Robert G. Kane, Niagara University: “‘Evil Customs of the Past’: Japanese Challenges to a Segregated World Order in the Early Twentieth Century”

Standard accounts depict the early twentieth century in U.S.-Japan relations as a time of rising antagonism between two nations with discordant polities, ambitions and ideals. The conventional, U.S.-centric wisdom stresses incompatibility and difference, while its most rigid version pits Wilsonian liberal internationalism against Japanese imperialism as a key tension of the First World War. But considering Wilsonian democracy from a Japanese perspective obliges us to see Taisho diplomats as reformers and Wilson as an arbitrary power. This is especially true regarding tensions over racial equality, a definitive transnational phenomenon of the twentieth century. Most studies of bilateral relations in the 1910s and 1920s condense the issue to “Japanese pride and American prejudice” with an undue accent on Japanese anger as expressed in public protests and the press. But this equation captures neither the mutual accommodationism that, despite racial issues, regularly drove the policies of Tokyo and Washington nor the resiliency and resoluteness of Japanese efforts to reform the racial status quo before, during and after the First World War. A key trend in the early twentieth century was how Japanese elites, extending their own national narrative abroad, diplomatically confronted racism as an anachronism in great power politics and at times had greater faith in the flexibility of U.S. democracy than did Americans, including Woodrow Wilson. These efforts reflect Japanese aspirations to a leading role in a peaceful world that began in the Meiji era. As most accounts contend, Japanese pursuits of the goal could be contradictory and self-serving, but we can only dismiss the efforts as such when they are stacked up against an idealized version of Wilsonianism. The Japanese push for U.S. and subsequently League of Nations recognition of racial equality took place as Americans and other white citizens of the Anglophone nations of the Pacific Rim were demanding more exclusive societies. In short, Japan-U.S. interactions over immigration and racial equality in 1913, 1919 and 1924 show that the Great War brought virtually no change to the dynamics of bilateral and global race relations.
E. Taylor Atkins, Northern Illinois University: *A History of Popular Culture in Japan*

In 2013 Bloomsbury Press asked me to write a textbook for course adoption, entitled *A History of Popular Culture in Japan, From the Seventeenth Century to the Present*. It is based on a course I developed in 1999 and have taught in undergraduate and graduate iterations at NIU, Iowa, Berkeley, and Japan Center for Michigan Universities. As far as I can tell from looking at university courses online and from the reviewers’ reports, its historical perspective is unique. I have purposely written the book in a manner that is not “textbooky,” with an interpretive voice rather than that of an omniscient narrator. The book consists of nine chapters (see TOC below). I am submitting to MJS chapters 3 and 5, with the expectation that colleagues will only read one, whichever one captures your interest or reflects your expertise.

1: The Worst to be Said and Thought?—Defining, Debating, and Deconstructing Popular Culture
2: Floating Worlds—Urban Commoners and the Birth of Popular Culture in Japan
3: Revolt of the *Chōnin*?—On the Radical Potential of Edo-Period Popular Culture
4: Popular Culture as Subject and Object of Meiji Modernization
5: Cultural Living—Cosmopolitan Modernism in Imperial Japan
6: Entertaining Empire—Popular Culture as Agent of Imperialism
7: “Our Spirit Against Their Steel”—Mobilizing Culture for War
8: Democracy, Monstrosity and Pensive Prosperity—Postwar Pop
9: As GNP Falls, GNC Grows—Millennial Japan as Dream Factory

**HOTEL:** The Holmes Student Center Hotel, located at 340 Carroll Avenue, DeKalb, IL 60115, is in the same building as the seminar. The rate under the MJS room block is $71 plus tax per night, and rooms will be held for MJS until April 1. Please call (815) 753-1444 to make a reservation. For more information on the hotel, go to [http://www.niu.edu/hsc/hotelinfo/index.shtml](http://www.niu.edu/hsc/hotelinfo/index.shtml).

**LOCAL CONTACT:** E. Taylor Atkins ([etatkins@niu.edu](mailto:etatkins@niu.edu))

**DINNER:** To follow the seminar with information forthcoming.

**MAP:** [http://www.niu.edu/hsc/maps/index.shtml](http://www.niu.edu/hsc/maps/index.shtml)

To receive PDF copies of the papers, please e-mail Betsy Lublin ([aj8580@wayne.edu](mailto:aj8580@wayne.edu)), preferably by March 17. Also indicate if you intend to join for dinner Saturday evening.

**SCHEDULE FOR FALL 2016-SPRING 2017**

**Sept. 24, 2016  University of Iowa**
Ethan Segal, History, Michigan State University
Heather Bowen-Struyk, Literature, University of Notre Dame

**Oct. 15, 2016  University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign**
Monika Dix, Literature, Saginaw Valley State University
Kari Shepherdson-Scott, Art History, Macalester College

**Nov. 5, 2016 Michigan State University**
Luke Franks, History, North Central College
Kazue Harada, Literature, Miami University

**Feb. 2017 University of Memphis**
David Blaylock, History, Eastern Kentucky University
Anne Sokolsky, Comparative Literature, Ohio Wesleyan University

**April 8, 2017 St. Xavier University**
Beth Widmaier Capo, English, Illinois College
Tanya Maus, History, Peace Resource Center, Wilmington College

MJS Website: [http://international.wmich.edu/mjs](http://international.wmich.edu/mjs)

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