

## Gender and American Citizenship— the Construction of “Our Nation” in the Early Twentieth Century

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“Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Emma Lazarus, 1883

We will not judge fellow Americans by appearance, ethnic background or religious faith. We will defend the values of our country, and we will live by them. . . . Above all, we will live in a spirit of courage and optimism. Our Nation was born in that spirit, as immigrants yearning for freedom courageously risked their lives in search of greater opportunity.<sup>1</sup>

George W. Bush, September 2, 2002

Throughout American history, American values and principles such as freedom have been regarded as the basis of the national identity. As Emma Lazarus acknowledged, every newcomer, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity, should be welcomed as a member of “Our Nation” if he or she accepts American values and principles. As President Bush declares, every American citizen is to be a full member of “Our Nation” unless he or she denies American values and principles.

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Historically, however, gender as well as race has constructed the boundary of "Our Nation." Needless to say, legal citizenship is necessary for anyone to be a member of a nation. As the history of immigration policies illuminate, race and ethnicity have defined the eligibility of legal citizenship. Gender also constructed the boundary of legal American citizenship. From 1907 to 1931, for instance, any American woman who married a foreigner was forced to take the nationality of her husband. Those women married to people ineligible for citizenship were deprived of their own citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, according to Martha Gardner, immigration and naturalization laws and policies have tried to regulate "the borders of belonging" for immigrant women according to the "legal ideals of moral order, family unity, economic independence and racial homogeneity."<sup>3</sup>

Even if he or she has legal citizenship, however, not everyone has been able to acquire full membership in "Our Nation" as the civil rights movement revealed. Paying attention to this aspect of American history, recent studies redefine American citizenship. American citizenship, according to Evelyn Nakano Glenn, has functioned as a measure to construct "boundaries between those who are included as members of the community and entitled to respect, protection, and rights and those who are excluded and thus not entitled to recognition and rights."<sup>4</sup> In other words, we can define American citizenship as the full membership in "Our Nation" that assures "respect, protection and rights" to its members. If we define American citizenship in this way, it is clear that gender as well as race has mattered in the history of American citizenship. The movement for women's suffrage and feminism have stood up for rights which American citizenship should have guaranteed for every citizen. Rights are paired with obligation. Linda Kerber points out that the unequal obligations placed on men and women in the practice of citizenship have prevented women from participating fully in American society. According to Kerber, for instance, the system of coverture excused married women from civic obligations because married women owed their primary obligation to their husbands. In other words, married women could not have independent citizenship under this system.<sup>5</sup>

This paper has no intention to describe how women have been excluded from American citizenship. The aim of this paper is to clarify how gender affected the construction of American citizenship. In order to illuminate the relations between gender and American citizenship, I will focus on the period from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s. In this

period, American society made tremendous efforts to establish an “us” community, that is, “Our Nation,” as the basis of nationalism. For instance, American history and the American flag were introduced into the curriculum of public schools. Analyzing the curriculum of civics at public schools in the early twentieth century, Yoon K. Pak argues that “citizenship moved away from political rights and voting toward a cultural ideal and identity.”<sup>6</sup>

In order to protect “Our Nation,” nativistic movements tried to clarify who should be excluded from the “us” community. Analyzing the electoral reforms from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, for instance, Michael Schudson points out that the concept of citizenship began to change from “participation by virtue of one’s presence in the land to participation that rested on prequalifications.” He summarizes this trend as “purification of citizenship.”<sup>7</sup> Rogers M. Smith also argues that working-class immigrants, women, and people of color were assumed to be unfit for full and equal citizenship in the Progressive era.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, what was notable during this period was that the movement to define the standard of inclusion in the “us” community, that is, the Americanization movement, was active at the same time. The Americanization movement explained to newcomers in the affirmative what were the “prequalifications” for full American citizenship and tried to inculcate these “prequalifications” into newcomers. Desmond King indicates that Americanization meant “defining membership of the United States and of American life.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus, both nativistic movements and the Americanization movement attempted to define the boundary of American citizenship around this period. In response to these movements, various ethnic and racial groups who were placed as “others” in American society tried to prove that they were qualified for full membership of American society. This paper, accordingly, focuses on three kinds of approaches to define American citizenship in the early twentieth century, that is, the Americanization movement, nativistic movements, and responses of newcomers, and clarifies how gender was related to the construction of “Our Nation” in the early twentieth century.

