

Editor's Introduction

This year's *Japanese Journal of American Studies* carries "Democracy" as its special topic. Although we have a very slim volume this year, which may or may not have resulted from the difficulty in discussing democracy in the time of political as well as ideological turmoil and uncertainties, we hope that this issue will contribute to further discussions and renewal of research interest on the topic, because, needless to say, democracy is not only the basic premise of our activities as scholars but also one of the fundamental ideas the country, in which we all have scholarly interest, is supposedly built upon.

As always, the essays are arranged roughly in chronological order by their topics except for the first essay by Fumiaki Kubo's "Japan-US Alliance in the Face of Populism: The Vulnerability of an Alliance Based on Asymmetric Rights and Obligations," which is based on his keynote speech presented at our annual convention at the University of Kitakyushu, Kitagata campus, in June 2018. Kubo discusses the Japan-US Security Treaty, whose asymmetrical nature, he argues, is not properly understood in either country. He lays out the strengths and weaknesses of the Treaty's structure, while emphasizing the importance of retaining the Treaty.

In my essay, "Democracy and the International American Girl: Gender, Class, and Race in *The Lady of the Aroostook* by William Dean Howells," I analyze how Howells presented the idea of democracy by describing a young American woman in an international setting and compare his female protagonist with Daisy Miller, the most famous "international American girl" in American literature. The following two essays deal with the contemporary and controversial political issues. Shoko Kiyohara's essay on the US voter registration reform focuses on online voter registration and traces how it has been rapidly promoted and introduced on a state level since 2002. She argues that its introduction has not been a partisan issue and that the Presidential Commission on Election Administration has played a

significant role. Takeshi Iida's "Citizens' Constitutional Knowledge and American Representative Democracy," by using the original survey data collected from the Internet in 2017, examines the hypothesis that voters' constitutional knowledge affects their political attitudes, leading them to be more cautious of the abusive exercise of power by the government, regardless of their party identity.

As always, I would like to thank Katy Meigs for her continuing assistance as copy editor for the journal. I also thank Yuriko Tsunoda for her support. Most of the articles published in the *Japanese Journal of American Studies*, including those from back issues, are freely available on the Internet (<http://www.jaas.gr.jp>). We invite responses and criticisms from our readers and hope that the journal will continue to be an important player in the field of American Studies.

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Editor