

Professor Piccolo's Seminar

Our 4th-year seminar this year was small but with a wide variety of topics connected by a common theme - contemporary social issues.

In her essay, "Factors for the Increasing Suicide Rate of Young people in America", Riko Yamada wrote about why the United States has seen a recent increase in the suicide rate of young people. She notes similarities with the problem of suicide in Japan and Korea, but focuses on issues that seem to have particular impact on young people in the U. S. - the excessive burden of student loan debt, military service and PTSD (especially for victims of MST - Military Sexual Trauma), and the easy access to firearms in the U. S. Unfortunately, as the causes have become deeply rooted in American society, the problems will not be easily solved.

Hannah Iwagane brought her own personal experience singing gospel music to her study of "The Relation between Gospel Music and the Civil Rights Movement". She begins by tracing the origins of gospel music through the songs of enslaved workers, prisoners, and African-American spirituals. With the growth of the Civil Rights Movement in the twentieth century, songs such as "We Shall Overcome" and "O Freedom" came to play an important role in the movement. Special attention is given to the singer Mahalia Jackson and her performance at the March on Washington in 1963 prior to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

Yuto Watanabe focused on a comparison of important social issues in Japan and England. In his essay, "The Relationship of Social Issues between England and Japan", he discusses the similarities and especially the differences between the two countries regarding the issues of: medical care, immigration, the imbalance between rich and poor, and the environmental impact of excessive waste. As the essay shows, each country has had to devise its own ways of dealing with these serious problems depending on the unique ways in which they have affected Japanese or British society.

In her well-researched essay, "Evolving Diversity in U.S. Media: A Comparison of Friends and 13 Reasons Why", Mizuki Ito examines how depictions of minority characters, by race and gender, in American media have gradually become more inclusive and accurate. She begins with a detailed discussion of previous stereotyped depictions of characters in film and television according to race (Black, Hispanic, Asian) and gender (LGBTQ, transgender, non-binary). To demonstrate how minority characters are gradually becoming more inclusive and diverse in U. S. media, the second half of the essay focuses on the television series Friends (1994 ~ 2004) and 13 Reasons Why (2017 ~ 2020). The conclusion is that compared with Friends, 13 Reasons Why is notable for its diversity and lack of typecasting; however, accurate depictions of minorities in media is still in progress.

Finally, Mizuki Ito's graduation essay has been selected due to its in-depth research and well-argued thesis as the best essay in our 4th-year Seminar for 2020.