



D E N S H Ō

The Japanese American Legacy Project

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**PROGRAM CELEBRATING JAPANTOWN HOSTED BY
DENSHO: THE JAPANESE AMERICAN LEGACY PROJECT**

SEATTLE, October 2004 - "Community Ties: Memories of Japantown," a free public event at Town Hall on Sunday, November 21, 1:00 p.m., will commemorate Seattle's historical Nihonmachi (Japantown) neighborhood through personal stories, images, and scholarly research. The program will celebrate the close-knit, vibrant immigrant community that was shattered by the World War II mass incarceration of Japanese Americans.

"Community Ties" is presented by Denshō: The Japanese American Legacy Project (www.densho.org), a Seattle nonprofit organization that gathers video interviews and historical images to document the Japanese American experience, particularly the effect of the unjust wartime incarceration. Densho is conducting interviews with former residents of Seattle's Nihonmachi, one of the largest Japantowns in the Northwest, which overlapped today's Chinatown / International District and reached from the "Skid Row" waterfront to the Central District.

The Town Hall program will feature excerpts from video interviews with former residents of Japantown, and an authors' talk and book signing by Stephen Fugita and Marilyn Fernandez of Santa Clara University. They will discuss their recent publication *Altered Lives, Enduring Community* (University of Washington Press), which uses survey information gathered by Densho to investigate the lifelong social, economic, and psychological effects of the World War II incarceration on local Japanese Americans. Lori Matsukawa of KING 5 News will emcee.

Seattle's bustling prewar Nihonmachi was home to the Jewish community and other Asian immigrants in addition to approximately 8,000 Issei (first generation) and Nisei (second generation). Living in two cultures, Japanese American families ran hotels, groceries, restaurants, and pharmacies; attended public and Japanese-language schools; worshiped at Buddhist and Christian churches; and participated in American and Asian sports and holidays. Japanese Americans had a strong presence at Pike Place Market as well, where they sold some 70 percent of the produce before the war. *continued*

While the interviewees will attest that the closeness of their community was caused by discrimination that prevented them from living in others sections of Seattle, they also fondly recall being raised by a "village" of surrogate aunties and uncles who shared strong cultural ties now weakened through assimilation. After President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the forced removal of all immigrants and citizens of Japanese descent from the West Coast, the neighborhood changed dramatically. Businesses along Jackson Street were boarded up and eventually taken over by new owners. Upon leaving government-run camps at the war's end, many Japanese Americans did not return to the old neighborhood, whose character was permanently altered.

The program is free of charge and open to the public. For more information, call Densho at 206-320-0095 or write to info@densho.org. Town Hall is located at 1119 Eighth Avenue at Seneca (www.townhallseattle.org). This event is supported in part by a grant from the City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods Matching Fund Program.

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Preserving the past, inspiring the future

Densho (meaning "to pass on to future generations") is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in Seattle in 1996 with the initial mission of preserving the life histories of Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during World War II. Densho's online archive, offered free of charge for educational purposes, features hundreds of hours of interviews, thousands of historical images, and extensive curricula on civil liberties. Densho's broader mission is to educate, preserve, collaborate, and inspire action for equity. For more information, visit www.densho.org.