

Division, Diversity, and Unity

The United States has always been a diverse country. Over the centuries, minority groups have sought to claim their rights under the central concept articulated in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal.” However, the United States has faced internal divisions since its formation. Many factors, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and class have divided the United States throughout its history. With many dividing forces, finding consensus and agreement has often proved challenging, and unity has been difficult to achieve. Indeed, American history cannot be understood fully without careful and comprehensive exploration of three key concepts: division, diversity, and unity. They comprise the special topic of this year’s *Japanese Journal of American Studies*.

This topic is nothing new in American studies. However, we decided to focus on the topic this year because in recent years multiple highly publicized news events, as well as social and political movements, and resistance to them, appear to suggest that the nation and its people are becoming greatly divided and polarized. As scholars, we must be careful to understand the nature of these forces of division, to examine them in historical and institutional context, and to consider the long-term impact they may have.

The first two essays are written by Seong-Ho Lim, former president of the American Studies Association of Korea, and Yoshiko Uzawa, former president of the Japanese Association for American Studies (JAAS). The essays are based on their keynote speeches at JAAS’s 56th Annual Meeting held at Chuo University. Although their essays are less directly related to the special topic of this volume, both essays offer new ways in which international scholarly networks can contribute to the field of American studies. We sincerely hope that the friendship between the two associations will continue and deepen in the future.

The other essays are arranged roughly in chronological order by their topics. They all show the complexities of dividing lines, of social and political

movements for diversity and their results, and of processes to achieve unity.

Hiro Matsubara writes about the New York Religious Tract Society (1812–1826), which functioned to make lower-class people of New York conform to the norms and power structures of existing American Society. Matsubara demonstrates that the Society's policy produced an unintentional result: women were empowered as a sub-group. Junko Isono Kato addresses divisions created by the three-fifths clause of the U.S. Constitution. The clause was a compromise between two divided camps, slave states and free states. While the Civil War resulted in the elimination of the clause, Kato argues that the division continued for another hundred years in a different form. Yuki Oda studies the International Institutes which advocated for family reunification of European immigrant families in the late 1920s. Oda describes how trans-Atlantic cooperation greatly contributed to making Progressive reformers address the conditions of separated families.

Shunta Matsumoto argues that reforms in Congress have caused a significant shift in the main function of Congress from a unifying institution to a partisan political arena. Matsumoto also articulates how existing theoretical frameworks based on economic-oriented studies are outdated and asserts the need for a better analytical framework to understand how Congress works. Finally, Yutaka Nakamura reports on his ethnographic research examining conflicts between African American Muslims and African Muslims in New York City. Through his interviews, Nakamura also sees ways in which people from the two groups can mediate tensions between them.

These essays provide an invaluable opportunity for us to consider how movements for division, diversity, and unity have produced not only conflict in the United States but also the impetus and energy for change. As the 2024 presidential election approaches, political rhetoric and wrangling will be intense and heated, but as scholars we must be circumspect to examine and understand more deeply what is changing and what is not changing.

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Editor