of announcement of sale in March 1963 and were occupied by February 1964.

### Illustration – St. Francis Square

St. Francis Square was not only the first racially integrated housing coop on the West Coast, it pioneered an equity model of ownership that allowed residents to stay in their units, with increased payments, if their income rose above FHA limitations.<sup>155</sup> This led to a remarkably stable residential profile, and a waiting list that has been lengthy since the project was completed. The project is also notable for its design, which has been widely lauded as a model for high-density, low-rise family housing. Breaking the street grid kept through traffic on the periphery and created an interior environment of generous, well-designed open spaces.<sup>156</sup>

From the neighborhood perspective, St. Francis Square is one of the few success stories. By 1960, about half of Japantown’s core had been razed, displacing at least 1,500 residents and more than 60 small Japanese American businesses. At least 38 parcels passed from Japanese ownership to the SFRA during this period.<sup>157</sup> Within ten years, the demolished structures were replaced by the eight-lane Geary Expressway, the Japan Cultural and Trade Center and towering housing complexes such as The Sequoias, a 25-story 300-unit pre-cast concrete clad retirement community built in 1969.<sup>158</sup> All of these developments exemplify aspects of urban planning and design under post-WWII urban renewal policies, including an auto-centered environment and massive, single use development far exceeding the historic scale of the neighborhood.

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<sup>153</sup> Rudy Bruner Award Application, 1987 on the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence Digital Archive <http://libweb.lib.buffalo.edu/bruner/>

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Yayoi Tsukuhara, November 2007.

<sup>155</sup> Rudy Bruner Award Application.

<sup>156</sup> The designers hoped that partnerships with the adjacent YMCA and Rafaell Weill School would provide community facilities and offset the relatively small units. These never seem to have been realized but the complex received a Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence in 1987 and has been a beloved home for generations.

<sup>157</sup> Sales Ledgers

<sup>158</sup> David Gebhard, Eric Sandweiss and Robert Winter, eds. *The Guide to Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985), p. 92.

Funds from the federal highway program created the new Geary Expressway, which sliced through what had historically been the Japantown-Fillmore neighborhood with its southern border along O'Farrell. Hence, the Geary Expressway became a physical and psychological dividing line between the African American communities to the south and the White communities to the north, with Japanese Americans providing what Doris Matsumoto described as the "grey area in the middle."<sup>159</sup> Along with the six-lane Geary Expressway, the largest feature of SFRA's redevelopment plan for the area was the Japanese Cultural and Trade Center. The first major project undertaken by SFRA director, Justin Herman, the Center was designed to solicit investment from Japan and to create a destination that would appeal to San Francisco's tourists. National-Braemar, a firm backed by investors from San Francisco and Hawaii, was selected by SFRA to be the master developer for the property, with the Center's structures to be operated by four different entities upon completion. In 1962, National-Braemar brought Kintetsu Enterprises Company of America, a new investment arm formed by the Kinki Nippon Railway, into the project. The Center's design, like its funding, was a bi-national project. Nisei architect Minoru Yamasaki served as the primary designer, with Tokyo-based Yoshiro Taniguchi contributing the design for the Peace Plaza and Pagoda.<sup>160</sup>

#### Illustration – Miyako Hotel in the Japan Center, Courtesy of San Francisco Public Library

Construction began in 1965 and was completed by 1970, when it became known simply as the Japan Center. The complex included major tenants such as Hitachi; Nissan and Mitsubishi who introduced Japanese electronics and cars to American consumers; the up-scale Miyako Hotel; and Kinokuniya Bookstore, a subsidiary of Japan's largest bookstore chain.<sup>161</sup> By the mid-1970s, however; the large Japanese corporations no longer needed the Center's showrooms to win U.S. market share, and the Center became populated by a new generation of small-scale independent retail shops, primarily operated by Japanese nationals who were later joined by Korean immigrants.<sup>162</sup> Currently, the subject of a new round of urban development, the Japan Center merits further study and documentation. It exemplifies significant aspects of urban planning and design trends during the post-war period and is unique in the neighborhood for its scale as an ensemble of large buildings and open space covering three full blocks, as well as its architectural styling. In "The Difficult Legacy of Urban Renewal," Richard Longstreth argues that sites such as the Japan Center should be approached as cultural landscapes of a still contentious, but important period of urban history.<sup>163</sup>

#### *Redevelopment Western Addition Project Area A-2*

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<sup>159</sup> KQED, The Fillmore.

