

Proseminar 2026 Program

Hosted by the University of Osaka (Minoh Campus)
Co-hosted by the Japanese Association for American Studies and ASA
Sponsored by the American Studies Foundation

Date: Friday, June 5th, 2026

Time: 13:00–16:30 *Japan Standard Time

Venue: Academic Exchange Room (2nd Floor), Foreign Studies Research and Lecture Building,
the University of Osaka (Minoh Campus)

Address: 3-5-10, Semba-higashi, Minoh, Osaka 562-0035

Access: <https://www.osaka-u.ac.jp/en/access/top>

Commentators:

Professor Tanisha C. Ford (The City University of New York)

Professor Russ Castronovo (University of Wisconsin Madison)

Professor Mark Redondo Villegas (Franklin & Marshall College)

Timetable

Part I: 13:00–14:40

(1) Taro ONO (Graduate Student, Hitotsubashi University) 13:05–13:50

“Freeway Construction to Provoke Civil Rights Enhancement: How African American Leaders Fought Against Proposed Highway in the 1950s”

Comment: Tanisha C. Ford

(2) Tomoko INOUE (Graduate Student, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) 13:55–14:40

“Who Gets to Speak?: Narrative Authority and Racial Representation in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Percival Everett’s *James*”

Comment: Mark Redondo Villegas

BREAK: 14:40–14:55

Part II: 14:55–16:30

(3) Shiina MIMAKI (Lecturer, Kyorin University) 14:55–15:40

“How to Tell a True ‘Japanese American’ Story”

Comment: Russ Castronovo

(4) Sophia H. DICKEY (Assistant Professor, Shikoku University) 15:45–16:30

“A Divided America: Trauma and Memory in Julie Otsuka’s *When the Emperor was Divine*”

Comment: Russ Castronovo

Chair: Koji ITO (The University of Osaka)

Reception in Senri-Chuo: 17:00–19:00

2026 Proseminar Report

Taro Ono (Hitotsubashi University)

I had the honor of speaking at the JAAS Proseminar on June 5th at Osaka University's Minoh Campus. I am deeply grateful to the commentators from the American Studies Association and the International Committee of the Japan Association of American Studies. At the seminar, I presented “Freeway Construction to Provoke Civil Rights Enhancement: How African American Leaders Fought Against Proposed Highway in the 1950s,” and argued that black residents along the right-of-way of the interstate highway construction in the 1950s were not mere victims of city planning and that they actively fought against highways. Despite the dominant narratives that focus heavily on cases in the 1960s, the case study of St. Paul, Minnesota, provided a rich example of black middle-class leaders’ struggles against freeway construction and housing discrimination, fueled by advances in the Civil Rights Movement at both national and local scales.

Professor Tanisha Ford from the History Department at the CUNY then gave me a comment which focused on how to frame my research in a larger perspective of black freedom movement and urban history beyond the scope of city planning and introduced me some essential papers and scholarly literatures. Her comment was particularly constructive for me to refine my research into my master’s thesis, locating it in a larger and well-studied field of American History.

I received inspiring comments and questions from the floor as well. Professor Russ Castronovo from University of Wisconsin Madison pointed out the freeway as a place of resistance during the BLM movement and as a non-human agent of history, which I thought was a crucial perspective to bridge between the highway case in Minnesota and more recent BLM movement at the same State.

The workshop was also a fascinating place to meet researchers and students studying American history in different institutions all over Japan.

I am very grateful to have the opportunity to be part of this workshop and would like to express my deep gratitude to JAAS and ASA for its support in making this event possible.

Proseminar Report

Tomoko Inoue (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies)

On June 5, 2026, I had the opportunity to present my paper, “Who Gets to Speak?: Percival Everett’s *James* as a Hermeneutic Response to the Critique of the Africanist Presence,” at the JAAS Proseminar. My paper examined Percival Everett’s *James* (2024) as a contemporary re-reading of Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, using Toni Morrison’s concept of the Africanist Presence as a theoretical framework. Rather than arguing that Everett simply “gives voice” to Jim, I explored how the transfer of narrative authority invites readers to reconsider Jim’s interiority as well as the silences and limitations embedded within Twain’s narrative.

The Proseminar provides an exceptional opportunity to receive detailed feedback from distinguished scholars in American Studies. Professor Mark Redondo Villegas served as the commentator for my paper and offered thoughtful and extensive comments that encouraged me to clarify several aspects of my argument. What particularly impressed me was his insight into situating my question within a much broader cultural and political context, rather than limiting it to the literary analyses of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *James*. He argued that African American presence is embedded not only in literature but also throughout American culture, including rock and country music, the language of TikTok, and Soul Food, while Black voices continue to be marginalized or erased in many of these domains. He also drew attention to the contemporary tension between the 1619 Project and 1776 Project, demonstrating that the question of whose stories constitute American remains an urgent political and social issue.

