

AN URBAN VOICE PRODUCTION



Crossroads In Nihonmachi

The Struggle for an American Community

CROSSROADS IN NIHONMACHI

The Struggle for an American Community

In the 1950s, Japantown (Nihonmachi) stretched over 40 blocks and the community bustled; rebuilding itself after the internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. But, when San Francisco implemented its urban renewal plans in the '60s, 30-day eviction notices and another vast dispersal of the neighborhood began.

Nihonmachi would become a tourist attraction. The first round of redevelopment reduced the neighborhood to four blocks. Residents and merchants who knew everyone by name were relocated to the outlying suburbs or out of the city. To many, these evictions were "the second evacuation."

When later phases were initiated in the early 70s, the community fought back. Businesses organized on an official front against the city's bureaucracy. Community activists and college students gathered renters and small business owners in street protest and campaigns of resistance. The community persevered, remaining a center for Japanese American social, historical and cultural events.

In 2006, Nihonmachi was celebrating its 100th anniversary. Simultaneously, a Beverly Hills investment group began purchasing 60 percent of business properties. History was repeating itself as once again Nihonmachi faced an unknown future and struggled for a voice.

CROSSROADS IN NIHONMACHI forces us to question the rights and responsibilities of individuals within community. Do municipalities have the right to partner with private industry to "create" neighborhoods in the name of progress? Can we justify the New Urban Reality where democratic decision-making is dying at the feet of privatization?

Treatment of the Story

The first edit of **CROSSROADS IN NIHONMACHI** was screened in Japantown in December 2006 to a packed, standing-room crowd. This version utilizes the feedback we received from that showing.

We're excited about the range of visual material **CROSSROADS** celebrates. During our exploration of the historical era following World War II, we gathered nearly 10,000 stills and several thousand feet of 8mm and 16mm film, some dating back to the late 1930s illustrating the everyday lives of people and their community. Much of these visuals have never been seen. We also filmed extensive footage of Nihonmachi's 100th anniversary celebrations throughout the year, giving us a large library of community life today and of a year which must be considered once-in-a-lifetime.

We poured through the SF Redevelopment Agency's shelves of archived photographs and documents. We utilized hundreds of rarely seen public domain film and stills illustrating the ideas and actions of those eras. Most importantly, we gathered over 40 interviews with key individuals who played important roles from all sides of the redevelopment issue. And finally, we attended all three of the landmark town hall meetings during 2006 when the future of the community was put on public notice. These include speeches by Mayor Gavin Newsome, Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, and a packed house of community members who were taking a stand, hoping to right some of the past wrongs and fighting for the future of Nihonmachi.

While this story is unique to Nihonmachi, it is a story that is universal to all urban communities.

Crossroads Production Staff

CROSSROADS IN NIHONMACHI was funded and produced by Urban VOICE, an all-volunteer organization of independent filmmakers dedicated to bringing forth the issues of social justice through creative, high quality videography. This documentary was based on an original story by Boku Kodama. It took 27 months to complete.

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Francis Wong
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George Yoshida & the J-Town Jazz Ensemble

Crossroads Interviews

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