<sup>160</sup> Laguerre, p. 112.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 113

<sup>162</sup> Siegel, p. 21.

<sup>163</sup> Richard Longstreth, "The Difficult Legacy of Urban Renewal," in *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship*, v. 3, n. 1, Winter 2006.

Planning for the A-2 phase of redevelopment began even before ground was broken on the Japan Center, and encompassed an even larger area of seventy blocks and 277 acres surrounding the A-1 area and extending from Bush to Grove streets and from Broderick Street to Van Ness Avenue. As the SFRA announced plans for the launching of the Western Addition Project Area A-2, community members who had witnessed the ongoing mass evictions and clearance of the neighboring A-1 area became concerned and alarmed at the possibility of the same occurring in the remainder of Japantown. SFRA director, Justin Herman, stated his commitment to preserving existing buildings in the project area “as much as possible.”<sup>164</sup> In part at the urging of the SFRA, the United Committee for the Japantown Community (UCJC) was formed in 1962 with over 200 members. The group’s “Statement of Policy” made retention of Japanese American residents and businesses the highest priority. After negotiations with the SFRA, the UCJC formed the Nihonmachi Community Development Corporation (NCDC) in 1964, which became responsible for “allocating development sites to its members, undertaking the financing and development of shared facilities, [and] coordinating community interests” with the Agency. “Nihonmachi” became the formal designation for the four-block area bounded by Webster, Sutter, Bush and Laguna Streets.<sup>165</sup>

The architectural team of Rai Y. Okamoto and Van Bourg/Nakamura, was selected by the SFRA from a list of consultants drafted by the UCJC to prepare concept plans envisioning a “village-scale” environment and a community center for the new reduced Nihonmachi.<sup>166</sup> Okamoto and Van Bourg/Nakamura’s urban design study for Nihonmachi describes “the wishes of the local citizens” for an environment characterized by an “intimate scale of buildings and spaces.” These objectives were clearly a response to the massive scale of the Japan Center and its erasure of historic Japantown. The report devotes several pages to discussing the implications of the SFRA and UCJC’s expressed desire that “ethnic character” be encouraged wherever possible. Rather than propose that particular eras or styles of Japanese design be the model for a new Nihonmachi, the authors list aspects of traditional and contemporary design in Japan as “critical areas where sensitivity and good judgment should be applied.” Attention to Japanese use of materials, structure, space, modularity, roofs and gardens by “gifted architects and landscape architects” would “serve the special needs of a Nihonmachi.”<sup>167</sup>

Not surprisingly, Buchanan Mall, designed by Okamoto’s firm in the 1970s, reflects these qualities. The central plaza is framed by two-story commercial structures that refer to traditional Japanese villages through scale, massing and modular “half timber” patterns on the facades. Okamoto invited sculptor Ruth Asawa to create two fountains that punctuate Okamoto’s “cobblestone river” as it meanders through the center of the mall.

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<sup>164</sup> Seigel, Shizue. “San Francisco *Nihonmachi* and Urban Renewal”. *Nikkei Heritage*. XII, 4 and XIII, 1, Fall 2000/Winter 2001

<sup>165</sup> Seigel, p. 22.

<sup>166</sup> “History and Progress of the Nihonmachi Revitalization in the Western Addition A-2” in San Francisco Planning Department files.

<sup>167</sup> Van Bourg/Nakamura & Rai Y. Okamoto, “Nihonmachi: An Urban Design Study in the Western Addition Area A-2,” (San Francisco Redevelopment Agency: San Francisco, 1963), pp. 17-18.

Asawa's *Origami Fountains*, like the architecture surrounding it, echo Japanese cultural traditions in modernist form. Asawa also added bas-reliefs to cast concrete benches – the panels, created with local children, depict figures and scenes from Japanese folk tales.<sup>168</sup>

### Illustration – Buchanan Mall Looking Toward the Japan Center, Collection of San Francisco Redevelopment Agency

Van Bourg/Nakamura and Okamoto advised that “the retention of existing commercial enterprises together with selected new activities” would create the optimum mix for achieving neighborhood and SFRA goals.<sup>169</sup> Ultimately, redevelopment dramatically raised property values, and many small businesses that served the neighborhood were not able to return to Japantown after being evicted due to increased rents. Newspapers at that time reported property taxes tripling in areas adjacent to the new Japan Cultural and Trade Center. As more and more affordable housing and small family businesses were removed to make way for hotels and larger businesses, the tightly woven historic fabric of the neighborhood was further unraveled.

