From "Yellow Peril" to "Model Minority"

Japanese Americans and Racial Ideology in U.S. History

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Introduction

In the 1920s Los Angeles was growing by leaps and bounds both in physical size and population as it developed the sprawling suburban landscape that would become the city's trademark. This was a time when the production of space was particularly governed by white supremacist interests and ideology. Tens of thousands of homes were built in neighborhoods restricted to whites as the city's leaders sought to attract white migrants to a sunnier, cleaner, and whiter alternative to the big industrial cities of the Midwest and East Coast.

By the 1920s the Issei had established some notable foundations in LA as community leaders stressed the need for permanent settlement. With the growth of families owing to the yobiyose allowance of the Gentlemen's Agreement and a rise in Nisei births, the Issei began to look for housing beyond the crowded and commercialized confines of Downtown LA's Little Tokyo district. They found, however, that their mobility was hampered by the quest to keep suburban areas exclusively white. White homeowners' associations often portrayed the solitary act of a Japanese family moving into an all-white neighborhood as an "invasion" of their territory. Black residents were treated similarly, as I discuss in my book focusing on comparative Black/Japanese relations in twentieth-century Los Angeles.

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A particularly sharp conflict developed in a district lying to the east of Little Tokyo called Belvedere. Here, white supremacist mobs intimidated and attacked Japanese American families who moved into the neighborhood—in one instance they burned out the house of the Shimizu family who resisted their threats.

Community leaders and especially Japanese consular officials were concerned by these incidents. But what they most wanted was to avoid these localized conflicts, so as to prevent them from interfering with international relations. Thus, they worked to obtain an agreement whereby the white residents would refrain from anti-Japanese attacks so long as the Issei refrained from moving into white neighborhoods where they were not wanted.

However, this agreement unraveled in 1924. Mokichi Kawamoto had been allowed by his white landlord to remain in Belvedere under the terms of a two-year lease. But when Kawamoto stayed beyond his lease, hostile signs were planted outside his house on June 19, 1924. One read "Keep Japs Out of Belvedere." Another reading "Shall It Be America or Japan?" characterized Kawamoto's presence in Belvedere as a threat to the national sovereignty of the United States.

Later that evening, a mob of sixteen to twenty white men and women showed up at his doorstep and demanded, "You better move or we'll move you." When he refused, Kawamoto was dragged outside and beaten by several white men. If the Issei resident did not leave, mob leaders vowed, they would tie him to a tree, coat him with tar-and-feathers and kill him. Kawamoto appealed to local authorities but received no help from the police who sided with the assailants. In fact, one officer was a former president of the Anti-Asiatic Association. The Issei resident thus resigned himself to moving out.

However, the story did not end there. I am told that newspapers in Japan circulated reports of Kawamoto's beating and similar attacks, which

fueled the indignation of the Japanese citizenry. This all occurred around the time of "American Peril Day" and "National Humiliation Day" marking the July 1, 1924 implementation of the exclusionary 1924 Immigration Act. The "yellow peril" image in this way was becoming a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. Issei who mostly wanted to live peacefully in suburban neighborhoods were attacked for being "invaders" threatening the security of white families. Such attacks, in turn, may have influenced rising anti-American sentiments in Japan.

While I seek to develop a complex analysis of historical developments like this, I must admit that my own perspective is ultimately rather one-sided—drawing mainly from expertise in American history and work with English-language sources. I am thus honored to have the opportunity to engage in a dialogue about Japanese American history in a transnational and global context, and I look forward with great interest to future exchanges with scholars in Japan.

This article will focus on the "yellow peril" and "model minority" images of Japanese Americans. The first portion will draw from my book, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles*. Now of course, much has been written about these stereotypical images and what a powerful impact they have had upon the history of not only Japanese Americans but also of the United States as a nation. I will thus highlight three factors, which I believe can help us breathe new life into this discussion.

First, my research seeks not just to examine the images in popular culture but also to place them into context with what was transpiring on the ground, particularly in the city of Los Angeles during a very crucial period of its development.

Second, I want to focus on how and why the popular image of Japanese Americans shifted so quickly and abruptly from "yellow peril" to "model minority"—I would offer that this shift tells us more about the

interests and concerns of the US nation-state than it does about any unique cultural traits of Japanese Americans.

And lastly, I want to pose the question: what are the implications of this historical shift from "yellow peril" to "model minority" for a broader understanding of racial politics and ideology in America? Here I will venture beyond the scope of my book. And I will particularly speak of how social conditions today are very different from those of the postwar era during which time the model minority image of Japanese Americans arose.

