

FRESNO - PAST & PRESENT

VOL. 23 NO. 3

The Journal Of The Fresno City And County Historical Society

FALL 1981

Japanese American Residential Desegregation, Fresno, 1900-1980

by Anne Brockley &
Arida Taylor

In large and complex societies, such as the United States, many racial and cultural differences exist. In the past, some of these differences have disappeared through the process of assimilation, which is the complete merging of varied cultures into a common culture and identity. However, when the dominant group of a society erects barriers to social participation for some minority groups in the form of prejudice and discrimination, the assimilation process is usually halted or delayed. In American society, those minority groups that appear physically "different," especially nonwhite groups, have been the victims of the most discrimination and have therefore had the most trouble achieving full assimilation. Japanese Americans are one nonwhite group that has suffered significant degrees of prejudice and discrimination by the dominant White American society. Our study attempts to determine how much assimilation Japanese Americans have achieved compared to other nonwhite groups by measuring one aspect of their assimilation, residential desegregation and, to a lesser extent, occupational changes, over time. We also compare their level of assimilation in these areas with the level they have achieved in another area, intermarriage. In addition, we compare our study on Japanese American residential desegregation with a similar study done on Black Americans, another minority group that has suffered much discrimination.

To determine the amount of assimilation achieved by a racial or ethnic group, it is useful to think of assimilation in terms of several levels, each of which constitutes a particular aspect of the assimilation process. Milton M. Gordon, in his book *Assimilation in American Life*, has identified several levels, or subprocesses, of assimilation: cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, and marital assimilation. Each of these subprocesses "may take place in varying degrees."¹

According to Gordon, cultural assimilation occurs when a minority group changes its cultural patterns to those of the host society. The ability to speak excellent English is one example of cultural assimilation.² Structural assimilation is the entrance of the minority group into the clubs and institutions of the host

society; marital assimilation, the end point of assimilation, is the extent to which the members of a minority group intermarry with members of the host society.³

S. Dale McLemore, in his book *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America*, breaks down Gordon's second subprocess, structural assimilation, into two types, secondary and primary. He defines secondary structural assimilation as "nondiscriminatory sharing (even if it is cold and impersonal) by subordinate—and dominate—group members of occupational, educational, political, neighborhood, and public recreational settings."⁴ He defines primary structural assimilation as "warm, personal interactions between dominant—and subordinate—group members in churches, 'social' clubs, neighborhoods, families and so on."⁵ Our study is in the area of secondary structural assimilation; specifically, residential desegregation, or the degree to which Japanese Americans have moved from lower class occupations to middle and professional occupational status.

The Japanese were victims of racial prejudice and discrimination for many years after their arrival in the United States shortly before the turn of the century. After Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which suspended all Chinese immigration, the Japanese began crossing the Pacific to the West Coast to fill the places forbidden to the Chinese. They worked almost exclusively as farm laborers, working in the fields for less wages than other laborers. This led to complaints that the Japanese were taking away jobs from the Americans. In addition, many felt that because the Japanese were loyal to their homeland, and because they looked "different," their assimilation was impossible. Because of these complaints, the Japanese suffered from a great deal of prejudice and discrimination. Although a "gentleman's agreement" between the United States and Japan was negotiated in 1907 to stop further immigration of Japanese laborers, a federal law was passed prohibiting them from becoming naturalized, and California passed laws in 1913 and 1920 preventing them from becoming land owners. Later, federal immigration

Continued

laws passed in 1921 and 1924 severely limited Japanese immigration under the quota system.