At the behest of progressive ministers, the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO) was formed in 1967 with a largely African American membership but also including Japanese American leaders such as Yori Wada of the Buchanan YMCA and Kathy Reyes of Christ United Presbyterian Church.<sup>170</sup> Led by Mary Rodgers and Hannibal Williams and formed to fight displacement and the destruction of the neighborhood, WACO organized residents, picketed the SFRA, and blocked bulldozers. In 1967, WACO filed an injunction that eventually succeeded in halting A-2 activities until the SFRA submitted a federally certified plan for the relocation of displaced residents as required by law.<sup>171</sup> All this activity slowed the SFRA's activities and shortly afterwards the SFRA hired a Western Addition minister, Reverend Wilbur Hamilton, to become the director of the A-2 project area. Ironically, Hamilton's tenure with the Agency included overseeing the demolition of the church

In 1968, Housing and Urban Development (HUD) began to require Project Area Committees be formed to review SFRA activities in the Western Addition. Shortly thereafter, the Western Addition Project Area Committee (WAPAC) was formed with representatives from 40 diverse Western Addition groups, many of whom were nominated by WACO.<sup>172</sup> In addition to reviewing the SFRA's activities, WAPAC also began securing SFRA jobs for its members, some of whom formed the Fillmore Economic Development Corporation. After WAPAC was founded however, WACO saw

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<sup>168</sup> Originally fabricated of corten steel, Asawa's *Origami Fountains* were recast in bronze in 1999. Japantown Task Force Data Sheet “Rai Okamoto's Rock River and Ruth Sawa's *Origami Fountains*.”

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>170</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/kqed/fillmore/learning/time.html>, Seigel, p. 23.

<sup>171</sup> See Seigel, Shizue. “San Francisco: Nihonmachi and Urban Renewal” *Nikkei Heritage* Fall/Winter Vol. XII/XIII (2001) National Japanese American Historical Society: 23.

<sup>172</sup> Okita, David. “Redevelopment of San Francisco Japantown.” Thesis. California State University, Hayward, 1980: 44.

less and less a need to address housing and displacement issues, and turned to providing surplus food to needy area residents.<sup>173</sup> Over 4,500 households and 1,145 businesses were removed by the A-2 phase, and 5,000 low-rent housing units were destroyed. Al Robles recalled coming home to his apartment at 1905 Bush Street to find the building partially demolished. The wrecking crew explained that they had “hit the wrong building,” but were tearing it down anyway since it was slated for redevelopment. Robles and his friends had to scramble through the night to remove his belongings before the building was razed the next morning.<sup>174</sup>

Despite the mass demolition during the A-2 phase, more than a handful of historic buildings were retained. A survey of structures with “esthetic, historic and cultural values” in the A-2 area was organized in 1961 by the San Francisco Conservation Committee; a group of planners, architects, and heritage advocates. Architectural historian, John Woodbridge, led the effort in consultation with staff from SFRA, which resulted in a 32-page report listing dozens of structures. Despite the nod to historic and cultural values, these buildings were categorized as being of exceptional, notable or limited merit solely on their architectural character and integrity. In his report to the San Francisco Conservation Committee, Woodbridge argues that the area is not favored with numerous structures of great architectural significance, but that the buildings “as a group...constitute an extremely valuable resource for the rehabilitation of the area. Properly integrated with new construction, they can provide a time dimension, which an all-new redevelopment painfully lacks. Their rich detail can provide a kind of visual interest that it is virtually impossible to provide in new construction, and it is hoped that their rehabilitation will be less costly than new construction.”<sup>175</sup>

### Illustration – relocating a Victorian in the Western Addition

The fight to save and often relocate Western Addition Victorian buildings was one of the catalysts for the founding of the Foundation for San Francisco Architectural Heritage and the establishment of the San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board. In the Fall of 1974, San Francisco Architectural Heritage and the SFRA moved thirteen Victorians across town to Biedeman Place between Ellis and O’Farrell streets. Another collection of 19<sup>th</sup>-century structures was formed at the corner of Sutter and Fillmore streets in the late 1970s. Named “Victorian Village,” the commercial development was conceived by WAPAC and SFRA staff to house retail shops, offices and residences. According to the May 1978 Western Addition News: A-2 Report, the plan involved moving six structures from various locations in the project area to join five buildings that remained en situ. One of the relocated structures, now home to Marcus Books at 1712

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<sup>173</sup> Mollenkopf, John H. *The Contested City* Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1983: 196.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Al Robles, January 2008.

