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Lon Kurashige. *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival in Los Angeles, 1934-1990.* Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2002. xxii + 274 pp. $21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-22743-9; $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-22742-2.

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Constructing and Contesting Japanese American Identity

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In *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict*, Lon Kurashige uses an ethnic community celebration in Los Angeles known as Nisei Week as a prism for viewing the changing and contested meaning of Japanese-American identity. Festivities such as public parades, beauty pageants, fashion reviews, and talent shows promoted the ideal second-generation Japanese American. The celebration not only conveyed positive images of Japanese Americans to the world outside of "Little Tokyo" but also defined appropriate behavior for those living within the ethnic community.

Kurashige begins his narrative with descriptions of the Japanese American community and of the economic, social, and political forces that led to the creation of Nisei Week in the decade prior to the Second World War. The planners of the first celebration in 1934 hoped that the events would undermine anti-Japanese sentiment and foster a more positive race relations environment. In addition, they wanted to create community consciousness and ethnic consciousness among the Nisei. According to Kurashige, the Issei merchants behind Nisei Week stressed the importance of ethnic solidarity to encourage younger Japanese Americans to shop in Little Tokyo at a time when they could purchase similar goods outside of the community. Leaders from the local chapter of the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL) became involved in the planning process as well. They envisioned the festival as an expression of Nisei identity that not only emphasized how the Nisei were thoroughly American but also reinforced the Nisei's role as ethnic representatives to the rest of the nation. The Issei and Nisei leaders believed that the Nisei had to assume a bicultural position in order to protect and to promote the ethnic community. These leaders put together a program to celebrate both Japanese and American culture and to commemorate the immigrant pioneers who achieved economic success after years of struggle. Building upon existing studies that treat the Issei and the older Nisei as a generational block, Kurashige reveals that these leaders had similar perspectives and values, and that they frequently engaged in inter-generational alliances.

Those who attended the festival watched kimono-

clad women performing a Japanese folk dance and parades displaying costumes from different periods in Japanese history. The planners promised tourists an authentic Japanese adventure and tried to promote a greater understanding of Japanese history and culture. However, as tensions between the United States and Japan increased at the end of the decade, Americanism eclipsed biculturalism as the dominant articulation of Japanese American identity. Nisei Week events then became a demonstration of civic virtue and political allegiance.

Kurashige exposes the ways in which these articulations of ethnic identity, including the constructed ideal Nisei, obscured the diverse opinions and social cleavages within the community. Editors for a leftist ethnic newspaper, for instance, criticized festival organizers for ignoring working-class experiences and even labeled a few local businessmen as opponents of labor and supporters of Japanese imperialism. Another part of Kurashige's argument against Nisei homogeneity offers a group profile of the JACL to show the differences between the community's political elites and rank-and-file Japanese Americans. After confirming that those in the JACL generally possessed more cultural capital and enjoyed higher socioeconomic status, he describes the limited occupational choices available to less privileged Nisei and shares examples of juvenile delinquency among Nisei youth. The festival's positive images of the Nisei and the narratives of ethnic success and social acceptance undoubtedly hid from view the realities of marginalization and frustration. JACL leaders may have provided the dominant Nisei voice, first one of biculturalism and then one of Americanism, but they never represented the views of all Japanese Americans.

During the Second World War, some of the aforementioned social cleavages played a role in the protest at the Manzanar Relocation Center. In December 1942, over three thousand Japanese Americans held a demonstration to protest the arrest of several Kibei accused of beating up a JACL informant.[1] The protest led to violence later that night: angry internees physically assaulted several alleged collaborators, and military guards fired their rifles into the assembled crowd, killing two protestors and wounding many more. Kurashige portrays the Manzanar protest as a challenge to the ethnic orthodoxy maintained by the JACL and argues that class, education, and cosmopolitanism influenced whether one was against or for the protest. By analyzing the social backgrounds of those involved, he claims that the pro-WRA faction included college-educated urban Nisei who had the skills, the opportunity, and the cultural capital to succeed in the world outside the ethnic community. The protestors, on the other hand, remained detached from white America and tended to come from the farming classes. Kurashige also suggests that white racism's persistence embittered the Nisei and led some of them to criticize those who implemented and supported wartime internment. Kurashige's interpretation thus revises earlier studies that characterized the Manzanar protest as primarily a struggle between the Americanized Nisei and the Issei and Kibei, two social groups which were thought to have stronger cultural ties with Japan.

