

Densho Digital Repository  
Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and  
Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS)  
Oral History Project Collection  
Title: Lisa Doi Interview  
Narrator: Lisa Doi  
Interviewer: Anna Takada  
Location: Chicago, Illinois  
Date: September 6, 2019  
Densho ID: ddr-chi-1-20-11

<Begin Segment 11>

- AT: 00:42:30 And, uh, forgive me, uh, Azuma's class was at U Penn? Okay. Um, okay. Well, and this, um, this kind of leads into my next question, which was about, um, the degree you pursued at University of Chicago. Um, can you share about, um, what it was that you studied there and maybe some of the, the um, um, motivation, inspiration that you know, brought you to that, that degree and that research topic? Yeah.
- LD: 00:43:12 So I came back to Chicago to get a master's degree at the University of Chicago. It was a master's in social science and as part of the program was only a one year program, but we had to do a capstone thesis and partially out of interest and partially out of expediency. I decided to do a project around Japanese Americans in Chicago because I figured I had a lot of, um, entree points already that would make it easier to do a one year thesis on that topic. So I ended up mapping using directories, um, from the legacy center here at the Service Committee, mapping Japanese American residential patterns from the 1940s through the 1970s and was able to notice some very clear trends in terms of initial congregations. Um, on the south side and near north side, and then a very noticeable migration northwards through the city. Um, so through Lakeview, Uptown, Edgewater and then out into the suburbs. And if you overlay this on other, um, racial housing patterns in Chicago at the time, there's, um, very noticeable instances where, especially on the South Side and the near North Side, um, in the late forties, early 50s those neighborhoods become increasingly Black. And as that happens, Japanese Americans leave. Um, so that's part of it. And then part of it just sort of follows general patterns of white flight as white Chicagoans left for the suburbs in the 60s and 70s.
- AT: 00:44:50 Um, and, uh, can you tell us like a little, a little bit more about, um, maybe some of the takeaways from, from the projects or what you found and in doing that research?

LD: 00:45:06 So I think in terms of my own research, it really helped me crystallize a sense of, um, maybe the purpose of the overall incarceration history, which, you know, I, I don't think that the WRA ever intended to permanently house Japanese Americans. But I do think if you look at the overall philosophy of the Roosevelt administration in terms of the power of the government to intervene in terms of social problems, um, they really saw pre-war Japanese American ethnic enclaves as a social problem. And if you also look at sociologists, you know, of the 30s and 40s, um, there was this deep preoccupation with assimilation and what assimilation means, and suddenly here's this opportunity to have this government intervention to be a solution to this problem. And so to me, I really see one of the primary goals of the WRA and as this project of dispersal resettlement, um, so that you would, you would determine who was loyal, who was disloyal, for those who are loyal, you would then scatter them.

LD: 00:46:18 Um, Franklin Roosevelt said one Japanese American family in every community across the country. Um, and you know, ultimately that didn't happen. But I think there was this intentional, internal, and external dissolution of a Japanese American community when people came to Chicago. Um, there was discouragement of, you know, forming ethnic enclaves in the city, although the [inaudible] I think had sort of mixed, mixed intervention. Um, you know, they acknowledged that there was a lot of, um, residential concentration in Chicago. Um, but then I think there was a lot of internal pressure within the community to, um, sort of prove your Americanness and, and really what that means is aspiring towards whiteness. Um, not necessarily racially, but in terms of, um, uh, sort of sanctified American middle class lifestyle of, uh, you know, a house in the suburbs, a white collar job, kids who went to college that I think was very much internalized by the community. Um, but I think that that is not unique amongst Japanese American community, that that is sort of a winch pin of, of some of the violence of, of this broader aspiration of whiteness that this country has embodied.

**<End Segment 11> - Copyright © 2019 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**