



Doing What Had To Be Done (Asian American History & Cultu)

Soo-Young Chin

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The first biography of an American-born Korean woman, "Doing What Had to Be Done" is, on the surface, the life story of Dora Yum Kim. But telling more than one woman's story, author Soo-Young Chin offers more than an unusual glimpse at the shaping of a remarkable community activist. In addition as she questions her subject, introduces each chapter, and reflects on how Dora's story relates to her own experience as a Korean-American who immigrated to this country as an adult she carves around Dora's compelling and courageous life story, a story of her own and one of all Korean-Americans. Born in 1921, Dora, as she tells Chin her story, chronicles the shifting salience of gendered ethnic identity as she journeys through her life. Traveling through time and place, she moves from San Francisco's Chinatown where Koreans were a minority within a minority to suburban Dewey Boulevard where Dora and her family attempt to integrate into mainstream America and where she becomes a social worker in the California State Department of Employment. As the Korean immigrant community grows in the late 1960s, Dora becomes deeply involved in community service. She remembers teaching English to senior citizens and preparing them for their naturalization exams, finding jobs for the younger Koreans, and founding a community center and meals program for seniors. A detailed and inspiring lens through which to view Korean-American history, Dora's life journey echoes the changing spaces of the American social landscape. The grace and ease with which Dora just 'does what has to be done' shows us the importance of everyday acts in making a difference. Soo-Young Chin is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Asian-American Studies at the University of Southern California.

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