Professor Villegas’s comment encouraged me to think beyond close textual analysis and to consider more fully the critical role that literature can play in contemporary society, as well as the significance of reading as a practice through which we interpret the world. Building on these insights, I hope to further develop my research by paying closer attention to the dynamic relationship between literary texts and the broader cultural, political, and historical context in which they are situated.

I am sincerely grateful to the Japanese Association for American Studies, the American Studies Association, and the American Studies Foundation for organizing this invaluable Proseminar. The opportunity to present my work and engage in extended discussion with leading scholars has significantly strengthened both my current research and my future academic goals.

2026 Proseminar Report

Shiina Mimaki (Kyorin University)

I appreciate this opportunity to share my current research and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to very helpful comments from Professor Russ Castronovo (University of Wisconsin Madison), Professor Mark Redondo Villegas (Franklin & Marshall College), and Professor Tanisha C. Ford (The City University of New York).

My report “How to Tell a True ‘Japanese American Story’” investigates the cultural and historical traces of Japanese Americans that remain in Japan to uncover perspectives often overlooked in previous research of Japanese (and Asian) American literature. The motivation for the research is to reevaluate Japanese American identity through both Japanese and American perspectives, and its objective, to construct a more balanced understanding through cultural and literary analysis. Based on this reevaluation, I examine the works of John Okada, a pioneer of Japanese (and Asian) American literature. His masterpiece, *No-No Boy* (1957), was rejected upon publication and long ignored, as it touches on one of the most taboo topics in the post-World War II America. I believe that *No-No Boy* and his other works remain underappreciated. They reveal that Japanese American identity extends beyond psychological conflict, racial discrimination, and the trauma of the Japanese American internment. Okada also captures Japanese Americans’ deep emotional core, particularly the profound affection to family.

As Professor Castronovo pointed out, in order to further advance this research, it is necessary to uncover and thoroughly examine a wide variety of historical sources that have not yet been studied in both Japan and the United States. I believe that reading literary works based on research into historical sources can broaden the possibilities for interpretation more than ever. This is especially true when it comes to interpreting literary works set against a historical context that is not yet fully understood, such as the history of Japanese Americans. To demonstrate the possibilities of interpretation of works of Okada and other Japanese American writers, I would like to continue the challenge of analyzing these works while continuing to collect and reevaluate historical sources.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for hosting 2026 Pro Seminar. I would also like to thank all the participants who listened to my presentation and shared their valuable insights.

2026 Proseminar Report

Sophia H. Dickey (Shikoku University)

I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to present at the 2026 Proseminar. I was very grateful to share my current research and receive much valuable feedback. In my presentation, titled “A Divided America: Trauma and Memory in Julie Otsuka’s *When the Emperor Was Divine*,” I examined how Otsuka portrays World War II trauma and memory through imagery, silent language, and narrative form. Focusing on the recurring imagery of the color white, the portrayal of the protagonists’ silence, and the depiction of postwar American society, I argued that the trauma and memories of the war shaped the protagonists’ lives and self-perceptions after the war. I considered the novel in relation to Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, since Otsuka writes not from firsthand experience of the war, but rather through inherited memories, research, and imagination. I also relied on Cathy Caruth’s view of trauma to better understand the relationship between trauma and expression as Otsuka’s novel adopts a restrained narration of silence rather than using emotionally charged language. Through close reading of the text, I explored how the protagonists’ inability to return to their prewar lives reveals the instability of American identity and the divided condition of postwar America.

I am especially grateful to Professor Russ Castronovo, my commentator, for reading my paper with great care and offering detailed feedback. His encouraging comments helped me reconsider the theoretical framework of my ongoing research, particularly the relationship between postmemory, national memory, and other possible approaches, such as multidirectional memory. In addition, the insightful suggestions made by Professor Mark Redondo Villegas to consider the possibility of “post-postmemory,” as well as the thought-provoking ideas about autoethnography shared by Professor Tanisha C. Ford, opened new directions for my research. The comments I received prompted me to reconsider how later generations of Japanese Americans may interpret wartime memory differently from those more directly connected to the incarceration experience. Since this paper will form an important foundation for one of the main chapters of my dissertation, participating in this year’s Proseminar helped me recognize the next steps I need to take. Being able to exchange ideas with the participants gave me the inspiration and encouragement to move forward with my research. Once again, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Koji Ito, who served as chair and supported the presenters throughout the process, as well as to the commentators, the organizers, and all the participants for making this Proseminar possible.