

## Japanese of the United States

[https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/12322/US](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/12322/US)

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### I. Introduction/History

The United States of America is home to the third highest population of Japanese people of any country outside of Japan, according to the statistics found on the IMB's website, *PeopleGroups*.<sup>1</sup> The history of Japanese in what is now the United States began in the mid to late nineteenth century, when the *gannenmono*, which means "first year people" or "first generation," arrived in Honolulu to try to earn a living working on farms and plantations.<sup>2</sup> These first migrants from Japan experienced harsh treatment and living conditions.<sup>3</sup> They were paid to work, but they were treated much like slaves, to the point that some members of the first groups of Japanese returned to Japan early.<sup>4</sup> However, many of them stayed and continued on to the mainland to find work in places like San Francisco and San Jose, where they were objects of racism.<sup>5</sup> This racism went on for many years, climaxing during World War II with the introduction of relocation camps, into which prominent Japanese in the western United States were held until the end of the war.<sup>6</sup> After the war, conditions became better for Japanese people in America. They continue to play a large role in the American society.<sup>7</sup>

### II. Where are they located?

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<sup>1</sup> "People Name: Japanese of United States," PeopleGroups.org, last modified March 4, 2017, accessed March 5, 2017, <http://www.peoplegroups.org/explore/GroupDetails.aspx?peid=43285#topmenu>. This information was provided by The International Mission Board - Global Research, <http://www.imb.org/globalresearch/>.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Niiya, *Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to the Present* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 1993), 1-11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

A large number of these Japanese Americans live in Hawaii, as well as on the west coast of the forty-eight contiguous states, though there are many who live all over the United States.<sup>8</sup> Most Japanese people in America live in the urban areas and large cities.<sup>9</sup>

### III. What are their lives like?

Japanese Americans live lives that are much like the lives of other Americans, though first and second-generation immigrants have held to many of their cultural traditions.<sup>10</sup> Most of these traditions have been contextualized to fit more with their American cultural context.<sup>11</sup> Japanese in America usually have a strong emphasis on family.<sup>12</sup> They often focus on the “*oyako*, parent-child relations that stress reciprocal obligation.”<sup>13</sup> The Japanese American familial structure is traditionally nuclear, and the mother is the primary caretaker of the children and household duties, while the father is the bread winner.<sup>14</sup> One difference between Japanese Americans and other Americans is that it is common for more than just one family unit to live under the same roof. Cousins, grandparents, aunts, and uncles often live together in the same house.<sup>15</sup>

Marriage and death are two of the most important occasions in the lives of Japanese in America.<sup>16</sup> Due to their strong family emphasis, they see marriage as more of a joining together of two families into one, rather than simply just the husband and wife.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> PeopleGroups.org, “People Name: Japanese of United States.”

<sup>9</sup> “America’s Asian Population Demographic Patterns & Trends,” ProximityOne.com, accessed March 4, 2017, [http://proximityone.com/asian\\_demographics.htm](http://proximityone.com/asian_demographics.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, Ian Skoggard, Eds., *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, vol. 11, Wendy Ng, “Japanese Americans,” (New York, NY: Macmillan Reference USA, 2002), 159-163.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

#### **IV. What are their beliefs?**

The majority of Japanese people in America are either Christian or Buddhist. If they are Buddhist, then their beliefs were probably handed down from their ancestors in Japan.<sup>18</sup>

Religious pluralism is common in Japan, so the type of Buddhism a Japanese person adheres to is usually a blend of Shinto and Buddhism.<sup>19</sup> It can be inferred that the same is true for many of their Japanese American descendants. In addition to this, Japanese Americans have a notable percentage of people with no religious affiliation.<sup>20</sup>

#### **V. What are their needs?**

These facts indicate the increasing need for Christians who are willing to live like Jesus among this people and preach the good news among them. Japanese Americans, because of their pluralistic mindsets, need Christians who will explain that following Jesus is not just another aspect of religious life, but that He is Life. As with anyone coming from a country that speaks a different language, first generation Japanese immigrants need basic training in the English language and help getting acclimated to their new culture.

#### **VI. Prayer Points**

- Pray that the Lord Jesus Christ would specifically call believers to boldly and intentionally speak and live the good news among Japanese Americans without fear. Ask Him if that is His will for you.
- Pray that the Lord Jesus Christ would continue to work in the hearts of Japanese in America who do not know Him, that they may come to know Him.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> David Levinson, Paul Hockings Eds., *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, vol. 5, Margaret Lock, "Japanese," (New York, NY: G.K. Hall & Co., an imprint of Macmillan Inc, 1993), 104-111.

<sup>20</sup> "Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths," Pew Research Center, published July 19, 2012, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-overview/>

- Pray that the Lord Jesus Christ would give His wisdom to those who are and will be working among this people group, so that the workers can best know how to minister and witness to them.