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Shaffer, Robert

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disconnected proved a fantasy, the same sort of self-deception that many Germans had to come to grips with following the war. Ultimately, however, Kreimeier successfully demonstrates that characterizing Ufa as simply a tool of the conservative Right or the Nazi state is simplistic and misleading. His convincing and detailed analysis of the complicated relationships between government, business, ideology, and artistry in the history of Ufa makes *The Ufa Story* an necessary addition to the reading list of anyone interested in the history of film.

KENNETH McDONALD
University of California, Riverside

PAGE SMITH. *Democracy on Trial: The Japanese American Evacuation and Relocation in World War II*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

While no historiographical consensus can be expected to remain unchallenged, a good candidate for such consensus is the idea that the removal of 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast during World War II was due to American racism. Historians from the late 1940s to the present have concluded almost unanimously that the removal was not due to military necessity at all, but to a racist mindset variously attributed to the Hearst press and white West Coast farmers, to the U.S. military, to the Roosevelt Administration, or to all three.¹ Not only historians, but all three branches of the federal government, after Japanese-American organizations campaigned long and hard for redress, are now formally on record with apologies to those who suffered loss of property and jobs, poor living conditions in the relocation camps, and public stigma solely due to race rather than to any individual actions.²

But Page Smith, in his last book, *Democracy on Trial: The Japanese American Evacuation and Relocation in World War II*, published just before his death in 1995, paints a very different picture. Smith denies that racism was behind the removal, and he points to the benefits of the experience for the Japanese-American community. Smith's work, however, while challenging, is

riddled with errors, injudicious use of evidence, and questionable assumptions. While it is not likely that *Democracy On Trial* will upset the consensus among historians, one can easily imagine Smith's thesis spreading via Rush Limbaugh, Dinesh D'Souza, and the College Republican circuit. In this era when the New Deal is under far more attack from the right than from the left, and when best-selling books challenge the underpinnings of racial equality, historians should be prepared. This essay will first present *Democracy on Trials* thesis, then discuss its several strengths and its many flaws.

Smith makes a number of interrelated arguments. First, the patterns of Japanese immigration to the U.S. left many of the Issei (first-generation immigrants, prevented by law from becoming U.S. citizens) and their Nisei children (U.S. citizens if born in the U.S.) more loyal to Japan than to the U.S. Smith is careful to say, to be sure, that such loyalty was natural and logical, not "wicked" or "evil" (426).³ Second, the disastrous military situation of the U.S. in early 1942, combined with the knowledge of Japanese-American loyalty to Japan, made the evacuation of all Japanese Americans from the West Coast zone "wise and prudent," even if not "essential" (437). Third, wrangling between federal governmental agencies, and between the federal and state governments, rather than any conscious, racist plan, led to the specific form that removal took. For example, no one had envisioned at the outset the setting up of relocation centers. While racism against Japanese Americans existed, "It was obviously not the case that the decision to relocate was the result of racist attitudes," Smith concludes (436).

The author argues further that the War Relocation Authority, although often hampered by mistaken or unfortunate policy decisions from above, generally ran the camps with the interests of the "residents" at heart. The camps provided a level of "comfort" and "security" which made Japanese Americans, for the most part, satisfied with life there and reluctant to leave. Camp life, Smith asserts, was a "vacation" from a previous life of toil. Finally, removal and internment ended the dominance of the Japanese-American community by its most tradition-bound groups. It facilitated the broadening of social experience which allowed Japanese Americans, in the end, to become fully American. To clinch his case Smith quotes the provocative statement of Japanese-American internee and sociologist Charles Kikuchi that "on the whole the Nisei group didn't get too damaged by relocation. Generally, we probably gained" (421).

Democracy on Trial is not without virtues, especially its attention to the political history leading to the decision to expel Japanese Americans from the West Coast in conjunction with the social history of this immigrant and ethnic community before and during the war. Smith offers a useful overview of almost all of the major phases of the relocation experience, including the stu-

dent relocation program, resettlement to jobs in the Midwest and elsewhere after the autumn of 1942, Nisei experiences in the armed forces, and movement back to the West Coast in 1945 and 1946. Among the better features of the book is its attention to those white American liberal, pacifist, and religious groups and individuals who did what they could to make the experience less harsh for Japanese Americans.

Smith also takes a fresh look at the motivations and actions of key individuals involved in what he calls "the decision nobody made" that led to the establishment of the relocation camps. While he downplays the well-known racist attitudes of Gen. John DeWitt of the Western Defense Command, he points out in DeWitt's defense that the general had envisioned the internment of Italian and German nationals on the West Coast as well as Issei and Nisei. It was War Department officials in Washington who exempted the Italians and Germans, for political reasons. While going overboard in his praise for WRA officials Milton Eisenhower and Dillon Myer, Smith does rescue them from the more dogmatic critiques of some historians.⁴ His attention to Myer's efforts as early as March 1943 to allow Japanese Americans to return to the West Coast is important in this regard (313).