Shortly after the United States entered World War II, over one hundred thousand people of Japanese birth or parentage were forcibly moved by the United States government away from the West Coast to relocation centers in the West and Middle West. This relocation was based solely on national origin, not on any disloyal acts committed by the Japanese. This meant discrimination against thousands of loyal American citizens. It can never be estimated how much the Japanese in America suffered financially and emotionally from the devastating experience of evacuation, relocation, and resettlement, but certainly they were subjected to a level of discrimination similar to that encountered by the largest nonwhite minorities in the United States.⁶

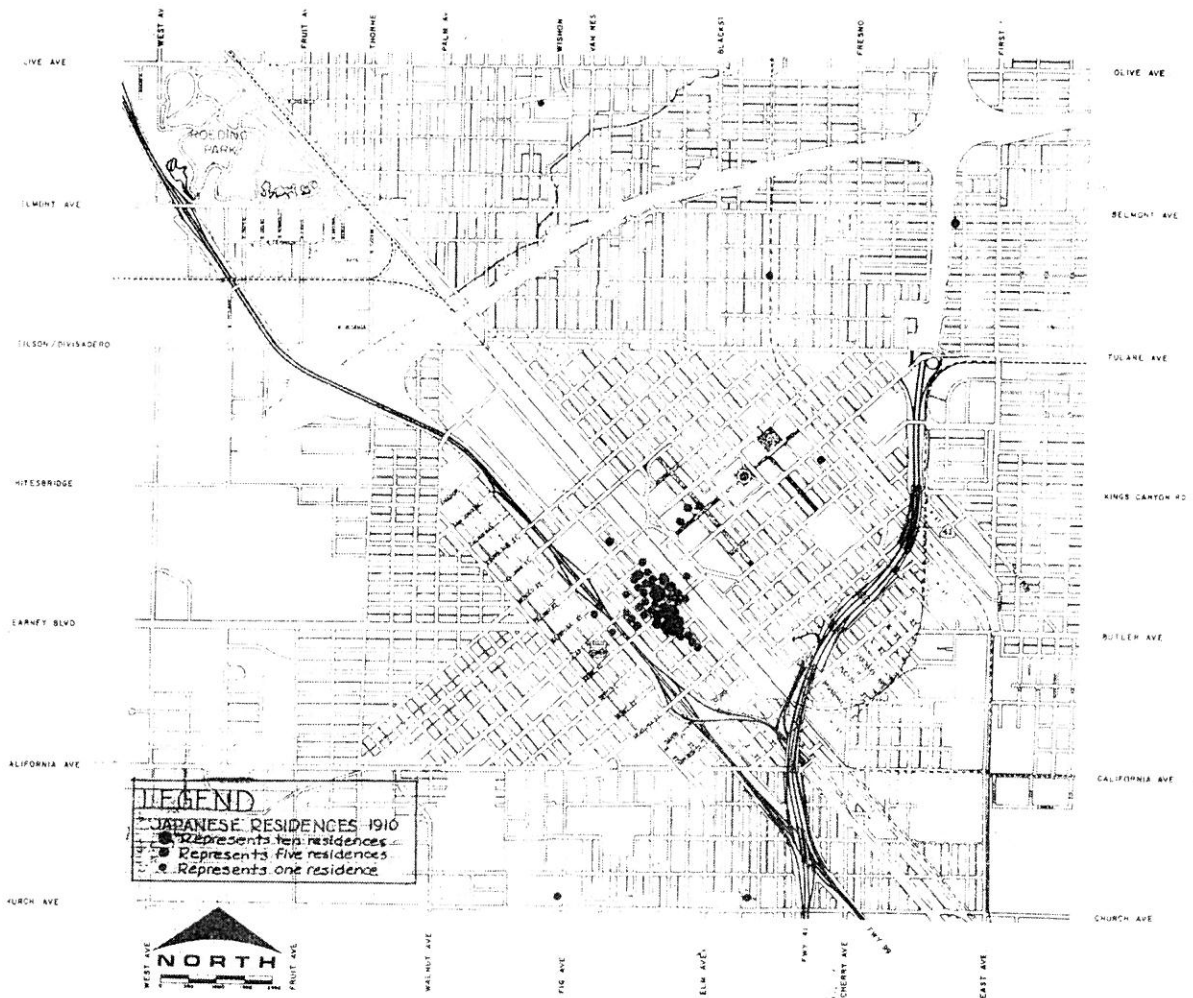
One theory often used to explain why nonwhite groups have done so poorly in the United States compared with white immigrant groups is the concept of internal colonialism. This theory proposes that nonwhite groups were not immigrants who entered American society voluntarily but were colonized minorities who became part of American society through conquest, capture, and other forms of force or manipulation.⁷ This forced entry, then, prevented nonwhites from moving about freely to compete for jobs with members of the dominant group and

hindered their progress towards complete assimilation into American society.

