

# *Ethnic Succession from Japanese American to Mexican Immigrant Labor in Southern California's Suburban Maintenance Gardening Sector*



- **Background:** For generations, the ownership of small suburban maintenance gardening businesses has facilitated the economic integration of immigrants in Southern California.
- In the early to mid-twentieth century, this occupational niche was filled primarily by first generation Japanese immigrant men (*Issei*) and their U.S.-born sons (*Nisei*).
- Presently, suburban maintenance gardening is dominated by well-established Mexican immigrant *worker-entrepreneurs*, who employ a workforce of more recently arrived Latino immigrant laborers (Ramírez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009).
- **Research Question:** How, and why, did ethnic succession occur in Southern California's suburban maintenance gardening niche?
- **Methods:** During the summer of 2012, I conducted archival research in Los Angeles, at the Little Tokyo headquarters of the Southern California Gardeners Federation (SCGF).
- **Findings:** My analysis of SCGF's archives, including board meeting minutes and 500+ issues of its in-house monthly newsletter, suggests that *upward socioeconomic mobility* among self-employed Japanese American gardeners and their children, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, led to their abandonment of this line of work.
- Crucially, this development coincided with an increase in the number of Mexican immigrants, many of whom were attracted to gardening work because of their rural backgrounds.
- **Next step:** I currently have a book proposal under review (UC Press), which includes a chapter devoted to these historical events.



A group of Japanese American Gardeners, Los Angeles, 1960

Hernán Ramírez, PhD  
Assistant Professor, FSU Sociology Department  
hramirez@fsu.edu