

8-2013

Review of: Queer Compulsions: Race, Nation, and Sexuality in the Affairs of Yone Noguchi

Kevin Allen Leonard

Western Washington University, kevin.leonard@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/history_facpubs

Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leonard, Kevin Allen, "Review of: Queer Compulsions: Race, Nation, and Sexuality in the Affairs of Yone Noguchi" (2013). *History Faculty and Staff Publications*. 12.
https://cedar.wwu.edu/history_facpubs/12

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty and Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

and visual culture than historians seeking better to understand the historical and cultural context of photographs of Asian Americans.

University of La Verne

KENNETH H. MARCUS

Queer Compulsions: Race, Nation, and Sexuality in the Affairs of Yone Noguchi. By Amy Sueyoshi. (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2012. xvi + 229 pp. \$40)

Yone Noguchi is now best known in the United States as the father of sculptor Isamu Noguchi, but he was a highly regarded author and poet who lived in the United States between 1893 and 1904 and taught English at Keio University in Tokyo after his return to Japan. In this book, Amy Sueyoshi, who teaches in race and resistance studies and in sexuality studies at San Francisco State University, carefully examines the elder Noguchi's published writings and his correspondence with other poets and writers. Her book challenges Noguchi's biographers, many of whom have simply assumed that he was heterosexual, and historians of Asian Americans who have refused to explore the possibility that sex among men occurred in "bachelor societies." Her work also addresses historians of sexuality, most of whom have overlooked Asians in the United States who engaged in same-sex affairs.

Sueyoshi focuses largely on the letters between Noguchi and author Charles Warren Stoddard, whose descriptions of his erotic interactions with boys and men of the South Pacific islands have long attracted the attention of scholars interested in the history of homosexuality. Between Noguchi's arrival in the United States in 1893 and Stoddard's death in 1909, the two men exchanged hundreds of letters. In describing, paraphrasing, and quoting from the letters between Noguchi and Stoddard, Sueyoshi demonstrates that the degree of intimacy expressed in these letters was unusual, even among bohemians who accepted and celebrated romantic friendships among men. Although the degree of intimacy suggested by the letters waxed and waned, many of the letters included explicit professions of love if not physical desire. In a January 1898 letter, for example, Noguchi sent Stoddard "boundless love and kisses" (p. 44). Sueyoshi points out that Noguchi's letters to Stoddard almost always expressed more affection than his letters to women, including Léonie Gilmour who bore his son Isamu.

The book makes clear that Sueyoshi has thoroughly read, reread, and analyzed her sources. She considers the possibility that

Noguchi's critical descriptions of Stoddard in letters to Gilmour may have reflected a decrease in his affection for Stoddard, but she also notes that Noguchi may have been attempting to downplay passions that might have appeared inappropriate. Sueyoshi offers provocative interpretations of the relationship between Noguchi and Stoddard. At one point, she observes the similarity between this relationship and "Daddy/boy" relationships in the late twentieth- and twenty-first-century queer community. She also explores the connection between racial ideology and the relationship between Noguchi and Stoddard. In his letters, Stoddard made clear that his feelings for Noguchi reflected his fascination with Asians and Pacific Islanders. In his early years of residence in the United States, Noguchi attempted to challenge stereotypical depictions of Japan and Japanese people. Eventually, however, he embraced Orientalism, posing for photographs in kimono and highlighting his exotic origins.

Sueyoshi does not simply succeed in her effort to challenge Noguchi's biographers and historians of Asian Americans and sexuality. She also provides a stellar example for other scholars interested in the intersections of race, nation, and sexuality.

Western Washington University

KEVIN ALLEN LEONARD

Nikkei in the Interior West: Japanese Immigration and Community Building, 1882–1945. By Eric Walz. (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2012. xxvii + 236 pp. \$50)

Eric Walz's *Nikkei in the Interior West* provides a workmanlike study of a neglected history. From the beginning, the author carefully delineates his selected scope: a focus on five rural communities in the states of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Nebraska, and Utah, from earliest settlement to the end of World War II. As context, he has selected a model derived from *Japanese Diasporas*, edited by Nobuko Adachi (2006), which to a great extent accounts for both the strengths and weakness of this book. Walz is to be commended for beginning with two chapters describing the often-neglected "push" factors in Japan and the hardships of actual emigration, and for melding individual stories with facts and statistics. He follows the same format in the five succeeding, thematic chapters based on interpretive "periods" of the diaspora: the frontier; settlement and family; cultural interaction with the "host" society and ethnic transformation (addressed together); and early and later voluntary