The weaknesses of the book, however, far overshadow its strengths. They include numerous errors in the text, a consistent tendency to present the condition of the camps in a more favorable light than they deserve, generalizations which do not follow from the information presented, and premises which are simply unproven.

Some errors are simply nuisances, such as statements that Germany attacked the Soviet Union at the end of 1941 (12-13), or that Theodore Roosevelt mediated a peace agreement between Japan and the U.S. (not Russia) in 1905 (42). Minor distortions arise from equating the Congressional testimony of a Seattle banker who believed that the "oriental mind" was unknowable with the views of the mayor of Tacoma who spoke out clearly against removal and who emphasized that Nisei were thoroughly American (137). The Rev. E. Stanley Jones, who made fiery speeches denouncing removal, is misidentified as the head of the Federal Council of Churches (204), which exaggerates the extent of the Council's public opposition to mass evacuation (226).

More significant interpretive problems emerge from other errors. Smith argues, for example, that one of the main reasons FDR did not end the exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast before the 1944 elections was his desire to protect Helen Gahagan Douglas in her tough reelection campaign against the red-baiting Richard Nixon (370). Despite Smith's claims that Douglas was an "outspoken champion" of Japanese Americans, a recent scholarly biography of her makes no mention of such activities or

views, and Douglas herself later stated that she reluctantly favored mass evacuation.⁵ More importantly, Douglas was not an incumbent in 1944 and she was not running against Richard Nixon; that infamous race would not come until 1950. Thus, Smith's point is not at all convincing.

The absence of footnotes, and the inclusion of an incomplete bibliography, would make it difficult even for a sympathetic reader to find out more about each of the issues that Smith discusses. It becomes just about impossible for critics to investigate some of Smith's more controversial claims. For example, Smith asserts that Morton Grodzins, the first historian of the evacuation to attribute it to American racism, later in his life told Charles Kikuchi that it was the military situation in the Pacific, not racism, that led to removal (437). But a search through the only entries in the bibliography to either Kikuchi or Grodzins reveals no mention of Grodzin's startling change of heart.

Smith's tendency to minimize the physical discomforts of camp life simply ignores the readily available testimony of Japanese Americans, and is occasionally contradicted by Smith's own evidence. The WRA, he writes, counteracted the bleak desert setting of the Topaz camp by planting thousands of trees and shrubs (243). Fair enough, but almost none of these trees and shrubs survived, as he vaguely admits later (344). Smith quotes WRA materials that described living conditions of white staff members in the camps as similar to those of Japanese-American residents (247). Reliance on such sources ignores the persistent theme in narratives by Japanese Americans about a wide — and widely resented — gap in accommodations. Documenting the resistance of Japanese Americans in the relocation centers to employment, he hardly mentions their anger about the insultingly low wages. Paying closer attention to the voices of the victims of U.S. policy would seem to be an obvious starting point in any history of the internment.⁶

Smith often presents pertinent information, only to mar it by questionable conclusions or generalizations. He prefaces his survey of Japanese-American reaction to Pearl Harbor with the flat statement that all Japanese Americans felt "freed" by the attack, only to follow it with a diary entry from Kikuchi contradicting this assertion (91). Smith describes the shockingly offhanded approach of Roosevelt to the issue in early 1942, and his deference to political and bureaucratic considerations in his final decision. This portrait is a far cry from Smith's thesis that "military necessity had been the overriding consideration for the President" (122). Smith details the protests by Japanese Americans against registration for the draft, which declared that while they were prohibited from returning home they should not have to serve in the U.S. Army. He concludes unconvincingly, however, that such arguments were "disingenuous," masking the allegiance of decisive numbers of Nisei to Japan

(337-8).

Smith's most questionable and offensive assumptions concern his descriptions of the "Japanese psyche," which he even characterizes as "inscrutable" to Westerners (70). Because of the subordination of the individual to the family and emperor in traditional Japanese society, Smith assumes that any persistence of cultural identity with Japan signified loyalty to the Japanese state in World War II, though the evidence presented often does not support this generalization (76-82). From this obsession with an ingrained Japanese psychology, it is only a small step for Smith to accept DeWitt's openly racist argument that the "undiluted racial strains" of the Issei and Nisei would lead to cooperation with the Japanese military (124). In a truly bizarre passage, he presents as evidence of this Japanese psyche the controversial cooperation of the Japanese American Citizens League with the FBI in rounding up suspected Japanese sympathizers. This kind of intrigue, the argument goes, is supposedly characteristic of Japanese politics (83).⁷ Without this essentialist notion of an ingrained Japanese psychology, Smith's interconnected thesis falls apart.