"Yellow Peril" Discourse During World War II

As is well known, the "yellow peril" depictions of Japanese Americans that gathered momentum during the early decades of the twentieth century reached a crescendo in the months following the attack on Pearl Harbor. The national outcry to intern "Japs" was so pervasive that even Dr. Seuss aided the agitation by publishing a cartoon portraying Japanese Americans as saboteurs.

Los Angeles leaders were at the forefront of the public campaign for Japanese American internment. LA Mayor Fletcher Bowron lead a chorus of local politicians and civic leaders characterizing Japanese Americans as members of a treacherous enemy race. Bowron proclaimed, "the Japanese problem is centered in Los Angeles"—sounding the alarm that LA would be the site of a "second Pearl Harbor." As such arguments blending fear and hatred took hold among the public, putting Japanese Americans into concentration camps became a matter of what Fletcher Bowron deemed "common sense." Bowron's most masterful and nefarious accomplishment was to shift the primary focus of suspicion from the immigrant and alien Issei to the American-born and citizen Nisei, transforming a highly problematic witch-hunt for "disloyal enemy aliens" into an indiscriminate concentration of over 100,000 Japanese Americans.

Before the war began, however, Fletcher Bowron had a reputation as a liberal Republican. In the late 1930s, he was a judge with a notable record of defending civil liberties. In an August 1940 speech against anti-Communist witch-hunts, Bowron commented, "The true patriot is not a flag waver." "The real American, the real patriot, the one who is actuated by love of country, is not one who shouts the loudest in trying or unsettled times. He works quietly to protect American institutions, to see that the guarantees of the United States Constitution are carried into effect rather than be forgotten and disregarded by mob hysteria."

Less than two years later, Bowron could be found demanding not only that all Japanese Americans be removed from the West Coast but also that the Nisei be stripped of citizenship and shipped off to Japan. In fact, the mayor argued, the Nisei were the most dangerous of all because they harbored "a secret loyalty to the Japanese Emperor, while enjoying the privileges and immunities of American citizenship as a constitutional right." Using twisted logic, Bowron argued that patriotic, law-abiding behavior was the most suspicious of all. "The most natural thing would be for the most dangerous of them to condemn the Japanese war clique, the Axis powers, to loudly declare a prejudice against Japan and proclaim a belief in American Democracy with an emotional pledge of allegiance to the Stars and Stripes." (Similar arguments were also advanced by Earl Warren—the attorney general of California, who later became governor of the state and chief justice of the US Supreme Court.)

Hearing these words, one Nisei responded, "I thought the Mayor was a liberal and a man who had a scrupulous record for human justice and honesty. He's more of a pompous jackass and hypocrite from what I can gather."

But the mayor just shrugged off his critics. World War II was "not a time for sentimentality or for our people to be so actuated by a mistaken sense of brotherly love." He then offered these famous last words: "Those

little men who prate of civil liberties... will be forgotten in the pages of history."

Authorities like Bowron quickly recognized how easily the desire of Nisei leaders for acceptance could be manipulated. Their message to the Nisei was that they should do whatever the government asked of them to prove their loyalty. One internal report to the mayor proposed that "fear propaganda" be used to "keep [the Nisei] in line" and "obtain information" from them. On February 5, Bowron publicly informed Japanese Americans that if they wanted to remain in America they had not only behave themselves but also ensure that no other ethnic Japanese deviate in any way, shape or form. He declared that "one single act"—in other words, "anything that might assist the Japanese government in time of war"—would "brand the entire Japanese population, not only during the existence of a state of war, but at least for a generation." Restating what was by then becoming a popular argument, Bowron remarked that voluntarily moving to relocation camps would signify the truest sign of loyalty. There was, he assured, "nothing that could be considered inhumane in connection with this plan." Again, this was (in Gramscian terms) the prevailing "common sense" of the American public in 1942.

"Gateway to a New World"

The utility of "yellow peril" discourse, overtly racist and exclusionary in character, would be challenged, however, as the war progressed and the American nation-state was presented with new challenges. For instance, Nobel Prize-winning author and social critic Pearl Buck stood at forefront of a group of liberals who stressed the values of racial tolerance, cosmopolitanism, and global integration.