Both nativistic movements and the Americanization movement were spontaneous activities at local levels as well as nationwide movements. Political and intellectual leaders at the national level tended to discuss abstract ideas. At local levels, Americanizers who worked with newcomers every day had to clarify what newcomers were expected to

learn and teach newcomers how to behave in everyday life. Exclusionists at local levels also had to explain why they tried to exclude certain people in concrete terms in order to gain the support of the public. Accordingly, analysis of local activities will illuminate how gender defined American citizenship more precisely. This paper will focus on the local activities in California where both the anti-Japanese campaign and the Americanization movement were active in the early twentieth century.

## 1. GENDER ROLES AND AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

### “Go After Women”

Women participated actively in the Americanization movement. In California, chapters of various women’s organizations such as the Federation of Women’s Clubs or the Daughters of the American Revolution (the DAR) participated in the Americanization movement. Local governments appointed women to major positions on the California State Commission of Immigration and Housing (the CSCIH) which was responsible for Americanizing immigrants in California.

Recent studies regard the Americanization movement as one of the social reforms in which middle class white women actively participated during the Progressive era. John F. McClymer, for instance, emphasizes the accomplishment of women activists in public policy formation and implementation in the Americanization movement. Gayle Gullet also analyzes how women progressives actively played political roles in the Americanization movement. Both McClymer and Gullet point out that women activists utilized “domesticity” as the means for women’s participation in the public sphere.<sup>10</sup>

When we analyze the programs of Americanization as a measure to define American citizenship, however, we should consider why women activists could play a significant role in the Americanization movement and why “domesticity” became an effective device for Americanization. Women could play active roles not only because women intended to do so but because women activists were needed to pursue the Americanization movement. One article on Americanization by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1919, for instance, proposed that it was “the task of our best American womanhood” to teach “the best American ideals and home standards, as well as a knowledge of our language to the foreign-born women.”<sup>11</sup>

Women activists were needed in the Americanization movement

because the Americanizers considered that it was a top-priority issue to Americanize immigrant women. In a sense, it is natural that activists targeted immigrant women since immigrant women stayed at home and had little contact with American society. The Americanization movement attached more importance to Americanizing women. In 1915, for instance, Kate Waller Barrett, special agent of the United States Immigration Service, pointed out the significance of Americanizing immigrant women. "The importance of reaching the alien woman is paramount if we are going to Americanize our foreign population. She is the crux of the whole subject."<sup>12</sup>

Why was "reaching the alien woman" so important? Activists who advocated the significance of Americanizing women did not expect immigrant women to be independent citizens. They regarded immigrant women as homemakers or homemakers-to-be. As "a deep concern of our nation should be for the homes of its people," according to Edith Terry Bremer, who discussed immigrant education in 1916, women should be evaluated as "the forces that act upon the homes of this nation and the making of its people."<sup>13</sup> An article discussing the Americanization of Mexican laborers, published in 1923, stressed the need for the Americanization of Mexican women. "'Go after the Women' should become a slogan among Americanization workers, for after all the greatest good is to be obtained by starting the home off right."<sup>14</sup> In other words, as the Americanization movement regarded the "home" as the foundation for the full membership of American society, activists tried to "go after" immigrant women.

### The Home as the Basis of American Citizenship

Americanizers repeatedly asserted the significance of "home." According to Royal Dixon, who wrote *Americanization* in 1916, Frances Kellor, one of the leaders of the National Americanization Committee, emphasized the significance of Americanizing the immigrant's "home" because the "home" was "a basis of good citizenship and social solidarity."<sup>15</sup> One professor of home economics also maintained in 1922 that the "home" was the basis for citizenship. "Home ideals . . . are basic in their influence upon the interrelations of the citizenry of the nation."<sup>16</sup> Pearl Idelia Ellis, homemaking instructor of elementary schools in California, contended that the home, which symbolized a good family life, was the basis for citizenship in 1929. According to Ellis, a good family life brought about social stability. In her book entitled

*Americanization through Home-making*, Ellis advocated the necessity of teaching women “American habits of home-making.” According to Ellis, it was significant to “begin at the basic structure of their social order—the home” in order to “assimilate” them.<sup>17</sup>