<sup>175</sup> “Western Addition Area Two Survey of Structures with Visual and Historical Merit.” n.d. copy in archives of San Francisco Planning Department. John Woodbridge, “Architectural Conservation in Western Addition Area Two: A Report to the San Francisco Conservation Committee,” January 11, 1962, photocopy in archives of San Francisco Planning Department.

Fillmore Street, was the former Jimbo's Bop City Club that had been located at 1690 Post Street.<sup>176</sup>

Between 1966 and 1967, the SFRA's residential rehabilitation program, managed by Enid Sales, preserved more than 350 19<sup>th</sup>-century houses. Some owners were able to take advantage of the low-cost rehabilitation loans offered by SFRA, but many buildings were auctioned off by the SFRA to the highest bidder.<sup>177</sup> In July 1975, the SFRA mailed a circular announcing the sale of five Victorian homes on Bush, Sutter, Laguna and McAllister Streets. The Soto Zen Mission (former Ohabai Shalom Temple) was also for sale with a minimum bid price of \$39,600. The announcement specifies that bids from "holders of Residential Certificates of Preference," those property-owners who had lost their buildings to eminent domain and received certificates granting priority to return to the neighborhood, would be considered as buyers over others.<sup>178</sup> It is not clear how many former residents were able to take advantage of their Certificates of Preference, but later accounts indicate that the numbers were very small as rising property values priced former residents and businesspeople out of the area.<sup>179</sup>

The lives of many Sansei (third-generation Japanese Americans) "resonated with the political ferment and racial destabilization of the 1960s."<sup>180</sup> The creation of ethnic studies programs at San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley and the beginning of the Asian American movement in the late 1960s, led to new forms of activism and community development in Japantown that promoted social justice and the ethnic identity of Japanese Americans. In 1969, one year after the student-led strike for an ethnic studies program at San Francisco State, Sansei created the Japanese Community Youth Council (JCYC) to respond to needs of Nikkei children and youth. The first community-based organization, the JCYC was housed in Japantown in an SFRA-owned building at 1808A Sutter Street, which was rented by the group for one dollar a year. Many other newly established Japanese American organizations also rented the old, Victorian buildings owned by the SFRA. In 1971, Kimochi, Inc. was formed to address the needs of the elderly Issei, who were not being served by the mainstream service organizations due to cultural and language barriers. Subsequently, other Japantown-based, non-profit organizations grew, such as Nihonmachi Little Friends, Nobiru-kai, the Japanese Community and Cultural Center of Northern California (JCCCNC), the Japanese American National Library, the Japantown Arts and Media Workshop, Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach (formerly Nihonmachi Legal Outreach), and the National Japanese American Historical Society. All of these organizations were created as alternative, ethnically based organizations to serve the needs of the Japantown residents

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<sup>176</sup> Pepin and Watts, p. 138.

<sup>177</sup> Dave Weinstein, "Urban renewal: Enid sales helped save San Francisco's Victorian homes and never backed away from a preservation fight," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 19, 2008.

<sup>178</sup> "SFRA Offers Buildings for Sale," brochure in archives of San Francisco Planning Department, postmarked July 30, 1975.

<sup>179</sup> Venise Wagner, "Western Addition Residents," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 21, 1998.

<sup>180</sup> *Takahashi, Jere. Nisei, Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997) p. 169.*

and the Japanese American community to fill the service void existing in mainstream institutions.

