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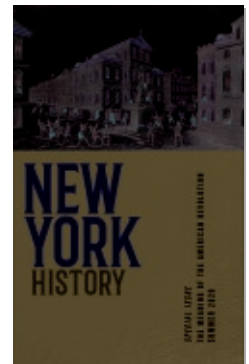
Distant Islands: The Japanese American Community in New York City, 1876–1930s by Daniel H. Inouye (review)

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New York History, Volume 101, Number 1, Summer 2020, pp. 152-154 (Review)

Published by Cornell University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nyh.2020.0015>



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demonstrates the value of local history for suffrage research. In recent years, many more local newspapers have been digitized through the New York Historic Newspapers Project (nyhistoricnewspapers.org), and it is a rich source for future studies of suffrage. Researchers will be assisted by Appendix 2, which lists more than a hundred suffrage organizations and political equality clubs, along with their place, county, and date founded. Most were located in central New York State, though more than a third were in the New York City area. Another appendix presenting statistics on referendum votes would have been useful.

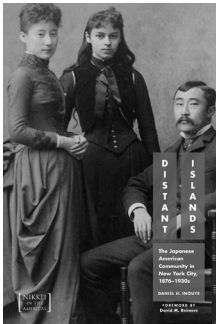
The concluding chapter recounts the final efforts to achieve the 19th Amendment by highlighting Carrie Chapman Catt's work and the activities of New York women who picketed the White House. Suffragists became the first women elected to the New York State Assembly in 1918, and New York women created the League of Women Voters in 1919.

The intended focus on upstate is not always realized, but the attention to upstate communities enhances this study of suffrage in New York State. Readers will agree with the final words of the authors, that "what members of these disparate groups did was nothing short of remarkable. . . . The suffrage workers altered the nature and actions of the masculine state and polity. Their example continues to inspire" (194).

Reviewed by Natalie A. Naylor. Professor Naylor is retired from Hofstra University where she taught American social history and was director of its Long Island Studies Institute. She edited several Institute publications and is the author of Women in Long Island's Past (History Press, 2012). She is president of the Nassau County Historical Society and editor of its annual Journal.

Distant Islands: The Japanese American Community in New York City, 1876–1930s

By Daniel H. Inouye. Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2018. 360 pages, illustrations, maps, 6" x 9". \$49.00 cloth, \$34.95 paper.



Daniel H. Inouye's *Distant Islands* represents a significant work that addresses a sorely neglected subject matter in the field of Asian American history: the East Coast experience of Japanese immigrants. Unlike their Chinese American counterparts, whose lives and communities in New York have been the topic of a number of systematic studies, the Japanese immigrant experience in North America has hitherto been told primarily as a West Coast story. This was due in part to the small and dispersed nature of the Japanese population on the East Coast. In contrast to the

rural agricultural communities which in many ways came to define the experience of Pacific Coast Japanese Americans, the Japanese residents of early-twentieth-century New York City generally hailed from urban centers such as Tokyo and settled into what Inouye calls “micro communities”—small groups of a similar socioeconomic status that coexisted within larger neighborhoods in the social fabric of New York. Drawing on his training as an urban and public historian, Inouye sheds light on the origins and development of this little known yet fascinating group.

Part of a projected three-book series about the ethnic Japanese population in New York City—with an overall time span covering roughly one hundred years from the second half of the nineteenth century up until the 1950s—*Distant Islands*, the first entry, focuses on the early formation of this group and the development of its internal social hierarchies through the 1930s. Inouye structures his book around the idea that the New York Japanese American “community”—if it could be called that—was resistant to cohering around a sense of shared ethnic and cultural heritage, and instead divided itself along lines of status and class. The chapter organization reflects this core framework, with the first five chapters describing the four-tiered class and status hierarchy, along with a separate, non-tiered student sphere, that he argues characterized the Japanese American world in New York City. He adds a further layer of complexity to this scheme by using chapters six and seven, which form the second part of the book, to demonstrate how Buddhist and Protestant religious organizations gave the appearance of a cohesive Japanese American community during the interwar years, despite its stratified social structure.