At the weekly "Town Hall" forum of Los Angeles civic leaders on November 1, 1943, Pearl Buck emphasized the significance of race

relations in a world standing at a crossroads. Throughout American history, she argued, the white majority had ruled the nation at the cost of terrible suffering for the colored minorities of the land. On a global scale, however, whites were severely outnumbered. Hitler's genocidal war of conquest now forced every American to choose between two potential courses. Domination of the planet by its white minority could only be sustained by "military preparation of the most barbarous and savage kind"; the use of "super-weapons," including "chemical warfare on a mass scale"; and an ultimate willingness "to destroy all civilization, even our own, in order to keep down the colored peoples." But establishing a world order shaped by the free and equal participation of all humankind could augur a new era of peace and prosperity. Through speeches like this, Buck contributed to the reformulation of racial discourse in response to the paradigmatic geopolitical developments of the evolving "American century." Leading a chorus of intellectuals during World War II, she pushed Americans to comprehend that "the battle against race prejudice" had shifted from being "a family quarrel in our own house" to becoming "part of the tremendous struggle for human freedom upon this globe."

Portraying this national watershed as particularly salient to Los Angeles, Buck implored her audience to assume the responsibility that came with their region's new status as "the leader of the nation." "Imperceptibly the center of gravity in our country is moving westward," she declared. "The people in our Eastern states are already looking toward you as these great questions arise of how to deal with the people of Asia and South America." As she spoke these words, Buck knew that next week's "Town Hall" would debate "whether or not any Japanese Americans should be allowed to return to California when the war is over." Los Angeles had made itself known as the center of public agitation for the internment, and this troubled her because racial chauvinism played into the hands of Japan's propagandists. Rallying the people of Asia to its "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,"

Japan submitted that it was a liberating force marshaling resentment of Western imperialism and white supremacy. Hence, to win the hearts and minds of people in Asia, America must disavow its past indiscretions. "I beg of you men and women of the most important part of our country, as I now believe California is, to keep your wits and common sense," Buck pleaded. "Once in an eon a single people is given the opportunity to shape the world's direction—that opportunity is now ours. And because you in California face the Pacific and Asia, you among us have the crux in your hands. You can, by what you decide, be a barrier—or you can be a gateway to a new and better world, for us and for all peoples."

Throughout the first-half of the twentieth century, the Pacific coast location of Los Angeles had inspired both boosterist visions of growth and xenophobic fears of "yellow peril." While Pearl Buck had asked the Town Hall audience to embrace a world of interdependence, her speech's most practical implication was that the city could not have growth unless it overcame its fear and hatred. The subsequent events of the war served to quell the fears. White agitators had always portrayed the small population of Japanese in America as a symbol of a grave threat—the yellow hordes who would pollute the nation through unchecked immigration; the Japanese farmers who would take agricultural sustenance from the hands of the white race; and, above all, the scheming "yellow peril" saboteurs ready to strike the minute Japan gave the signal. By the end of 1945, Asian immigration remained tightly restricted, the Issei presence in farming had been curtailed by the internment, and Japan had been subdued by the atomic blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As it turned out, the anti-Japanese agitators, who for decades warned that yellow hordes would invade California, got it reversed: the invasions occurred largely from west to east. The United States occupied Japan with two million personnel for nearly seven years. With a vested interest in demonstrating that the people of Japan were close friends capable of adopting the American way of life, the occupying forces carried forth an

idealistic vision of Western-style democracy.

In return, the occupation had a profound impact on the way people of Japanese descent were viewed and treated in postwar America. Most immediately, hostility toward Japanese Americans diminished as American foreign policy made new designations of "good" and "bad" Asians. In large measure, Japanese Americans had been victimized by racist acts because whites linked them by "racial guilt" to Japan's belligerence. But Japan was now central to the creation of the United States' sphere of influence, otherwise known as the anti-communist "free world." As it hosted permanent American military outposts, Japan went from being a reviled enemy to a critical ally in the fight against communism in China and Korea. In this regard, as literary critic Christina Klein has argued, American Cold War policy was marked not only by the fight to contain communism but also by the attempt to create an affiliation between the US and Asia. To secure domestic consent for transpacific intervention, American intellectuals and policy makers constructed what Klein has called a "global imaginary of integration." Just as wartime propaganda taught Americans how and why to hate the "Japs," postwar news accounts and fictional narratives provided models of a dominant America taking Japan as a subordinate ally. Through the production of a "sentimental discourse," postwar cultural and ideological projects provided Middle America with an appreciation for Cold War integrationist objectives.