Nisei Week in the 1950s and 1960s only vaguely resembled the celebrations of the prewar era. Raising funds for community organizations replaced the goal of bolstering Little Tokyo's businesses. In addition, Japanese-American chapters of mainstream veterans' organizations, women's groups, and civic clubs played a more prominent role in planning the festival. Even outsiders such as the mayor's office and the local media gave vital support to the celebrations. Furthermore, the inclusion of a swimsuit competition in the beauty contest signaled acceptance of mainstream America and suggested a move away from an ethnic beauty standard. According to Kurashige, these developments reflect both the postwar integrationist orthodoxy and the improving social conditions and race relations experienced by Japanese Americans. At the same time, cooperation between the United States and Japan in the war against communism permitted Japanese Americans to identify with Japan without endangering their position at home. Nisei Week parades began to feature a Shinto ritual and floats advertising Japanese businesses. By the end of the 1960s, Japanese corporations such as Toyota, Japan Airlines, and Mitsubishi Bank represented the festival's largest financial contributors.

Beginning in the 1970s, the integrationist orthodoxy and the anticommunist partnership came under fire. Energized by the social movements of the 1960s, Asian-American youth criticized Anglo-conformity and asserted a cosmopolitan identity that acknowledged their minority experiences and connected them with the oppressed in America and abroad. For instance, the Van Troi Anti-Imperialist Youth Brigade interrupted the 1972 Nisei Week parade to proclaim their support for the Vietnamese people struggling against Japanese and American imperialism. The Van Troi protestors also disparaged the beauty pageant for using white beauty standards to judge contestants and for inviting white Americans to serve as judges. They called for ethnic pride and for community control. This and other challenges to integration

may have touched off an ethnic revival, but they failed to force the community to address racial, gender, and class inequalities. In the end, the dominant articulation of ethnicity merely shifted from integration to an innocuous form of cultural pluralism. Kurashige punctuates this point with brief examinations of Asian-American car culture and beauty contests.

The final chapter of the book focuses on the movement to protect the Japanese American community from "Japanization." Increasing Japanese investment in Nisei Week and plans to allow Japanese corporations to fund the redevelopment of Little Tokyo generated accusations that Japanese Americans were losing control of their community and allowing it to fall into the hands of outside interests. Japanese Americans representing different generations and different political perspectives came together to protest the redevelopment plans. Their efforts led to the promise that redevelopment projects would be committed to both preserving ethnic community and promoting international trade. Kurashige views the creation of the Japanese American National Museum as a project that simultaneously addressed the community's desire to preserve their heritage and the corporations' desire to defuse anti-Japanese sentiment.

Japanese American Celebration and Conflict is a carefully crafted and elegantly written history resting upon a solid foundation of community newspapers, archival records, and personal interviews. Kurashige creatively reveals the generation and class distinctions within the prewar and the wartime community and how they shaped expressions of ethnic identity. He suggests the constructed nature of Nisei masculinity and Nisei femininity as well but does not provide many examples of the ways in which these gendered identities are contested. Kurashige gives more attention to gender in the postwar era by relating the various debates concerning the beauty pageant. In my estimation, the investigation of postwar ethnic community and identity formation is a thoroughly original contribution. These later chapters are also the more challenging ones to fully comprehend since a larger number of individuals and organizations are introduced and since the presentation occasionally becomes a series of themes rather than a chronological narrative.

Despite this minor shortcoming, Kurashige's book remains an admirable work of historical scholarship. It not only enriches our understanding of the Japanese American experience in Los Angeles but also represents an important addition to the growing body of literature shedding light on the diversity within Asian-American communities.

Note

[1]. Kibei were Nisei who had been sent to Japan for education. American authorities suspected that the Kibei were loyal to Japan and posed a national security threat because they had been indoctrinated abroad.

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