This idea that the “home” was the basis for citizenship was put into practice in California. In 1915, California passed the Home Teacher Act. The main objective of the home teacher program was Americanizing immigrant families. “The Manual for Home Teachers of 1919” made it clear that the primary aim of this program was “to Americanize the families of the community.”<sup>18</sup> Amanda Chase, who had belonged to the Los Angeles College Settlement, experimented with the home teacher system in Los Angeles County and prepared several pamphlets showing the methods of teaching “foreign women.” She wrote that schooling for “foreign-born women” was necessary because the mother determined “the kind of home and health and happiness of the family” and “the foreign-born mothers” would take much of the responsibility of determining “what kind of citizens their children shall become.”<sup>19</sup>

The home teacher program in California was not just the program of public schools. Public offices and private organizations cooperated with each other in terms of finances, human resources and ideas. Various private women’s organizations such as the California Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the YWCA as well as churches helped the CSCIH to pass the Home Teacher Act. Patriotic organizations such as the California State Society of the DAR and the United Daughters of the Confederacy cooperated with home teachers. Eight chapters of the California State Society of the DAR, for instance, paid home teachers wages and asked them to visit immigrants’ homes and gather mothers into a class at the Albion Street School, which the California State Society of the DAR subsidized.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, home teachers and local activists in California intervened in the private lives of immigrant families and exemplified what was expected of immigrant women as homemakers. Observing the activities of the home teacher program in California, F.V. Thompson, superintendent of a school in Boston, pointed out in 1919 that the home teacher program of California was “a substantial factor in future endeavors for Americanization.”<sup>21</sup> Historian George Sanchez also contends that from 1915 to 1929, home teachers were “the linchpin of Americanization efforts.”<sup>22</sup>

### The Anti-Japanese Campaign and Gender

The Americanization movement defined the boundary of inclusion into "Our Nation." Conversely, the anti-Japanese campaign made attempts to construct the boundary of citizenship in order to exclude Japanese immigrants and their descendents from "Our Nation." Both movements, however, had one thing in common. That is to say, both targeted women.

One of the most common criticisms leveled against Japanese immigrants was the problem of women's roles at home. Anti-Japanese advocates accused Japanese immigrants of making women work outside and of neglecting the "home." Economic competition was one of the major reasons for this criticism of women's labor. The advocates, however, did not directly blame Japanese immigrant women for offering inexpensive labor. They argued that women's work in the fields was a moral issue because Japanese immigrant men had women neglect their homes. According to Milton H. Esberg, a member of the Chamber of Commerce of San Francisco, one of the causes of the anti-Japanese campaign was that there was no "discrimination" on the part of the Japanese "as to whether the men, or the women do the work."<sup>23</sup> A field manager at Walnut Grove maintained that Japanese immigrants disrupted the "order" of American society because they made women work in the field.<sup>24</sup> V.S. McClatchy, who was one of the leaders of the anti-Japanese campaign, pointed to the "general use of women as laborers, regardless of their condition as prospective mothers, and prevalence of child labor"<sup>25</sup> as one of the causes of "unassimilability." According to Harry A. Millis, who discussed the "Japanese Problem" in 1915, "an average American assumes that wives should not work regularly at the chief gainful pursuit of the family," but "in the rural communities especially, Japanese women have neglected household duties for work in shop or field."<sup>26</sup>

Ralph Burnight who conducted a survey on "the problems" of Japanese immigrants in 1920 pointed out the importance of mothers' roles. "There is a widespread campaign throughout our country against women in industry. . . . The proper training of the children of any country requires more attention from the mother than taking them into the fields where they sit all day while the parents are working nearby." Burnight suggested that the labor of Japanese immigrant women adversely affected the citizenship of American-born farmers. "How can a

white farmer compete with them [Japanese immigrants] and at the same time inform himself sufficiently to make a good and efficient citizen, and how could his wife rear good citizens?"<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the criticism of the gender roles in Japanese immigrants' homes became an appealing moral issue for people who had not even seen a Japanese immigrant. It goes without saying that gender roles within Japanese immigrants' homes were only one of many causes for the exclusion of Japanese immigrants. The analysis of criticisms against gender relations of Japanese immigrants, however, illuminates that the "home" to which women dedicated themselves was one of the major requisites for American citizenship.

