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Library Research Award Reflective Essay

I first found out about the history of Little Tokyo-Bronzeville through reading public history articles on local newspapers, and, upon deciding that this was a solid topic for a final project, began to take notes on the general course of events, both in LA and nationally, around the time of WWII. I turned to the UW Libraries' Research Guides for access to databases relating to my topic, and mainly drew from three History guides: History: Asian American, History: African American, and History: Military. Using these guides, I made a list of relevant databases including Densho's online collection and ProQuest Historical Newspapers' Black Newspapers database, and then searched for secondary sources (books and academic journals) on the topic of Little Tokyo and Bronzeville in World War II-era Los Angeles. Around this time, I also decided to consult with Theresa Mudrock, the History Research Librarian, to learn about strategies of obtaining sources which feature the voices of members of the two communities I was researching.

My overall approach to finding information could be viewed as characterized by an initial "top-down" strategy (i.e. identifying relevant collections and keywords first), but this ended up existing alongside a more "bottom-up" approach (i.e. after reading some primary and secondary sources, I ended up developing better search terms, identified more relevant authors and works, and seeing new options for framing the histories I encountered) which fed into each other and sustained my research together. I ended up identifying sources ranging from historical newspaper articles (from both ethnic and more "mainstream" newspapers/magazines), oral histories, and U.S.

government documents to autobiographies, public history articles, and various academic books and papers.

Developing helpful search terms/keywords was important for me as a historian identifying primary sources in various online databases and collections. Some examples of search terms I used—after filtering for the relevant date range (mostly 1935-1955), geographical location (i.e. Los Angeles or California more generally), and type of source—included those describing the specific populations I was researching, such as "African" (as in "African American"), "Black," "Japanese," etc. I also ran searches using keywords related to the names of the district, such as "Little Tokyo" and "Bronzeville." As I got further into my research, I grew more familiar with names used to describe specific events or reflect popular attitudes toward the events in the podcast, such as "race war," "discord," and "clash," and included those on my list of keywords to find increasingly relevant articles.

Other specific search terms I used were dated racial-ethnic labels describing the groups of people featured in the podcast—terms such as "Negro" or "Jap," for instance, which would be considered deeply offensive today. Although the usage of these terms often revealed a lot about the attitudes of those using them toward the group(s) they were writing about ("Negro," for instance, was a common term used by many African American journalists to describe their own racial group around this time)—and thus provided valuable insights into the research for the project—I still had to be ethical in acknowledging the oftentimes racist nature of these terms in the actual, public-facing podcast.

A difficulty I faced was finding good scholarly works and analysis on my topic (getting the "lay of the land," so to speak)—since my topic was quite narrow in its scope, focusing on a specific district in a timeframe of less than a decade, I struggled to find analysis which would place

what happened in Little Tokyo-Bronzeville in the context of larger national processes such as the Great Migration of African Americans out of the South, or national policies related to Japanese internment. My solution was to both broaden the use of search terms when identifying material in the UW Libraries catalog (i.e. searching for books/articles on more general African American history in California in the early 20th century, for instance) as well as paying close attention to UW Libraries' recommended secondary sources which show up to the side of individual catalog materials on the website, and which are almost always relevant to the work I was looking at originally.

Overall, however, I felt that I was quite thorough in searching for information. I was able to uncover otherwise hard-to-find sources on my topic by identifying valuable primary sources (of which I could not have access to physical copies due to the pandemic, of course) from the bibliographies of secondary sources. These included, for example, specific articles or passages from the African-American newspaper *Los Angeles Tribune*, which I could not find via online searches or ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

As a historian, evaluating the information I found on my topic required a lot of source analysis—who the source was created by, its purpose and intended audience, etc. This is especially true for historical subjects who are often framed in a certain light by contemporary observers. For instance, when Dorothy Baruch (a comparatively privileged, white professional) used language such as "squalid" to describe the ethnic neighborhood of Little Tokyo-Bronzeville, it is important for the researcher to be aware of the inscribed racism behind such terms and "read against the bias," so to speak, when quoting her in order to describe this district to a public audience.

This project made me aware of the limits of the (traditional, written, often white-dominated) historical record in fully capturing the beliefs and attitudes of groups who have been marginalized

in a particular historical moment. For instance, I relied mainly on oral history to describe the perspective of many Japanese Americans during the early 1940s, since doubts about their "loyalty" on the part of many white Americans around this time stifled the thriving of an active, local ethnic press in many parts of the western United States. Overall, I have learned about and reflected heavily on the nature of different historical methods to capture the lived experiences of groups whose voices have been suppressed in various historical periods—a way of conceptualizing historical practice which I hope to continue to address in history-related research in the future. (Word Count: 999)