The Emergence of the "Model Minority"

The local impact of this shift in discourse was palpable. Through foreign and domestic considerations, a confluence of actors became invested in portraying Nisei as model American citizens during World War II. Countering Japan's race war propaganda, the United States recruited Nisei into the armed forces and highlighted their achievements. At the same time,

white liberals pressing the War Relocation Authority (WRA) to release select internees back into public life insisted that Nisei loyalty was beyond reproach.

By linking the political fate of Japanese Americans to decorated Nisei veterans, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) sought to advance its civil rights agenda and curry favor from mainstream politicians. In November 1946, it sponsored a high-profile banquet in Los Angeles that drew extensive media coverage and the attendance of many elected officials. Its guest speaker of honor was none other than mayor Fletcher Bowron, who used the occasion to deliver a *mea culpa*. Especially proud of the high proportion of Nisei veterans with local origins, he praised the all-Nisei 442nd Regiment and admitted their heroic wartime deeds of service in the US armed forces had proven his previous suspicions misguided. "I am glad, indeed," Bowron concluded, "to make the public declaration that I have been convinced beyond any peradventure of doubt, the Nisei have been true." Two days after this momentous occasion, the JACL won a significant electoral victory. Proposition 15, which promised to strengthen the Alien Land Laws, fell to defeat by a nearly 60-40 margin among California voters. After decades of marginalization, the JACL also achieved a semblance of access to the nation's highest policy making circles when its representative Mike Masaoka invited to participate in President Truman's civil rights committee.

The new prerogative for discourses emphasizing transpacific integration and friendship fused with a neoconservative interpretation of race relations to herald a new image of Japanese Americans centered on the American-born and assimilated Nisei. By 1966, the "model minority" had become firmly established in the American consciousness when University of California sociologist William Petersen, writing in a feature for the *New York Times Magazine*, declared that Japanese Americans had achieved a "remarkable record" of unparalleled achievement "by their own almost

totally unaided effort." "Even in a country whose patron saint is the Horatio Alger hero," Petersen concluded, "there is no parallel to this success story."

But the narrative of Japanese American success was not really about Japanese Americans per se. Instead it was part of a discourse whose purpose was to valorize American exceptionalism and validate the ideology of liberal individualism. The celebrations of Nisei battlefield heroism and the "successful" Nisei assimilation reinforced official narratives of America as a land of opportunity and a nation that had defeated racial prejudice. Stories have since circulated of the young actor Ronald Reagan expressing this sentiment during a post-World War II ceremony honoring the fallen Nisei soldier Kazuo Masuda. "America stands unique in the world," he reportedly proclaimed, "the only country not founded on race, but on... an ideal."

If the segregated 442nd Regiment could serve as a model of American democracy in action, it was perhaps not so far a stretch to propose that the internment could do likewise. In fact, War Relocation Authority (WRA) director Dillon Myer argued that the internment was a benevolent endeavor consistent with modernist notion of progress and racial integration. In his eyes, the herding of Japanese Americans into WRA "relocation centers" had launched "an exciting adventure in the democratic method." As the relatively smooth postwar resettlement confirmed his faith in American justice, he stated, "When the people of the United States have the opportunity to understand the problems of the underdog and those discriminated against, they really do believe in the Bill of Rights and are ready to do something about it." Myer and other assimilationists argued that the status of Japanese Americans improved not *in spite of* their having been interned but *because* of their internment. While he considered the internment to be "unnecessary," he declared it had "yielded some excellent results." Ultimately, he concluded, Japanese Americans were "better off as a result of the evacuation." Myer even belittled or downplayed Japanese Americans suffering, when he asserted that "probably at least half [of the Issei] had

never had it so good" as when they were interned.

Critiquing the "Model Minority"

In one sense, the image of Japanese Americans as a "model minority" was a significant advance in that it countered the violent, racist images associated with the "yellow peril." However, as Asian American studies developed in the late 1960s, activists and scholars placed their condemnation of the "model minority" myth at the center of the field's critique of multiracial relations. This image of Japanese American "success," they argued, had been purposefully distorted and exaggerated to denigrate other communities of color.