At the end of WWI, "white" women acquired suffrage. Nevertheless, the suffrage did not automatically assure women of full American citizenship as individuals. As both the Americanization movement and the anti-Japanese campaign in California revealed, the "home" was the basis of American citizenship and women were primarily regarded as "homemakers."

## II "THE HOME BUILT UPON THE AMERICAN STANDARD OF LIVING"

### The American Standard of Living

As the "home" was the basis of American citizenship and women were supposed to be homemakers or homemakers-to-be, immigrant women had to learn what the proper American home was. The Americanization textbooks and classes placed importance on the practical way of life which meant activities and habits of everyday life. In 1915, for instance, Kate Waller Barrett, special agent of the United States Immigration Service, argued that the Americanization of immigrant women was urgent because they made decisions about the practical way of life. "It is she [the alien woman] who selects the neighborhood and the house in which the family live and the church which they attend. She has the opportunity to supplement the lessons at school and her attitude towards the problems of daily life unconsciously are reflected in the other members of the family."<sup>28</sup>

Albert Shiels, whose book on Americanization was published by the District of Los Angeles Public Schools in 1919, emphasized that Americanizers had to be attentive to the everyday lives of immigrants. "Good citizenship is very much less a matter of knowledge than of habitual action. Therefore Americanization—that is, the making of good cit-

izens—depends very much more on the kind of a place a man lives in and the people he lives with than on the school he attended.”<sup>29</sup> David A. Bridge also argued that Americanization of immigrants was “connected directly with their everyday life.”<sup>30</sup>

Americanizers believed that the proper way of daily living enabled immigrants to obtain “the American standard of living.” In other words, obtaining “the American standard of living” was one of the major requisites for American citizenship. In 1916, Helen V. Boswell, president of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs summarized the “three prime essentials” required for American citizenship. They were “common language, common citizenship and a high standard of living.”<sup>31</sup> David A. Bridge, who made an Americanization program for the Los Angeles Recreation Center District in 1920, mentioned that the chief duty of Americanizers in the district was “to secure an American standard of family life for all” because the family life or the “home” was the foundation of all the social welfare and progress towards “American ideals.” As the “home” should stand for “American institutions,” according to Bridge, “the home built upon the American standard of living” was indispensable to Americanization.<sup>32</sup> The California State Society of the DAR also suggested that obtaining “the proper standard of living” was necessary for immigrants in order to adapt to American society. “For with the ever-increasing foreign population needed in agriculture and industry, the public institutions and all patriotic organizations are strained to maintain proper standards of living and education for these foreign residents.”<sup>33</sup>

The CSCIH also advocated that Americanization meant development of the standard of living. In 1923, the CSCIH claimed that “Americanization was not flag raising and ‘patriotic’ howling” and that Americanization was more than teaching English to foreigners. The CSCIH defined Americanization as “the encouragement to decent living, and making possible the attainment of decent standards.”<sup>34</sup>

“The American standard of living” was not an abstract concept. The Americanization activists did not directly relate the standard of living with the level of wages or income, either. They believed that the standard of living was measured by activities and habits of everyday lives. While some social reformers proposed to change the living and working conditions of immigrants in order to improve their standard of living, the Americanizers considered that teaching the proper way of life and “good” habits was more effective than reforming conditions. According

to a text for the Americanization program, which was edited by the United States Department of the Interior in 1919, there were two main methods of Americanization. One was to promote education in subjects such as health, safety and recreation at workplaces and the other was to promote education in communities concerning the practical way of life.<sup>35</sup>

### The “Modern” Domesticity

As everyday lives at home were supposed to be the women’s sphere, the Americanizers stressed the necessity of educating women. Besides programs which aimed at teaching English, American history, and civics to both men and women, activists conducted various classes to teach immigrant women what to do in the women’s sphere, that is, “domesticity.”