### Illustration – Citizens Against Nihonmachi Evictions, ca. 1974 Japanese American National Library

With redevelopment in full swing, the Committee Against Nihonmachi Evictions (CANE) emerged in 1973 to address the needs of residents and small businesses. A grassroots activist group, CANE “squatted” in a SFRA-owned property at 1858 Sutter Street, which later became the site for the Japanese American Community & Cultural Center of Northern California, according to long-time Japantown activist, Mike Tsukuhara.<sup>181</sup> One of CANE’s first actions was to support the Japanese American Religious Federation’s housing project for affordable housing in Japantown. Sansei like Carole Hayashino, a member of CANE’s coordinating committee, were motivated by the evictions of Issei and Nisei who had rebuilt lives shattered by WWII internment.<sup>182</sup> CANE’s increasing membership, which swelled to over 300, revealed widespread discontent with redevelopment and tensions within the Japanese American community over NCDC’s role as the Agency-appointed community representative. CANE members felt that the community’s interests were being bulldozed by the SFRA, while merchant leaders of NCDC believed there was room to align the Agency’s plans with their view of the community’s economic interests. A CANE banner depicting women holding back a wrecking ball labeled “RDA” with the slogan “Low Rent Housing – Not Tourism,” summarizes CANE’s oppositional stance toward the Agency.<sup>183</sup> Through protests, editorials, and education, CANE was able to make itself heard and joined in other neighborhood struggles, such as the fight to save the International Hotel in Manilatown, yet redevelopment rarely acted on CANE concerns.<sup>184</sup>

CANE and other community organizations drew explicit parallels between destructive government actions during WWII and those of urban renewal. One CANE placard proclaimed “Evacuation in 1942: Eviction in 1974.”<sup>185</sup> San Francisco attorney and activist, Edison Uno, was among the first to publicly call for redress for those unjustly incarcerated during WWII, a cause that captured the imaginations and energies of Nikkei across the nation. Another prominent San Francisco activist, Clifford Uyeda, led the JACL’s National Redress Campaign, which initially focused on gaining community

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<sup>181</sup> Interview with Mike Tsukuhara, April 8, 2008.

<sup>182</sup> Wong, *Generations*, p. 75.

<sup>183</sup> The CANE banner is depicted in the film “Crossroads in Nihonmachi: the Struggle to Save an American Community,” (Emeryville: Urban Voice) 2007.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Mike Tsukuhara. Okita, David. “Redevelopment of San Francisco Japantown.” Thesis. California State University, Hayward, 1980 54.

Recognizing that shifting from a purely anti-redevelopment was necessary, CANE became the Japanese Community Progressive Alliance in 1979-80, according to Tsukuhara.

<sup>185</sup> “Crossroads in Nihonmachi.”

“block grants,” but under pressure from Nikkei revised its goal to individual monetary reparations.

In the Bay Area, calls for reparations was made at the inaugural “Day of Remembrance” event in 1979 at Tanforan Shopping Center, when over one thousand people gathered to remember signing of Executive Order 9066. Two years later, San Francisco was among the cities where hearings by the US Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians enabled Japanese Americans to finally, publicly testify to the injustice, loss, and endurance of their WWII legacy.<sup>186</sup> The power of these personal stories furthered arguments for individual monetary reparations, which had been a central goal for the National Coalition for Redress and Reparations (NCR), whose San Francisco representatives drew from the Japanese Community Progressive Alliance and other activist groups. Local activists like Sox Kitashima organized letter-writing campaigns that deluged the White House and Congress with calls for redress.<sup>187</sup>

As San Franciscans engaged in the broader redress movement, local Nikkei were also involved with the important effort to overturn the wartime convictions of three Nikkei -- Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi and Min Yasui -- who had refused incarceration. Sansei lawyer, Dale Minami, an active member of the community organization, Bay Area Attorneys for Redress, was chosen to file the petition on behalf of Korematsu, an Oakland native who was originally tried in San Francisco. Federal Judge Marilyn Patel resolved the first of these cases when she granted petition for writ of error in the Korematsu case in 1983.<sup>188</sup>

Sansei activism and professional expertise led to another important victory for the community a decade later when local Nikkei fought the sale of Japantown YWCA. The central “Y” had held title to the property since it was opened because the Alien Land Law barred Soko Bukai, the Issei group responsible for its formation, from owning property. When the San Francisco-Marin-San Mateo YWCA announced plans to sell the building, community members recognized that the historic building and Nihonmachi little Friends, which provided childcare at the Y, were vulnerable. Long-time Nisei activists such as Michi Onumi joined with a number of Sanseis led by attorney Karen Kai, to fight for the community’s claim to the building.<sup>189</sup>