The "model minority" provided the first dominant imagery that allowed Japanese American to make a cultural claim to American citizenship. Yet, as Yuji Ichioka pointed out, an innocent notion of "belonging" to America was the core problem. In his 1970 review of *Nisei: The Quiet Americans*, written by Bill Hosokawa and produced by the Japanese American Citizens League, Ichioka argued that the JACL's strategy of promoting civil rights through assimilation was out-of-sync with the radical and confrontational politics of the late sixties and early seventies. Ichioka wrote of the book:

> It appears, ironically, at the very moment when Sansei are asking: what have we been integrating into? Into a nation conducting a politically and morally bankrupt war against Vietnamese people in the name of freedom and democracy? A nation bent on exterminating militant Black leaders? A nation which is moving to the extreme right in the name of law and order? A nation in which the so-called "American Dream" has turned out to be a violent nightmare? His theme is totally out of touch with the hard realties of the time. In 1969, "Americanism" still basically means racism, superpatriotism, and rightwing politics.[1]

In sum, the "model minority" image of Japanese Americans was built upon several key premises of the post war era: 1) American global hegemony; 2) White majority rule; and 3) American economic dominance and expansion.

First, the "model minority" was tied to the anti-communist discourse of "containment" and the establishment of American global hegemony during the Cold War. The push for Japanese American citizenship rights fed upon the transpacific anxieties of anti-communist politicians. Nowhere was this more evident than during the debate surrounding the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act. Considered the crowning achievement of postwar Nisei activism, the law granted naturalization rights to Japanese immigrants and replaced the 1924 ban on immigration from Japan with a new quota. But its passage was motivated by anti-communism on two fronts. On the one hand, Nisei leaders and their political allies found that the best case for ending Japanese exclusion could be made by stressing the vital role of Japan to American Cold War objectives. John Foster Dulles declared the goal of American foreign policy was "to align [Japan] with the West and alienate it from Asia." Walter Judd, a Republican congressman from Minnesota, lamented the fact that America had "lost a good part of Asia to Communist control." Judd asserted that Japan could serve as "a bulwark of freedom" in the region if immigration and naturalization policies were liberalized. The commanding general of the Eighth Army in Japan agreed; so did the American ambassador to Japan, who proclaimed the proposed law would "electrify the people of Asia."

On the other hand, such arguments only took effect when paired with domestic anti-communist considerations. The new measure ending Japanese exclusion only passed as part of an omnibus bill authored by the conservative Nevada senator Pat McCarran, who viewed immigration as a threat to national security. America was "the oasis of the world," he declared, and it was in danger of being "overrun, perverted, contaminated

or destroyed" by immigrants. Hence the greater impact of McCarran's 1952 act was to strengthen the power of the US state to exclude, monitor, and deport immigrants. Liberal and left-wing critics deemed it a repressive device comparable to "Hitler's Nuremburg Laws."

Second, the "model minority" image was presented as a method of racial integration rooted in individualism and the assimilation of nonwhites into a white majority. It deliberately evaded or glossed over the ways in which such an individualist method of advancement was not socially viable or even desirable for the nation's largest and most oppressed minority groups. Just as it was rooted in a distortion of the history of Japanese American internment, the "model minority" ideology—through its insistence that America was a free country affording every individual an equal opportunity to pull themselves up by their bootstraps—sought to whitewash the legacy of settler colonialism and slavery.

For instance, Japanese Americans achieved their greatest degree of political empowerment in Hawaii. They were part of a new governing coalition that took control of the territory through the "Revolution of 1954" in the name of a multiracial constituency linked to trade unions, ending a half-century of domination by white plantation elites tied to the Republican Party. Although some Native Hawaiians participated in the new Democratic bloc, the new governing body failed to resolve the original problem of Native Hawaiian dispossession, a problem whose roots could be traced to nineteenth-century colonialism and the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. The 1959 granting of statehood to Hawaii served as a further means of advancing Japanese American political clout (e.g. Senator Daniel Inouye has now been in Congress for over fifty years) while creating new obstacles to the exercise of Hawaiian sovereignty.

Although Japanese Americans comprised nowhere near the share of the mainland population as they did in Hawaii (where they became a majority), they did become somewhat prominent fixtures in places

of concentration on the West Coast. Here again, however, the postwar narrative of racial integration and assimilation failed to address the problem of dispossession of Native Americans and Mexicans linked to nineteenth-century settler colonialism. In other words, it failed to acknowledge that the "freedom" to achieve upward mobility (to the degree it was even possible) came at the expense of conquered others.

Third, the acceptance of Japanese Americans as a "model minority" occurred as a growing and globally commanding American economy gave rise to a vast postwar expansion of the white American "middle class." In cities like Los Angeles, tens of thousands of jobs and new homes were added at a rapid pace but nearly all were located in the suburbs. As a result, American cities grew increasingly segregated, as whites fled to the suburbs, often moving into homes subsidized by the government and monitored by realtors and developers practicing racial discrimination.