The meaning of domesticity, however, was not self-evident even for American-born women in the early twentieth century. Since the late nineteenth century, the so-called home economics movement had been active not only in making home economics an academic subject but also in spreading the notion of “modern” domesticity. This “modern” domesticity shifted its emphasis from chastity or the virtue of women to homemaking that required “modern” knowledge and conveniences for home management. Druzilla Mackey, Director of Immigrant Education in the Fullerton School, translated the keywords of this “modern” domesticity into terms that immigrants could easily understand. “Our ideal for the Mexican is centered about our worship of the four Gods to whom we bend in allegiance; namely, the clock, the bathtub, the savings bank and American citizenship.”<sup>36</sup> Of the four “Gods,” “the clock” meant efficiency in domestic chores, “the bathtub” meant hygiene and clean housing conditions, and “the savings bank” meant home management.

The home economics movement in this period promulgated this concept of “modern” domesticity not only among immigrant women, but also among American middle-class and working class women, women on farms, and Native-American and African-American women.<sup>37</sup> One home economist claimed that the home economics movement worked for a “national ideal of home” not only for immigrants but for every family in American society. “We are not concentrating our attention solely on educating immigrants or the ignorant to an appreciation of right living. We are trying to develop the highest conception of homemaking in every grade in society.”<sup>38</sup>

George Sanchez argues that the home economics movement was a sys-

tem of social control intended to construct a “well-behaved, productive citizenry” in an industrial order.<sup>39</sup> When we recognize the fact that the home economics movement also approached white middle-class women and American women on farms, however, it becomes evident that teaching “modern” domesticity was an activity neither to control only immigrant lives from above nor to inculcate into them self-evident middle class values which had been accepted by mainstream American society since the nineteenth century. Rather, emphasizing home economics in the Americanization program was a part of a larger social movement to “modernize” American homes, which were regarded as the foundation of the American nation in the early twentieth century. According to the definition of the CSCIH, Americanization involved “the development of national ideals and standards and the schooling of all residents, foreign-born as well as native-born, in those ideals and standards.”<sup>40</sup>

In order to develop “national ideals and standards,” American-born women had to learn “modern” domesticity and set an example for immigrant women. One professor of home economics explained how American women who could manage their household efficiently and cleanly were able to Americanize immigrant women. “The silent influence of the good housekeeper, surrounded by neighbors from other lands who are eager to learn American ways, is a potent factor in the great work of Americanization. The simple house furnishings, the spotless window curtains, the well-laundered clothing, the careful ventilation, and the well-ordered household activities of the American homemaker will serve as a guide in helping the foreign housewife who observes them to adapt her methods of living to those of her foster homeland.”<sup>41</sup>

It is true that not all women could “modernize” their homes. Most immigrant women did not have modern bathtubs in their houses. As Sanchez points out, educators taught “modern” domesticity to Mexican immigrant girls in order to make them acquire skills for domestic services. Nevertheless, the Americanization movement and home economics movement along with the developing consumer market made both Americans and immigrants notice that sharing the American dream of the modern American home was one of the requisites for membership in “Our Nation.”

#### The American Standard of Living and the Anti-Japanese Campaign

As “the American standard of living” based on “modern” domesticity was one of the requisites for American citizenship, “the American

standard of living” became one of the boundaries excluding Japanese immigrants from membership in American society. In 1910, the Asiatic Exclusion League advocated that California wanted “a population of the same standard of living—not an Asiatic population with Asiatic standards.”<sup>42</sup> In 1919, James Phelan, who was a leading anti-Japanese advocate, pointed out that the Japanese had “no strong disposition to adopt American standards or maintain those standards of living.”<sup>43</sup>

The anti-Japanese campaign not only criticized the Japanese way of life but also agitated that the Japanese way of life adversely influenced the standard of living of American farmers. At a hearing of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1920, referring to the “Report of Japanese Problem Committee” of the Los Angeles County Farm Bureau, one witness pointed out that the competition with Japanese immigrants prevented “the poor white farmer” from maintaining “the American standard of living.” “The poor white farmer has a certain standard of living, as we call it—American; he tries to keep his wife at home . . . The white farmer, in order to compete with him [the Japanese farmer], will have to give up his American methods and go down to that primitive method where all work in the field together, and that will stop education of the children in the farming districts of the white people.”<sup>44</sup>

