

Takashi Fujitani. *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. 520 pp. \$34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-520-28021-2.



Reviewed by John Hennessey

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Commissioned by Charles V. Reed (Elizabeth City State University)

An interest in the origins of the “uneasy compatibility of racism and its disavowal” displayed by present-day attacks on affirmative action provides the genesis for Takashi Fujitani’s book *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (pp. 8). By comparatively examining Korean soldiers in the Japanese armed forces and Japanese American soldiers in the American military during the Second World War, Fujitani reveals that both the United States and Japan employed remarkably similar methods to deal with race in their pursuit of total war. This reflects a larger historical movement from a negative exercise of power against suspect minority groups toward a more inclusive mode of modern liberal governmentality (as theorized by Michel Foucault). At the same time, following the current historiographical trend to regard the United States as an empire, Fujitani explains that both the American and Japanese Empires experimented with avowedly antiracist “postcolonial models of imperialism” in order to rule broad swaths of territory in a rapidly changing world (p. 7).

Throughout the book, Fujitani argues that these shifts in domestic and international policy were inextricably linked through the regimes’ strategic disavowal of racism.

Fujitani describes this change as a movement from an exclusionary, biologically based “vulgar racism” toward a more inclusionary and culturalist “polite racism.” This latter mode is characterized by a subtle, ostensibly antiracist reproduction of difference in which members of racial or ethnic minorities are still regarded as deviant from the (majority) norm, but are considered capable of cultural assimilation. On the domestic front, both empires found it necessary to mobilize even despised minorities like Koreans and Japanese Americans to meet increasing manpower needs. More important, both Japan and the United States realized that the treatment of these minority groups could be used in propaganda efforts to win the support of Filipinos, the Chinese, and other Asians. In this respect, the shift of both powers’ official policies away from vulgar racism was not just a parallel but a mutually reinforcing develop-

ment, since much of it was in response to the other side's propaganda. To mobilize these hitherto excluded minorities for propaganda and labor purposes, however, it was necessary to persuade Koreans and Japanese Americans of the regimes' good intentions through concrete measures to end discrimination. Thus, these groups were brought within the purview of liberal governmentality, paradoxically reflecting "the stimulation of welfare by warfare" (p. 26). Moreover, to buttress the credibility of antiracist claims, the entire population of both empires had to be made to at least pay lip service to the premise of racial equality. In consequence, Fujitani believes that the need to utilize these minority groups made vulgar racism increasingly untenable, no matter how cynical or calculating the reasons behind their inclusion may have been. In the case of Japanese Americans, wartime exigencies may have bequeathed the legacy of "polite racism" and multiculturalism that remains the dominant discourse in contemporary America.

Following these primary arguments, chapter 1 scrutinizes the Japanese government's decision to allow Koreans to volunteer for army service. Fujitani argues that before this time, apart from a small elite, Koreans were not incorporated into the Japanese regime of bio-power and governmentality. As total war necessitated a greater mobilization of human resources, however, the Japanese government suddenly displayed "a new commitment to improve the health, education and welfare of the Korean people" (p. 39). Contesting established interpretations, Fujitani argues that Japanese leaders' efforts to vastly expand Koreans' civil rights were not empty promises; Japanese politicians believed that the mobilization of Korean soldiers was worth the costs. The induction of Koreans into Japan's armed forces set in motion an unstoppable trajectory toward holistic equality, even as it also expanded surveillance and control.

Chapter 2 attempts to explain the remarkable about-face in American policy toward Japanese Americans during the war. Before 1943, Japanese Americans were considered suspect as a group and were therefore forcibly relocated to internment camps according to the still-prevailing logic of vulgar racism. Analogously to the situation for Koreans in the Japanese Empire, however, increased labor needs and more important, "proof" that the United States was not racist led American leaders to abruptly reverse course in 1943 and begin encouraging internees to volunteer for military service. The screening of these recruits through carefully crafted questionnaires further reveals the shift to a logic of polite racism, whereby Japanese Americans had to prove their loyalty as individuals. Fujitani uses documentation from several government agencies to argue that welcoming Japanese Americans into the nation was seen by American leaders as a means rather than an intrinsically valuable end.

Chapter 3 explores the new "pastoral" form of governing Japanese Americans that the US government implemented from 1943. The appearance of freedom or individual self-determination was crucial to this new mode of liberal governmentality, hence the drive to recruit "volunteers" for the army as part of the loyalty questionnaires. To make this freedom of choice believable, Fujitani explains, it was necessary to (ironically) replicate liberal American society in the internment camps. While a significant number of Japanese American men did volunteer, those who declined were punished by transfer to special camps or enclosures within these, to some extent belying the freedom that they were ostensibly granted. In this way, Japanese Americans found themselves confined in a "series of interlocked spaces of (un)freedom" (p. 127).

