



# The Shogun's Grand Niece

Research by: Dr. Annika Culver and Sarah Brophy



## Abstract

*The Shogun's Grand Niece* aims to capture the intricacies of a Japanese immigrant family living between two identities in the United States during the early-to-mid twentieth century. The family's former status as rural samurai is taken into account when their only daughter is courted by a Japanese nobleman overseas right before WWII. The presentation starts in 1920s Los Angeles and follows leftist, progressive activities in the area and the larger Japanese community, and the family's possible intersection with it. It examines the successful business of Japanese produce distributors and the devastation of relocation to internment camps after the Pearl Harbor Attacks. The family, who owned a lucrative produce business, was stripped of assets and their patriarch was sent to Ft. Missoula for internment. Eventually, the couple's daughter chose to live in relative obscurity in a predominantly white, right-leaning rural Oregon town, where she recently decided to share her story. Government documents, journals, news sources, and books revealed that the success and distinct culture of the Japanese-American community were the main causes behind the vitriolic societal and governmental response to the Pearl Harbor Attacks.



## Background

Silver Lake grew from a dusty town of late 19th century California to a perfect place for silent film era movies to be shot in the 1910s. After the 20s, Silver Lake was a rather sleepy residential area with no one clear demographic emerging, more so a collection of a more well off echelon of the greater Edendale area. Edendale; however, was a hotbed for artists, leftist activities, a blossoming LGBTQ+ community, and escaped Mexican revolutionaries. Various reports and photos show a multiethnic community working together for a greater purpose. The only strong Japanese influence in the Silver Lake area was the Shonien orphanage that was even visited by the imperial family and made sure to keep the children close to their cultural roots. A few miles away, Little Tokyo was one of the fastest growing Japanese communities of the 20th century and became a thriving place of business and residence. It would not have been uncommon to see children playing in the streets and businessmen of all walks of life bustling down the street. With the start of World War II and the Japanese being stripped of many of their rights, including owning property, Tokyotown became a ghost town. The new, non-Japanese owners leased the newly open buildings to the influx of African Americans coming to the city due to its labor shortage, also due in part to the maltreatment of the Japanese.



## Methods

To create a historically accurate picture of the family, a mix of personal narratives and credible sources is needed. As such, government and university databases were used to gather both personal narratives and documents recording the movements of the family. Sources that synthesized both personal experiences in the time periods discussed and the paper trail left by mass media and government documents. It is important when analyzing these documents to recognize the questions they do not solve and look at personal stories to create a more accurate historical picture.

## Results

Government documents and media reports showed the importance of the Japanese community for California's economy, the Japanese owned over 90% of all berry farming and had a thriving Little Tokyo. Historically, the US does not take well to poor immigrants moving to America and using what they deem as American resources. By the same token, when minority groups begin to succeed, there seems to be almost equal push back from society. Before Pearl Harbor there was an underlying anti-Asian sentiment, but it was more directed at Chinese immigrants rather than Japanese immigrants or citizens of Japanese descent. Most importantly, there was public support for the Japanese community from prominent political figures. The tides turned quickly after Pearl Harbor and an anti-Japanese frenzy spread across the West Coast within days. Prominent members of the Japanese community, especially those with deep ties to Japan, were rounded up and deported to internment camps across the west, some worse than others. Californian officials were quick to turn their backs on the same communities that helped elect them, in fact it was at their insistence that the Japanese be rounded up. This panic was widely reserved for the Japanese with most German and Italian immigrants and descendants living relatively unscathed. Japanese immigrants had two unique factors that made them particularly vulnerable to such an attack on their rights. First, they kept deep ties with the family they left behind in Japan. Second, they were easily recognizable as an "other" group.

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