Agitators drew a distinction between “the American standard of life” and the everyday lives of Japanese immigrants specifically. According to the report of the State Board of Control about Japanese immigrants in 1920, “the American principles so universally approved in America” included “clean and wholesome living quarters, reasonable working hours, the usual Sunday rest and holiday recreation, and above all, refraining from working the women and children in the fields.” In contrast to these “American principles,” according to the report, the Japanese farmers and all members in their families, including their wives and little children, worked in the fields for “long hours, practically from daylight to dark, on Sundays and holidays.” The report also pointed out that in the majority of cases, Japanese farmers lived “in shacks or under conditions far below the standards required and desired by Americans.”<sup>45</sup>

Some who believed in the possibility of the Americanization of Japanese immigrants also focused on the issue of standard of living. Refuting the claims of the anti-Japanese campaign, they compared the Japanese standard of living with that of European immigrants and tried to prove that Japanese immigrants and their descendants could enjoy a relatively high standard of living. Harry Millis argued that though their standard of housing was “lower than the American or average

European,” it was not lower than “that of the Greek, the South Italians, and some of the less desirable races of immigrants from South and East Europe, better than Mexicans.”<sup>46</sup> Raymond L. Buell, who surveyed the anti-Japanese campaign in 1922, also pointed out that “the Japanese standard of living was lower than that of the North-European immigrant, but probably no lower than the South and Central European.”<sup>47</sup>

When we analyze the Americanization movement and the anti-Japanese campaign at the same time, it becomes clear that “the home built upon the American standard of living” was one of the major requisites for American citizenship. In other words, the capability of constructing “the home built upon the American standard of living” became the boundary between “us” and “others.” The significant point was that the anti-Japanese campaign did not evaluate the ability of each individual but questioned the capability of the group of Japanese immigrants and their descendants as a whole. Activists in the anti-Japanese campaign advocated that biological differences determined the capability of attaining the American way of life. V. S. McClatchy argued that Japanese immigrants could not become Americans or make good citizens because of “their racial characteristics, heredity and religion.”<sup>48</sup> McClatchy contended that this biological difference would determine “the standard of living.” Describing how Japanese immigrants’ standard of living was at a low level, McClatchy concluded as follows: “The Japanese seems to stand this sort of life without strain on the nervous system. . . . The white race as educated in the American environment not only will not do it, but perhaps cannot do it.”<sup>49</sup>

The biological differences that the anti-Japanese campaign referred to were not differences between the Japanese and Americans but the distinction between “the white race” and the Japanese. Consequently, we can assume that all the people who were defined as members of non-white racial groups would be unable to hold membership in “Our Nation” because they were supposed to be biologically incapable of attaining “the home built upon the American standard of living.”

### III THE JAPANESE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY AND THE BOUNDARY OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

#### Americanization of Women

As previous studies on the history of Japanese immigrants show, leaders of Japanese immigrant communities in California made attempts to respond to criticisms made by the Anti-Japanese campaign. Furthermore,

they made efforts to Americanize the Japanese immigrants even though the first generation was ineligible for legal citizenship. Among various issues that the Americanization movement and the anti-Japanese campaign brought forth, the issue that bewildered the leaders most was the role of women and gender relations at home. Most organizations in the Japanese immigrant community consisted of male members only, while women participated in auxiliaries. In spite of these traditional gender relations, male leaders had to discuss how to Americanize women.

According to the activists of the anti-Japanese campaign, the issues of the “picture bride” and “the field work” of women proved that the Japanese immigrants did not have the capability to develop a “home,” that is, one of the bases of American citizenship. The leaders of the Japanese immigrants were well aware of this criticism. The Japanese Association of America made resolutions to prohibit the “picture bride” system and recommended the members of the community to imitate the American “home.” “We consider it most important and necessary that the Japanese in America should marry and settle down in domestic life, because the home is not only essential to the wholesome existence of individuals, but also the foundation of a stable national and social structure. . . . At the same time we urge that in marrying and making their homes, the Japanese in America should do nothing which is contrary to the ideas and customs of the country in which they live.”<sup>50</sup> Although the Japanese Association of Los Angeles protested against this resolution on behalf of Japanese single men in the United States, the “picture bride” system was abolished in 1920.<sup>51</sup>