It is doubtful if Japanese Americans can fully be considered victims of internal colonialization. Robert Blauner, in his book *Racial Oppression in America*, feels that the Japanese situation was part colonial and part immigrant: for the Japanese, "we have an original entry into American society that might be termed semicolonial, followed in the twentieth century by immigration."⁸ Nevertheless, Blauner believes the exclusion of Japanese immigrants by law and the restriction acts changed the status of Japanese in America by limiting their numbers and potential power. In this way, he considers their situation the same as other nonwhite groups. On the other hand, he feels the Japanese were different from colonized minorities in one important way—they were the only group to come from a nation that has successfully resisted Western domination.⁹ According to Blauner, "this may be one important reason why the Japanese entry into American life and much of the group's subsequent development show some striking parallels to the European immigrant patterns."¹⁰

There are some similarities between conditions faced by white immigrant groups and nonwhite minority groups when they first attempted to assimilate into American society. Both groups encountered prejudice and discrimination in the areas of housing and occupations. Japanese Americans

Continued



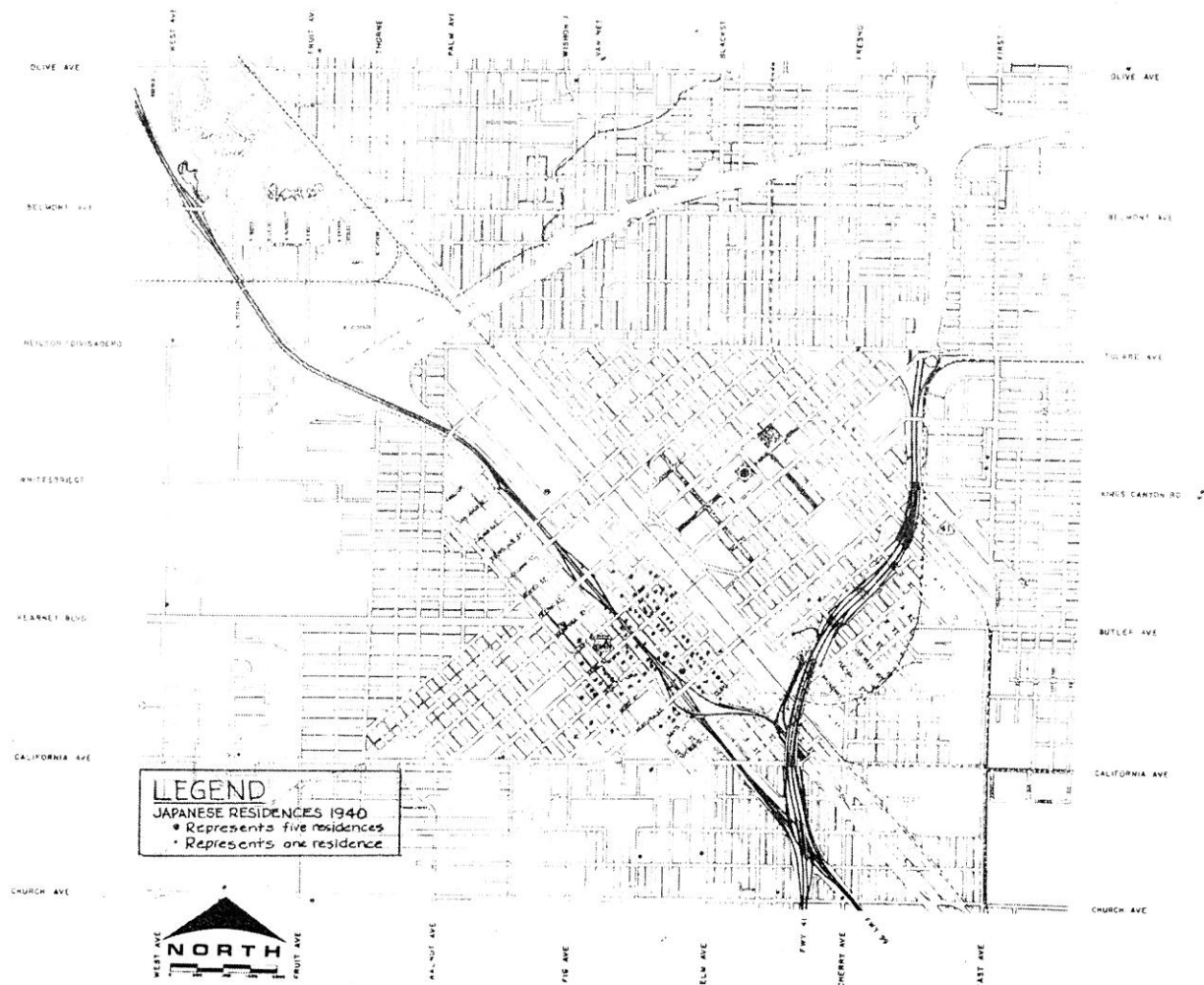
were no exception to this discrimination. In the beginning, Japanese immigrants tended to cluster together in tight communities with others from their land of origin, just as did other ethnic immigrant groups. These communities were formed for mutual aid and the preservation of ethnic heritage. Later, ethnic prejudice and discrimination directed toward the Japanese forced the continuation of this housing segregation. In the area of occupations, they were restricted, as were other groups. In buying land, setting up businesses, and entering certain occupations. Certainly, these housing and occupation restrictions are factors which must be overcome if full assimilation is to occur.

