

Piccolo Seminar

The essays in this year's seminar focused primarily on topics related to American history and culture. Students researched and wrote about a variety of issues related to topics ranging from race, gender, and class to baseball, the American Dream, and wedding customs. In addition to supporting their views with evidence gleaned through secondary-source research, the writers of the essays presented here also made use of examples from movies, television, and literature.

Movies were a primary focus in essays by Miyu Sasaki, Hirofumi Arai, and Nana Toda. Miyu and Hirofumi both examined changing ways in which women have been portrayed in Disney animations. Whereas Miyu focused specifically on "Princess" movies such as *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Tangled*, Hirofumi took a broader view which included female characters in *Mulan*, *Brave*, and *Frozen*. In her essay, Maho Sumi compared L. Frank Baum's original *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) with MGM's 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz* starring Judy Garland. In particular, Maho looks at how America had changed in the almost forty years between the publication of the novel and the release of the film and discusses how the differences between the two tellings of the story reflect these changes. Takaya Hashizume focused on a smaller screen and wrote about the animated television series, *Powerpuff Girls*, which appeared in the U.S. on Cartoon Network from 1998 to 2005. Takaya focused on the relation between the television show and American

cultural attitudes about childhood and compared Powerpuff Girls with its Japanese version Demashita! Powerpuff Girls Z. Kyohei Ohno wrote about the importance of the idea of the American Dream in American culture. He considered the different ways in which "American Dream" can be defined (or if it even can be defined) and surveyed how it has evolved throughout American history and continues to evolve. Yuske Shimana researched and wrote about how the cultural attitudes and values of the "Roaring" 1920s in America found visual expression in men's and women's fashions. A study of the fashion culture of the young "flappers" and "shieks" can help us better understand this crucial period of transition in American history. Kentaro Kojima wrote a well-documented and heartfelt essay about Jackie Robinson, the first black player to break the "color barrier" in Major League Baseball by signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1946. In addition to writing about Robinson's unique place in baseball history, Kentaro also discusses Robinson's importance to the Civil Rights movement and about his relationship with Branch Rickey, the man who made the decision to sign him to the Dodgers. Kana Takeshima took a different tack from the other students by writing about British culture. Specifically, she wrote about the Titanic, the British passenger liner which famously sank in 1912 on its way to New York after hitting an iceberg. Kana's focus in her essay was on how conditions aboard the Titanic (e.g. accommodations, food, socializing, safety) reflected class distinctions in British society at the time. Kana also referred to the 1997 movie, Titanic, to illustrate how ideas about

class inform behavior, attitudes, and values. Nana Toda took a cross-cultural approach in her paper by writing about the differences between American and Japanese weddings. By examining such topics as wedding attire, bachelor parties, and acceptable ways of proposing, Nana showed how a wedding and its surrounding ceremonies and details are influenced by and reflect the culture of those involved. In a well-researched and detailed essay, Shiori Taguchi argues for the necessity of paid parental leave in the U. S. for all working parents if America is to become the best society it can be. In a carefully organized essay, Shiori traces the development of parental leave from the Federal Maternity Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) to President Obama's proposal in 2014 for paid maternity leave (the Federal Employee Paid Parental Leave Act).

Finally, the award for Best Graduation Essay for 2015 goes to Shiori Katsura for her essay on the current state of race relations in the United States. Relying on evidence from books, film, music, and print and web accounts of current events, Shiori argues that "post-racial America" is still a goal rather than a reality, but a goal that must be reached if "the land of the free" is to have any real meaning for all Americans.