The issue of women’s labor in the fields raised another harsh criticism against Japanese immigrants. This criticism against women’s labor did not necessarily convince Japanese immigrants. A Japanese farmer, for instance, criticized the lives of American women and insisted that a woman should help her husband in his work. A woman’s labor in the fields, accordingly, was not immoral at all for this farmer. “But sometimes I see American women who just want to dress up all the time. Maybe their husbands work very hard to make a living, but it is hard because their wives don’t want to do anything but dress up. And I think it would be better if those women help their husbands a little.”<sup>52</sup>

Though they thought that the criticism of women’s labor was misdirected, leaders recognized the necessity of abolishing women’s labor in the fields as soon as possible. Gunki Kai argued that women’s labor in the fields was not immoral but simply a matter of custom. Nevertheless,

Kai recognized that the scene in which women toiled in the fields was not “pleasant” for Americans to look upon and admitted that the Japanese should have succeeded in adjusting themselves to the American standard.<sup>53</sup>

Pamphlets, which the Central Japanese Association distributed in 1916, recommended that women should not work in the fields on Sundays and “if possible” even weekdays. One of the pamphlets, which urged immigrants to follow American customs, acknowledged that women should be primarily homemakers. “It is a great error to let women work in the fields. Women have chores at home as wives and mothers. You have to learn from Americans if it is a good thing. One immoral act of a Japanese impacted negatively on people in the whole neighborhood.”<sup>54</sup>

Sei Fujii, president of the Japanese Association of Los Angeles, wrote in 1923 that Japanese immigrants should avoid attitudes and customs which were “repugnant to the good customs and manners of America.” One of the “repugnant” examples, according to Fujii, was the “hard working of ladies” because women had “so much to do at home as housewives.” In addition, Fujii suggested that husbands had to “do their best in always keeping their houses clean.”<sup>55</sup>

While they made efforts to rectify the points on which they were criticized, the leaders of the Japanese immigrant organizations recognized that Americanizing women was urgent. When the Japanese Association of America made an educational campaign for Americanization, they recommended local Japanese associations to hold women’s meetings. In 1919, the Central Japanese Association held a series of lectures on Americanization which targeted women every week at a Japanese language school in Los Angeles. Claiming that they should Americanize families of Japanese immigrants, the Central Japanese Association invited American teachers to teach classes about manners, how to take care of children, and domestic chores as well as English.<sup>56</sup>

The Americanization program of the Japanese Association of Los Angeles also aimed at inculcating into Japanese immigrants and their descendants what the American way of life was, while the content was different depending on gender. The program emphasized the significance of teaching women home economics such as dietetics, care of the home, hygiene, nursing, and many other subjects while it sought to instruct men in farming, housing, sanitation, hygiene and citizenship.<sup>57</sup>

Japanese immigrant women were not just the passive target of

Americanization. They actively participated in the efforts of Americanization in the Japanese immigrant community. The Christian churches and the Buddhist temples (churches) provided opportunities for women to meet while the Japanese associations were more male-centered. Japanese Christian churches, therefore, took an active part in inculcating the American way of managing the “home” into women. The bulletin of Mii Kyokai (the Los Angeles Japanese Methodist Church) indicated that the women’s organization of the Church had English, cooking, and sewing classes and advocated the importance of hygiene, clean milk and immunization. The slogan of Mii Kyokai in 1929 was “purifying the home.”<sup>58</sup>

### In Their Own Ways

The leaders of the Japanese immigrant community understood that Japanese immigrants and their descendants could not hold membership in “Our Nation” because Japanese immigrants and their descendants did not belong to the “white race.” Nevertheless, leaders were eager to participate in the Americanization movement and respond to criticisms made by the Anti-Japanese campaign. How did leaders try to cross the racial boundary of American citizenship?

As American society treated Japanese immigrants and descendents not as individuals but as a “race,” Japanese immigrant leaders tried to respond to the anti-Japanese campaign and the Americanization movement as a “race.” They aimed at Americanizing Japanese immigrant women not as individuals but as the foundation of their “race.” Leaders claimed that the primary role of women was the reproduction of the Japanese “race” and advocated that Japanese immigrant women should be mothers of the “Yamato race” (the Japanese). One Japanese language magazine for women, for instance, asserted that the home was the source of success for the “Yamato race.”<sup>59</sup>