We know that Japanese Americans today have achieved a high degree of cultural assimilation, the first step in the assimilation process. If Japanese Americans have experienced increased housing desegregation in recent years, and if they have also moved toward middle class occupations, then we could conclude that they have achieved secondary structural assimilation as well. Our study attempts to determine if this is true by tracing the residential and occupational patterns of Japanese Americans in one city in the United States.

For our study, residential locations of Japanese Americans living in Fresno, California, from 1900 to 1980 were used. Because Fresno County has more Japanese Americans per total number of residents than any other county in the continental United States, the city of Fresno is an ideal location for a Japanese residential desegregation study. In addition, in the 1920's and 1930's, the central valley of California was a location of substantial discrimination against Japanese Americans. Therefore, if residential desegregation has occurred for Japanese Americans in Fresno, then we can probably conclude that it has occurred for Japanese Americans in other cities as well. We obtained the residences of all Japanese-surnamed individuals living in Fresno from Fresno city directories for the years 1900, 1910, 1920, 1931, 1940, 1951, 1960, 1970, and 1980 (1930 and 1950 were unavailable.) These residences were plotted on maps, one map for each year of the study.

From our study we found that the residential patterns of Japanese in Fresno changed dramatically from 1900 to 1980. From 1900 to 1940 almost all Japanese lived in the west section of downtown Fresno. In 1900 there were only six Japanese

Continued



addresses listed in the Fresno city directory. These were fairly spread out in the west downtown area. One address, however, was that of a Japanese boarding house on G Street. We can probably assume there were many Japanese living there, but only one name was given for that address. By 1910 there was a great gathering of Japanese people living side by side in one particular area of downtown west Fresno, a four block area which included China Alley, Kern, and F Streets. In 1920 there were fewer names and addresses listed for Japanese than there were in 1910. Since many Japanese were still coming to the United States at that time, there should have been an increase in population. We have not been able to determine the reason for fewer addresses listed, but we feel the anomaly may be due to a flaw in the resource, namely the 1920 Fresno city directory. In 1931, although almost all of the Japanese population still lived in downtown west Fresno, there were a few living outside that area. These scattered few, however, represent farmers, nurses working and living at the Fresno County Hospital, and maids who lived with the families for whom they worked. In 1940 the number of residences grew but the location of the addresses basically remained the same. In 1940 most Japanese families owned their own homes.

The evacuation and relocation program occurred between our 1940 and 1951 maps. This evacuation, of course, resulted in the breakup of many homes and businesses. On the eve of relocation, "many people stored their goods or simply left everything in locked houses hoping that they would be safe until their return. Many farmers were forced to leave fields in which their life's savings were invested."¹¹ When the evacuation order was rescinded in 1945, many Japanese did not return to the West Coast, preferred to live in the Middle West where prejudice against them was less marked. Those who did return, however, found their former homes occupied.