#### Illustration Rally at Japantown YWCA, 1999 reproduced in *Generations*

The successful battle for the Japantown YWCA galvanized members of the broader Nikkei community to the ongoing vulnerability of Japantown. While Japantown was under recognizable threat, a new generation had emerged with social and cultural capital to fight for the future of Nihonmachi. An important source of energy for these efforts

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<sup>186</sup> Niiya, *Japanese American History*, p. 340, 342. Wong, *Generations*, p. 92-94.

<sup>187</sup> Wong, p. 96.

<sup>188</sup> Niiya, p. 123.

<sup>189</sup> Nishioka, Joyce. “A Matter of Trust: Japantown Leaders File Suit to Preserve Community Landmark.” *Asianweek*, 8 July 1999.

came from the community-based organizations founded by students and community activists from the Sansei generation who staked their long-term claim to Nihonmachi. In 1976, the Japanese Community Youth Council purchased a building at 2012 Pine Street, used previously by a Filipino Methodist Congregation, from the San Francisco United Methodist Mission. *(trying to get more accurate information from JCYC on this)* Subsequently, other community-based organizations purchased land in Japantown and built their own facilities including Kimochi and the National Japanese American Citizens League headquarter office in the 70's. Today, Kimochi, Inc. owns a second building, formerly the Nichi Bei Bussan Department Store, on the Buchanan Mall.

Although not dedicated until 1986, the Japanese Community and Cultural Center of Northern California was also born from the redevelopment period. The 1963 Van Bourg/Nakamura and Okamoto plan called for a community center at the northwest corner of Buchanan and Sutter streets, “complementary to the existing Young Women’s Christian Association facility.” The authors went on to state that, “it is important that the architecture represented by this building be equal to the best anywhere in the City. As a symbol of common interest and community effort, it represents more than simply the sum total of its functions.”<sup>190</sup> In 1974, the Nihonmachi Community Development Corporation secured the property at 1840 Sutter Street for the new organization, which had been incorporated the previous year. The first phase of the organization’s Japanese-style building was completed in 1986 and housed a variety of arts and community nonprofits, as well as the JCCCNC’s own programs.<sup>191</sup> The JCCCNC’s design, by Nisei architect Wayne Osaki, features overt references to traditional Japanese architecture, as do several other buildings developed by and for the Nikkei community in recent decades. The Japanese American Association (Hokka Nichi Bei Kai) building on Sutter Street, as well as Konkyo-ko Church and Sokoji Zen Temple share with JCCCNC a visual vocabulary of half-timbered walls, peaked roofs with overhanging rafters, and gilded ornamentation in contrast to the more severe “Japanese modernism” of the commercial buildings such as the Japan Center or the Miyako Inn at Sutter and Buchanan.<sup>192</sup> JCCCNC architect Osaki described his goal as trying “to bring some sense of identity – a sense of the Japanese cultural background so that people could feel comfortable.....Although it was Japantown, it didn’t really have an atmosphere.”<sup>193</sup>

## **Preserving Memories: Reinforcing Identity**

### *Continuing Japantown Legacies*

The question “What makes Japantown vital – and what is necessary for its future?” has inspired discussion and considerable efforts by Japantown leaders and Bay Area Nikkei

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<sup>190</sup> Van Bourg/Nakamura and Okamoto, p. 8-9.

<sup>191</sup> Japanese Cultural and Community Center, *30: Celebrating Our Community*, September 2003.

<sup>192</sup> Further research on the cultural and social meaning of these differences in recent architectural styles in Japantowns is merited.

<sup>193</sup> Wong, *Generations*, p. 115.

for some time now. Although Japantown continues to be the cultural, historical, and spiritual center of San Francisco's Japanese American community, the A-1 and A-2 redevelopment phases and their aftermath dramatically altered the small neighborhood feel of Japantown and had far-reaching effects still felt today. Dozens of Japanese-owned properties were transferred to the SFRA in the 1960s and '70s; hundreds of businesses and thousands of residents were removed.<sup>194</sup> In the end, Japantown not only lost a great deal of land, residents, and businesses, but its community dynamics and relationships were also altered by the large influx of Japanese capital and shifting demographics.