Through a lengthy reproduction of internee answers and requests for clarification, Fujitani succeeds in the following chapter in demonstrating that Japanese Americans cannot be reduced to

the categories of “loyal” or “disloyal” based on their decision to serve or decline in the questionnaires. Rather, their attitudes varied greatly. By scrutinizing their “cacophony of counterquestions,” Fujitani distills two common discourses of “conditional” and “unconditional loyalty” (p. 166). Many internees expressed that their loyalty was conditional on reassurances from the government about better treatment or future racial equality. Whether out of fear, pragmatism, or true conviction, only a minority displayed the “unconditional loyalty” the government desired. Nevertheless, even this “extremely limited success ... provided the tiny partial truth from which to ... produce an image of Japanese Americans as the ‘model minority’” that could be used in domestic and international propaganda (p. 205).

Chapter 5 examines this propaganda in more detail, particularly the film *Go for Broke* (1951). This film allegorizes the United States’ rejection of racism through the story of a racist American army officer who is forced to change his views after witnessing the heroism of the Japanese Americans under his command. Such praise for Japanese American exploits was not entirely innocent, according to Fujitani, since “the model minority success story could be mobilized to delegitimize the demands of other minorities for more aggressive measures to achieve social justice” (p. 230). Moreover, America’s polite racism had not yet embraced a discourse of multiculturalism but was rather premised on assimilation, where racial “others” could be welcomed into the nation only so long as they accepted all key aspects of white American culture.

The focus shifts to the Japanese Empire in chapter 6. Like their Japanese American counterparts, Korean volunteers for military service were subjected to rigorous background checks based on the rationale of polite racism. Much like in chapter 4, Fujitani reveals that many Korean applicants displayed the same concerns and tendency toward “conditional loyalty” as Japanese Ameri-

can internees, which led the Japanese government to undertake concrete reforms. Perhaps even more so than in the American internment camps, the institutions of liberal governmentality were rapidly extended to the Korean Peninsula. Japanese leaders’ reasons were similarly pragmatic: education (especially in the Japanese language) would produce better soldiers and improved household registers could extend Japanese surveillance over the entire Korean population.

The last two chapters analyze Japanese propaganda films and literature about colonial troops. Chapter 7 shows how “blood, adoption and self-determination” were leitmotifs in works that treated the question of Korean identity within the empire (p. 303). Fujitani brilliantly compares the Hollywood film *Beau Geste* (1939) and the Japanese movie *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* (1943), the former of which dramatizes French colonialism and is known to have inspired the latter. The final chapter investigates gendered discourses, demonstrating that in both Japanese and American propaganda, boundaries of ethnicity could be transcended, but not those of gender. In addition, Fujitani analyzes how love stories allegorized choosing loyalty to the nation and how becoming a Japanese soldier was depicted as the only way for Korean men to demonstrate their manhood.

Although this review comes unusually late, it is my hope that it will help to introduce this monumental work to scholars and students beyond the fields of Japanese, Asian American, and World War II history. *Race for Empire* is an exemplary transnational study that digs deep into primary sources from two continents, leading to a radical reevaluation of the United States’ and Japan’s wartime roles by emphasizing their many similarities. Fujitani brings forth the diversity of opinions and motivations within the Japanese and American governments as well as the Korean and Japanese American minorities within both empires, scrupulously avoiding essentialism. The

book is also a model for how to fruitfully apply Foucauldian theories, which too often are merely discussed in abstract terms, to concrete empirical cases. Although *Race for Empire* follows Foucault's theories so closely that the reader may at times question how inductive its research is, Fujitani draws on a vast collection of primary sources and time and again pulls out "smoking guns" from government archives that explicitly verify his interpretations. Critics of Foucault often contend that he neglected the role of individual agency, and likewise Fujitani occasionally struggles to fit the actions of specific politicians into his overall thesis that the shift to polite racism was more or less inevitable. As Fujitani himself notes, the case of Nazi Germany reveals that governments could instead choose to exterminate minority groups and intensify vulgar racism, even if this was perhaps not rational in light of total war demands. This minor point notwithstanding, *Race for Empire's* masterful investigation into the origins and political role of "polite racism" is both relevant and important in today's world, and will doubtless make this work appealing to a wide audience for many years to come.

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