In getting resettled, many Japanese were not able to buy or rent homes in the same vicinity as other returning, Japanese Americans. In effect, then, one unexpected result of the relocation program was the breakup of the tight ethnic communities which characterized the living patterns of the Japanese before 1942. Although not of their own choosing, this first step toward residential desegregation greatly aided their assimilation into American society.

In the light of this occurrence, we can understand why 1951 shows some migration away from downtown Fresno. Again, some of these were live-in maids or those working and living in hospitals. For the most part, though, those living outside the downtown area were living in rented rooms with other families or were living in apartments. Only a few owned their own homes.

The years 1960, 1970, and 1980 showed a continuation of movement out of the downtown area. In 1960 only about a third of the addresses were in downtown west Fresno. By 1970 over 90% of the Japanese population lived outside the downtown area and by 1980 this had risen to 93%. The 1970 directory showed many extended family homes and many apartment dwellers, especially near the University. By 1980 Japanese Americans were not concentrated in any one specific area in Fresno, except around CSUF because of the Japanese students living in apartments

near the University. The 1980 city directory, as had the 1970 directory, indicated that many Japanese Americans lived in apartments.

Our study concludes that secondary structural assimilation, as measured by ethnic residential desegregation, has occurred for the Japanese Americans living in Fresno today. Although the Japanese were residentially segregated in the west section of downtown Fresno for more than forty years, our study shows that by 1970 residential desegregation had become a reality. Their residential pattern of living had shifted from a tightly-knit, racially segregated community of individuals living in close proximity to each other to a completely desegregated pattern of living with residences spread out into virtually every section of the city.

We have added to our study on residential desegregation by tabulating occupations for Japanese surnamed individuals in the study years 1900 to 1960. Occupations are an additional measure of secondary structural assimilation. Four occupational categories were used for the tabulations: professionals, white-collar and clerical workers, managers and owners, blue-collar workers and farmers. The number of Japanese who held jobs in these categories was compiled for only seven of the nine years used in the residential study because very few occupations were included in the 1970 and 1980 Fresno city directories.

Except for some inconsistencies in 1920, the Occupational Table reveals some general trends in occupations held by Japanese Americans. The percentage of Japanese Americans in the professional category has gone up over the years and so has the percentage of those in the white-collar, clerical category. The percentage in the manager-owner category rose steadily until 1940, and then dropped in 1951. Many Japanese owned their own businesses in the early years, businesses which, in general, catered to a predominately Japanese clientele. The fact that many of these businesses were abandoned during the period of relocation probably accounts for the drop in the percentage of Japanese-owned businesses. The percentage of blue-collar workers and farmers had gradually decreased over the years. From these figures, we can conclude that Japanese Americans are gradually moving out of Japanese-oriented businesses and lower status occupations into the professions and middle class occupations.

Having shown thus far that Japanese American structural assimilation has been quite successful, we now will take a look at the final subprocess of assimilation, marital assimilation. According to McLemore, the surest means of assimilation is inter-marriage. However, he cautions, if a member of a dominant group and a member of a subordinate group marry, and the friends of the married couple are drawn mainly from the subordinate group and the children are raised in the religion and culture of the subordinate group, one may consider this assimilation.

Japanese American marital assimilation seems to have been quite successful, however. A study done in Fresno by Professor John Tinker in 1973 shows that half of all marriages involving Japanese Americans were with non-Japanese, or "out-marriages."¹² A

Continued

similar level of "out-marriage" was also not discovered by Akemi Kikumura and Harry Kitano in Hawaii in 1970 and in Los Angeles during 1971 and 1972.¹³ There seems to be evidence that the Sansei (the second generation of Japanese born in this country) are as likely to marry outside the group as within it.