Inouye populates his narrative with colorful characters who speak to the richness of the *nikkei* (i.e., Japanese diaspora) experience in turn-of-the-century New York. Focusing initially on the social elite, he traces, for example, the rise of the silk and cotton merchant Rioichiro Arai, whose success in bringing Japanese silk to the American market saw him become the first person of Asian descent to be elected to the board of the American Silk Association, in a fitting reflection of Japan’s rising status in the world following its successive victories in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05). Also featured here is the story of mid-size merchants such as Senzō Kuwayama—a Japanese grocer who helped to popularize among American consumers *ajinomoto* (also known as monosodium glutamate, or MSG for short), a food-flavoring agent responsible for the savory *umami* taste that has become so fashionable in recent years—and the Katagiri Brothers—owners of a Japanese grocery store that has continued to sell Japanese foods and wares from the same Midtown Manhattan location since its opening in 1907.

Unlike all of the other North American cities that had populations of one thousand or more ethnic Japanese residents by the 1920s and 1930s, New York never developed a single, readily identifiable Japanese American enclave along the lines of Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. Inouye persuasively shows why this was the case, giving a multifactor explanation that takes into account not only the social stratification of the *nikkei* community but also the spatial separation between different micro communities, the absence of overt anti-Japanese

racism, and the lack of place of origin-based prefectural associations (*kenjinkai*) that may have provided a stronger sense of social cohesion. He also complicates this picture by highlighting the transient student sphere, whose uncertain futures allowed them to remain outside the class and status hierarchy.

The book's treatment of the Japanese side of the narrative could be improved. In certain areas, the author's grasp of basic facts of Japanese history and terminology is lacking. The 1868 Battle of Fushimi (p. 24), for example, took place on the outskirts of Kyoto, making the author's claim that the Imperial forces "seiz[ed] control of Edo [current day Tokyo]"—located some 230 miles to the east—on the basis of its victory in Fushimi more than a little misleading. Moreover, for all the emphasis that Inouye places on dissecting the social structure among Japanese immigrants, his conceptualization of the Tokugawa-era status system (*mibunsei*) and its subsequent intermixture with Western notions of class and status is oversimplified. Recent scholarship in Tokugawa history has moved beyond the notion of *mibunsei* as a static, tightly fixed hierarchy—to say nothing of the system's breakdown in the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration of 1868—leading one to wonder whether Inouye's discussion of *mibun* could have benefited from a more nuanced approach. Overall, the entire first section of chapter 1, which recounts the historical background of the opening of Japan to the West, comes across as exceedingly perfunctory, sapping the book's narrative momentum from the outset. A more integrated opening foregrounding the main characters of Inouye's study—that is, the Japanese migrants traveling to and settling in America—would have been appreciated.

This leads to a broader point about the relative strengths of *Distant Islands*. Although the author's effort to give voice to a previously overlooked population deserves much credit, his use of "storytelling narratives," which he employs to "[relate] the history of a group excluded or marginalized in traditional narrative history," is more effective in some places than others (p. 12). An overreliance on third-person description, while detailed and informative, in many instances comes at the expense of readability. Perhaps this was due to the limitation of the sources, but the inclusion of more first-person voices would have livened up the life stories which, after all, form the backbone of this book. These issues aside, however, there is no question that this is an exciting and important new work for New York urban history, Japanese American history, and Asian American studies, with a promise of more to come.

Reviewed by Bo Tao. Tao received a Ph.D. in history from Yale University and is currently a visiting fellow at Waseda University. His dissertation, titled "Imperial Pacifism: Kagawa Toyohiko and Christianity in the Asia-Pacific War," focuses on the history of Japanese Christianity and transpacific encounters in the decades surrounding World War II.