Japantown is no longer the site of a highly concentrated residential population of Nikkei. WWII internment, post-war redevelopment and the assimilation of Japanese Americans into the broader social fabric has resulted in a more dispersed presence for Nikkei throughout the United States. The Nikkei population of Japantown decreased by 6.5 percent during the 1970s and '80s; by 1990, more than 90 percent of Japanese Americans in San Francisco lived outside of Japantown.<sup>195</sup> While increased residential and employment opportunities for Sansei and Yonsei (third- and fourth-generation Japanese Americans) have attenuated the role of Nihonmachi in the day-to-day lives of Bay Area Nikkei, San Francisco's Japantown continues to hold immeasurable symbolic and cultural meaning. Nihonmachi is the foundation for a regional community through the cultural, educational and spiritual ties it creates for Japanese Americans. In addition to ethnically specific goods and services, Nikkei throughout the Bay Area visit Japantown for cultural and educational events. The streets of Nihonmachi are the site for annual events such as Bon Odori, Cherry Blossom festival and the Japantown Street Fair that bring the regional community together.

As the neighborhood's demographics shifted to a more diverse and pan-Asian population, and Nisei retirements led to the closure of more long-time businesses, community energies have focused on the question of what is essential to Nihonmachi. By the 1990s, Japanese Americans in San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Jose recognized that they shared a common challenge – envisioning the future for the last remaining Japantowns in the United States. A series of community meetings in San Francisco's Nihonmachi during 1997-1998 led to the creation of a fifty-member Japantown Planning, Preservation and Development Task Force, which produced the "Concepts for the Japantown Community Plan" in 2000 and in turn created the Japantown Task Force in 2001. In its efforts to actively shape Japantown's future, the Task Force shepherded studies on economic, cultural and social impacts of neighborhood developments, youth services, and a preliminary historic context report that served as a foundation for this document.<sup>196</sup> Savvy and connected leaders from California's three Japantowns fostered passage of Senate Bill 307 in September 2001, which acknowledged the significance of their communities through a California Japantown Preservation Pilot Project. Although not fully funded and implemented, the project was designed to support the development of specific plans to promote the preservation of these Japantowns and resulted in work by

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<sup>194</sup> Sales Ledgers

<sup>195</sup> "Concepts for the Japantown Community Plan," p. 8.

<sup>196</sup> All of these studies may be accessed on the Japantown Task Force's website [www.jtowntaskforce.org](http://www.jtowntaskforce.org).

each community that grappled with the complex question about what cultural preservation means for an ethnic neighborhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On the centennial anniversary of San Francisco's Japantown, the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California hosted the 2006 premiere of "Nihonmachi; The Place to Be," a musical play by the Los Angeles-based theater group Grateful Crane ensemble. Written by native San Franciscan Soji Kashiwagi, the play centers on the struggles of a third-generation manju shop owner, whose dilemma over closing the business founded by his immigrant grandparents held powerful resonance for the audience. The packed crowd knew that San Francisco's own Benkyo-do manju shop was struggling for survival just across Sutter Street. In Kashiwagi's version, the press of history -- Issei sacrifices, WWII internment and resettlement, urban renewal, the Asian American and redress movements -- convinces the play's Sansei manju-maker to keep trust with previous generations who have passed on the legacy of Japantown.

The language of SB 307 is self-consciously inclusive in stating that, "Saving our ethnic communities is critical to our state and our nation. Not only are they sites of buildings, businesses and landmarks of historic and cultural significance, they are vital hubs that draw millions of people from all over the world who relate to and learn from their culture, history, food, and other elements of their heritage."<sup>197</sup> Although it would be foolish to minimize the challenges facing San Francisco's Japantown, the incredible creativity and tenacity of California's Japanese American communities provide an inspiring example for many other groups. San Francisco Japantown's heritage, and the work community members are doing today to guide the future of Nihonmachi, reflect a powerful a commitment to the history and cultural character of the community.

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<sup>197</sup> The text of SB 307 can be found on the Japantown Task Force website at [www.jtowntaskforce.org/studies/SB.307.bos.resolution.FINAL.pdf](http://www.jtowntaskforce.org/studies/SB.307.bos.resolution.FINAL.pdf)