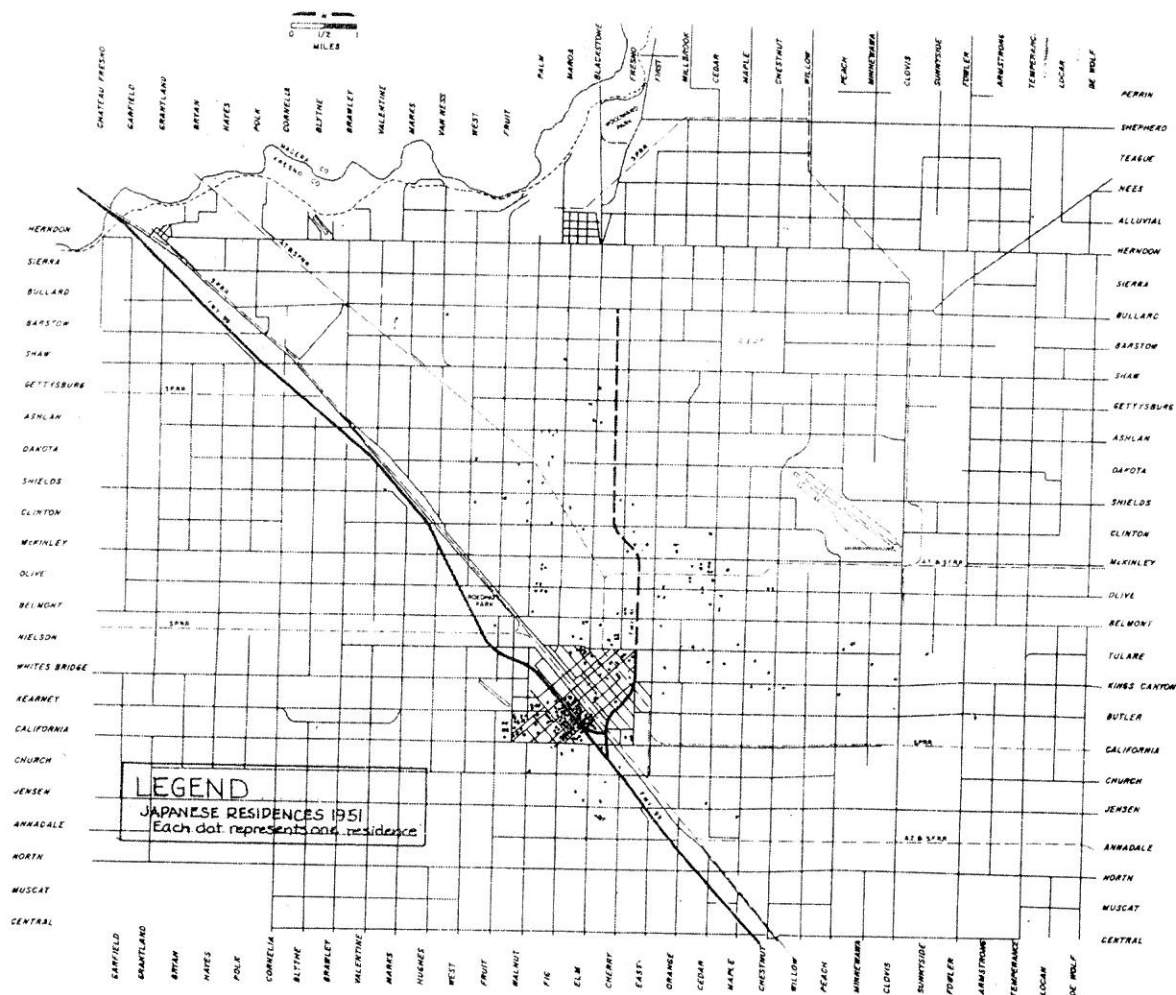
The above evidence shows a high level of assimilation, especially since interracial marriages of all kinds were illegal in many states until recently. Before 1948 the laws of California prohibited intermarriage of whites with members of another race. While in the last twenty years people have increasingly agreed on the desirability of desegregation of public facilities and the need for equal job opportunities, many people remain skeptical or even hostile about racial intermarriage.¹⁴ A 1972 poll of national opinion showed that 60% of the respondents at that time disapproved of marriages between whites and nonwhites.¹⁵