Meanwhile, the anti-communist climate of the Cold War era led to a curtailment of social democratic measures that were designed to uplift the standard of living for millions of urban and working-class blacks and Latinos. In the inner cities, neighborhoods were torn apart as freeways were consciously directed through minority communities and urban renewal projects forced residents out using the power of eminent domain. In the face of such hardships, simply obtaining guarantees of fundamental citizenship rights necessitated the blood, sweat, and tears of the civil rights movement.

Viewed as a smaller and less threatening population, Japanese and Asian Americans in Southern California (and probably across most of the nation) clearly enjoyed greater residential options than most other people of color. A Nisei protestant minister in the early 1960s surmised that white sellers viewed Japanese Americans as a tolerable alternative to blacks they feared would trigger a neighborhood "invasion." "A lot of us are congratulating ourselves on working for and securing wide acceptance in the community at large," he commented. "But I suspect that we have been

bailed out by the Negroes. They moved in and frightened the whites, who then found that we Japanese weren't so bad after all. They could stop hating us and start hating the Negroes."

The "model minority" thus became the exception that proved the rule: a discourse used to rationalize the social and economic privileges reserved mainly for whites and largely withheld from nonwhites. Hence we would later discover that even when American politicians ultimately moved to support Japanese American redress and reparations in the 1980s, the notion of compensatory measures for blacks exploited and disposed by slavery and Jim Crow remained a fringe proposition.

Looking Toward the Future

In the end, what the rise of "model minority" imagery demonstrates is the constrained terms under which racial tolerance became acceptable to the white American majority. Thus, we must also appreciate how different conditions are today from those that allowed for even the limited postwar vision of racial tolerance to develop. First, American global hegemony has been undermined by a series of failed interventions and its rationale for intervention has been undermined by the end of the Cold War. Of course, the Bush doctrine proposed fighting the "war on terror" as a new rationale for unilateral intervention, but the neoconservative fantasy became quagmired in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Second, whites are no longer a comfortable majority but have now become an emerging minority in the US. Indeed, in many cities and regions, whites are already a minority, and in some places, they are a very small minority. Thus the US is at a very different historical juncture. The old propositions for integration—premised on the incorporation of minorities into a white majority—have been displaced by new questions arising from multiethnic interactions.

Third, the American economy, particularly relative to China, has been shrinking more than it has been expanding. And for the US working-class, the economy has essentially stagnated for the past four decades. Formerly vibrant industrial cities like Detroit, once centers of dynamic growth and magnets for migrant workers, have exhibited an immense economic collapse and an almost total unraveling of the industrial-era safety net. During the recession and deindustrialization of the 1980s, we saw how quickly the "model minority" image of success could become a source of tension feeding the "Japan-bashing" that motivated attacks such as the 1982 beating of Vincent Chin in Detroit.

So where do we go from here? We know that the accommodationist ideology of the "model minority" was meant as a soothing device for whites who were unsettled by the turbulent struggles over racial integration. However, the "model minority" can perform no such duty today for whites now confronting the unprecedented prospect of the US becoming majority nonwhite while declining geopolitically and economically and, on top of all this, forced to curtail the consumerism of the American middle class if any meaningful steps to slow climate change are to be taken. What we are thus witnessing in America is a huge backlash—particularly from the former beneficiaries of white middle-class, postwar expansion. It is a backlash that makes little attempt to learn from history and thus directs its venom at both justifiable and unjustifiable targets: corporate power, outsourcing, foreign competition, "big government," and, especially at this moment, immigration. This backlash has become most visible through the Tea Party protests offering a right-wing brand of populism. In the short run, these forces are positioned to create a great deal of chaos in US politics and wreck a great deal of havoc upon the US population.

What will happen in the long run is up for grabs. To see the possibilities for a progressive alternative—one which looks more critically at crises confronting the US and the world and which looks beyond the

"model minority" stereotype for a multiracial response to the problem of oppression—I recommend that you follow the development of the US Social Forum. In June 2010, the US Social Forum gathered 18,000 activists in Detroit under the banner "Another World is Possible, Another US is Necessary." It presents a unique opportunity both to learn from history and to make history.

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Notes

[1.] Yuji Ichioka, "Book Review, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans*," *Roots: An Asian American Reader* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1971), 222. The review originally appeared in *Gidra* (January 1970).