In order to nurture the “Yamato race,” the Japanese immigrant women should have the virtues of “Yamatonadeshiko” (women of the Yamato race) such as self-sacrifice and patience. Leaders feared that if women demanded their rights based on American principles, the foundations of their “race” would be eroded. At the meeting of a women’s society of the Japanese Methodist Church in 1931, for instance, Pastor Kumagaya warned that as demands for equal rights would endanger the foundation of any nation, Japanese immigrant women had to maintain the virtues of Japanese women such as “patience.”<sup>60</sup>

Most leaders of the Japanese immigrant community did not seem to notice the contradiction between the virtues of “Yamatonadeshiko” and Americanizing Japanese immigrant women. Furthermore, the leaders did not, or would not, recognize the difference between the notion of the American home and their concept of home or “ie.” The American home was supposed to consist of a nuclear family and women were the “managers” of households. The home that the Japanese immigrant leaders imagined was almost synonymous with the “ie,” which had a rigid patriarchal structure and a seniority system within the family. Without recognizing this difference in perception, Japanese immigrant leaders believed that the “home” of Japanese immigrants was superior to the American “home” as the foundation of the nation because the Japanese “home” had “strong family ties.”<sup>61</sup> Shinichiro Hasegawa, vice president of Los Angeles Japan America Society, for instance, asserted that the Japanese should teach “familism” to Americans. According to Hasegawa, American women claimed equal rights as individuals and this individualism broke the family ties in American society.<sup>62</sup>

Emphasizing the “superiority” of their “home,” the Japanese immigrant leaders asserted that the “Yamato” race was an exception in non-white racial groups. They tried to prove that the Japanese immigrants and their descendants were qualified for full membership in “Our Nation” because they exceptionally could build the home as the foundation of “Our Nation.” According to *The Survey of Race Relations*, Japanese female interviewees praised the strong family ties of Japanese immigrants and the Nisei in comparison with the families of Southern European immigrants. “Like the Jews, they [female interviewees] said, the family tie is very strong among the Japanese. The children have more respect for their parents than is true of many of the people of the Southern European countries and there seems to be much less disharmony in the homes resulting from the Americanization of the children.”<sup>63</sup>

Thus, while Japanese immigrant leaders recognized the importance of Americanizing women and establishing a good home, they interpreted the ideas of Americanization concerning home and gender relations in their own ways. As this discrepancy revealed, most of their efforts toward Americanization were not understood by American society. Furthermore, this kind of difference in the interpretation of American values furthered the friction between Japanese immigrants and American society before World War II.

## CONCLUSION

The membership in "Our Nation," that is, full American citizenship, was not accessible to every one in the early twentieth century. The analysis of three kinds of approaches for defining American citizenship clarifies that "the home built upon the American standard of living" was one of the bases for "Our Nation" in the early twentieth century.

In order to construct "the home based on the American standard of living," women who were supposed to be responsible for everyday lives at home became the target of the Americanization movement. Women's role and place at home also became the issue of criticism when American society tried to exclude Japanese immigrants and their descendents. Exclusionists argued that Japanese immigrants should be beyond the boundary of full American citizenship because they were biologically incapable of understanding the American way of gender relations which was the foundation for the American standard of living.

Even though the first generation was ineligible for legal citizenship and the anti-Japanese campaign advocated that the Japanese immigrants and their descendants could not be members of "Our Nation" as a race, the Japanese immigrant leaders made efforts to Americanize their way of life, focusing on Americanizing women. Nevertheless, there arose a discrepancy in interpreting the meaning of "home" and gender relations.

Thus, gender roles, and women's role as "modern" homemakers in particular, directly affected the construction of "Our Nation" in the early twentieth century. It is often said that gender roles at home and "the home built upon the American standard of living" were only private matters. In the process of defining the boundary of American citizenship, however, they were public issues.

This paper had no intention to describe how women were oppressed within the domestic sphere in the process of constructing "Our Nation." In the context of gender history, not women's history, this paper proposes to reconsider the function of home and gender roles in the history of politics and nationalism. When women were regarded as homemakers in the process of constructing American citizenship, how were men positioned? Were men who would not or could not build "respectable" families treated as full members of American society? We also need to re-examine the relations between the "home" and the concept of "manliness" in this period in order to illuminate how gender affected the development of "Our Nation."

## NOTES

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