Studies clearly indicate that Japanese Americans have successfully assimilated into American society. The degree of Japanese American assimilation is further revealed when contrasted with the residential assimilation of another minority group, the Black

Americans. Secondary structural assimilation of Black Americans appears to be slow in most areas. A substantial amount of desegregation of the public schools has taken place since the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in the Brown case. Residential desegregation, however, seems to have been very slow, and studies indicate that it will take many more years before the various steps of assimilation take place. Even though limited studies were done in the area of housing segregation prior to 1940, some studies of selected cities were made. In the North and South, residential segregation increased gradually from emancipation to World War I and then accelerated sharply until 1930.¹⁶

Karl and Alma Taeuber, in their book *Negroes in Cities*, calculated residential segregation indexes for 109 cities from 1940 to 1960, and 207 cities in 1960.¹⁷ This analysis showed two important points. First, the average level of residential segregation of blacks and whites was high in every area of the country. No city in the Northeast had a residential segregation index lower than 74.3, and most were between 80 and 89. Atlantic City had an index of 94.6. This was consistent for most areas, the South having the highest average. Second,

Continued



Japanese Americans, nonwhite minority group, have assimilated so well into American society. Perhaps it is because they do not fit the internal colonial analogy as completely as other nonwhite groups. Or as Blauner suggests, maybe the fact that Japan has never been subjugated by Western nations has been an influencing factor. Perhaps their restricted immigration, rather than limiting their power base, made them less visible and therefore less threatening than other racially distinct groups. One other explanation of their success could be that "there is a significant compatibility between certain key values in traditional Japanese and American middle-class cultures."²⁰ Whatever the reasons, the history of the Japanese Americans generally supports the idea that disadvantages based on racial distinctiveness are not necessarily permanent in American society and assimilation can be achieved for nonwhite minority groups.

"Residential Desegregation Study: Japanese Americans, 1900-1980, Fresno, California," by Mrs. Brockley and Mrs. Taylor, written under the direction of Dr. John Tinker, Professor of Sociology at California State University, Fresno, was awarded first prize in the 1981 essay contest sponsored by the Fresno City and County Historical Society, and the School of Social Sciences and the Department of History at CSUF for the best paper on local history by a student at the University.

FOOTNOTES

¹Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 71.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

⁴S. Dale McLemore, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1980), p. 39.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹¹McLemore, p. 177.

¹²John N. Tinker, "Intermarriage and Ethnic Boundaries: The Japanese American Case," *Journal of Social Issues*, 29: 49-66.

¹³Akemi Kikumura and Harry H. L. Kitano, "Interracial Marriage: A Picture of the Japanese Americans," *Journal of Social Issues*, 29: 67-81.

¹⁴Tinker.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶McLemore.

¹⁷Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).

¹⁸Annette Sorensen, Karl E. Taeuber, and Leslie Hollingsworth, Jr., "Indexes of Racial Residential Segregation for 109 Cities in the United States, 1940-1970," *Sociological Focus*, 8 (April 1975), 125-142.

¹⁹Thomas V. Van Valey, Wade Clark Roof, and Jerome E. Wilcox, "Trends in Residential Segregation: 1960-1970," *American Journal of Sociology*, 82 (January 1977), 826-844.

²⁰McLemore, p. 199.

Occupations of Japanese Americans By Year Fresno, California, 1900-1960

	1900	1910	1920	1931	1940	1951	1960
Professionals	0(0%)	7(9%)	4(11%)	12(10%)	20(9%)	31(12%)	55(16%)
Managers/ Owners*	2(40%)	20(27%)	5(14%)	28(24%)	56(25%)	34(14%)	51(14%)
White-collar/ Clerical	0(0%)	11(15%)	10(28%)	17(15%)	64(29%)	91(37%)	142(40%)
Blue-collar/ Farm laborers	3(60%)	36(49%)	17(47%)	60(51%)	83(37%)	92(37%)	106(30%)
Total (N)	5	74	36	117	223	248	354
Total (%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Students/other not listed	2	0	6	26	31	76	181

* This category is mainly composed of managers and owners of small businesses whose clientele are mostly Japanese.