

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Japanese-Americans in the San Joaquin Valley area spans a period of 80 years, beginning in the late 1880's. The early Japanese immigrants provided significant labor forces working in the farmlands and orchards in the area. Businesses were established and developed to provide the farm laborers with the necessities of life important to their welfare.

In United States history, immigrants from other countries struggled to make a better life for themselves in the promised land of freedom and opportunity. For the Japanese immigrant this was not easy. Although their moral and ethical standards were similar to the Puritans, the Japanese were targets of discrimination since they were highly visible and their religion and customs were different from the so-called established society. Later as commercial and agricultural enterprises by the Japanese became successful, economic competition created another factor for ostracism.

In the early 1900's laws were passed to deter Asian immigration, to deny citizenship, and to prohibit non-citizens of Japanese descent ownership of property. "Gentlemen's agreements" prevented the Japanese from obtaining employment in any professional or semi-professional capacity. During World War II, American citizens of Japanese descent were forced to leave their homes in the Valley with their parents, to live in concentration camps.

While incarcerated, qualified Nisei men were drafted or volunteered for military service and valiantly served their country in the European and Pacific theaters. Before the war, with no possibility of owning property nor becoming citizens, the Issei strove to acquire fortunes with the idea of returning to their ancestral land to "raise the flag" and to retire in comfort.

The Nisei were encouraged to attend colleges at great sacrifice to their parents as as to ensure proper education and training for assimilation into American society. The Issei and Nisei persevered under great odds. Today the Issei are able to own land, and their offspring have taken their place in all phases of business and professional life.

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