In the end, Smith advances an updated vision of the old Oscar Handlin-style immigration history. That is to say, U.S. society was quite harsh on first-generation immigrants, but such treatment was necessary in order to make American individuals out of tradition-bound, communally-oriented peasants.⁸ Smith openly laments the failure up to the 1940s to replace fatalist values and communal ties in the Japanese-American community with "autonomous individuals..., 'inner-directed' men and women, ready to venture 'out on their own,'" (425). Only the shock of literally uprooting these communities could break down the "Japanese psyche." So, Smith concludes, Japanese Americans benefited from the evacuation because they were now able to face life in the U.S. as real Americans, that is to say, as individuals. Such an interpretation obviously collides with the views of many in the Japanese-American community who believe that removal and internment were and remain a founding moment of their ethnic identity and of their conflicting relationship to U.S. society.⁹

But Smith goes even further. The relocation camps themselves, he tells us, would not have solved the problem completely if not for the atom bomb. The obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was necessary not only to end the war in the Pacific but to force the Japanese emperor to acknowledge to his subjects that he was only human, thus breaking the hitherto inexorable link between Japanese ethnicity and the Japanese state. So Smith, who began by asserting that Pearl Harbor unleashed a feeling of freedom among Japanese Americans, ends by saying that their real freedom could only begin after — and because of — Hiroshima (439-440). Thus, the internment and the

bomb, two events which some historians have linked to make the case that the war in the Pacific had a strong racist component, become in Smith's hands the preconditions for the heroic triumph of Western individualism.¹⁰ And some people accuse left-wing multiculturalists of purveying "feel-good" history!

Smith himself had attacked self-congratulatory versions of history in previous books. He ended his long study of the Civil War by referring to the greed it unleashed, and he declared elsewhere that "[w]e had too long solaced ourselves with spurious and inflated history, obscuring or ignoring our cruelties and injustices."¹¹ Keeping these ideas in mind might have led Smith to a more accurate and usable book on the Japanese-American experience in World War II.

ROBERT SHAFFER
Rutgers University

NOTES

- 1 The most influential work has been Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps, U.S.A.: Japanese Americans and World War II* (N.Y., 1972), but see also: Morton Grodzins, *Americans Betrayed* (Chicago, 1949); Jacobus ten Broek et al, *Prejudice, War, and the Constitution* (Berkeley, 1954); Michi Weglyn, *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (N.Y., 1976); Peter Irons, *Justice at War* (N.Y., 1983); John Tateishi, *And Justice for All: An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps* (N.Y., 1984); the multi-volume document collection *American Concentration Camps*, ed. by Daniels (N.Y., 1989); and Sandra Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert: Japanese American Internment at Topaz* (Berkeley, 1993).
- 2 See Leslie Hatamiya, *Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and the Passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988* (Stanford, 1988), and William Minoru Hohri, *Repairing America: An Account of the Movement for Japanese-American Redress* (Pullman, WA., 1988).
- 3 For a well-documented study which presents similar evidence on this point, but with very different implications, see Brian Masaru Hayashi, *For the Sake of Our Japanese Brethren: Assimilation, Nationalism, and Protestantism Among the Japanese of Los Angeles, 1895-1942* (Stanford, CA., 1995).
- 4 See Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley, 1987).
- 5 Ingrid Winther Scobie, *Center Stage: Helen Gabagan Douglas, A Life* (N.Y., 1992); Helen Gahagan Douglas, *A Full Life* (Garden City, N.Y., 1982).
- 6 See Yoshiko Uchida, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family*

- (Seattle, 1982) and Charles Kikuchi, *The Kikuchi Diary: Chronicle from an American Concentration Camp*, ed. by John Modell (Urbana, IL., 1973). Smith draws heavily but tendentiously from Kikuchi. For an overview of recent Japanese-American accounts, see Arthur Hansen, "Oral History and the Japanese American Evacuation," *Journal of American History* 82 (Sept. 1995), 625-639.
- 7 Alert readers might note parallels in this notion that Nisei cooperation with U.S. authorities manifested loyalty to Japanese ideals to Earl Warren's long-discredited 1942 claim that the fact that no sabotage by Japanese Americans had yet occurred was evidence that Japanese Americans were planning such sabotage.
 - 8 Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston, 1951). For a challenge to Handlin by the "new immigration history," see John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN., 1985). For a survey of Japanese-American immigration from the "new immigration history" framework, see Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston, 1989).
 - 9 See Yasuko Takezawa, *Breaking the Silence: Redress and Japanese American Ethnicity* (Ithaca, 1995).
 - 10 See John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (N.Y., 1986).
 - 11 Page Smith, *Trial by Fire: A People's History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (N.Y., 1982), 992-95; idem., *Redeeming the Time: A People's History of the 1920's and the New Deal* (N.Y., 1987), 1140.