

A Roundtable on Monica Kim

The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History

Mitchell Lerner, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, Arissa H. Oh, Zachary M. Matusheski, Peter
Banseok Kwon, and Monica Kim

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Roundtable Introduction

Mitchell Lerner

Although the United States had not won on the Korean War battlefields, many Americans happily claimed a resounding victory in the post-war months. Communist prisoners of war in Panmunjom, the *New York Times* reported in November 1953, were resisting pressure from their home countries and were renouncing the communist ideology (despite the fact that they had been subjected to communist propaganda sessions that the paper described as an affront to those who “believe in Anglo-Saxon justice”). More than 20,000 detained Chinese and North Korea prisoners of war had “dared to pit their desires and beliefs against the conformist doctrine of communism. And so far, the men had won.” The result, crowed the *Times*, might be an important legacy of the war. If American military efforts had not proven victorious, the world’s diminished views of communism that would inevitably emerge from the prisoners’ reluctance to return home might nevertheless tilt the Cold War scales in the U.S. direction. “The unwilling puppets at Panmunjom,” the paper concluded, “by their exposure of Communist weakness may yet influence the course of history.”

Monica Kim’s ambitious book, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War*, offers a broad and provocative analysis of this Cold War frontier. On a most immediate level, the work offers a wonderful “bottom-up” approach to the Korean War, delving deeply into the lives of everyday people from multiple backgrounds as they struggle within the changing world around them. The book, however, also aspires to make much broader points about that world. Taking the reader beyond the traditional battlefields, Kim situates the struggle over the fate of the POWs within the emerging Cold War competition and the larger movements towards decolonization. Along the way, she asks provocative questions about personal and national identity, about the inherent conflict between American militarism and American rhetoric, and about the relationship between the individual and the state. In the end, she concludes, the interrogation room itself had become a contested

space, one where “the ambitions of empire, revolution and international solidarity converged” (5).

The four reviewers here find much to applaud. All praise Kim’s ability to tell the story from the ground up, focusing not on the generals and the diplomats but taking instead what Peter Kwon calls a “people-centered approach.” They are all impressed by the book’s ability to connect the struggles of the interrogation room to the effort of the American empire to co-exist with the growing calls for decolonization. They also laud many other specific contributions. Arissa Oh singles out Kim’s contribution to our understanding of postwar migrations, and to the relationship between language and war. Zach Matusheski likes the way the book fits into the longer arch of American military projects overseas, and Judy Wu calls it a tour de force, noting its deep dive into the relationship between individuals, freedom, and the state. Peter Kwon lauds its efforts to open a window into American efforts to represent itself as both a liberal and a hegemonic power, and praises its contributions to our understanding of propaganda and psychological warfare efforts.

To the extent that the reviewers have criticisms—and they do—they are of the type that one expects of a book as ambitious and sophisticated as *Interrogation Rooms*. Some wish for a more specific definition of the author’s terms and concepts and more evidence directly connecting Korea with the larger forces of change. Matusheski thinks Kim sees a more coherent and conscious plan than truly existed in the reactive and improvised reality on the ground, while Wu looks for more analysis of the way that self-perceptions of masculinity and personal strength played a role, as they surely did in such militarized and confrontational settings. Still, the reviewers are unanimous that the book makes a significant contribution. *Interrogation Rooms*, concludes Judy Wu, “is an amazing work, one that brings together the intimate and the epic; the racial, cultural, and philosophical with the diplomatic and the military; the focus on political subjectivity with the study of subjugation.” Overall, Kim has written a thoughtful, challenging, and provocative work, one that stands at the forefront—along with Masuda Hajimu’s *Cold War Crucible* and David Cheng Chang’s *The Hijacked War*—of the emerging literature that unites social, military, diplomatic, and international in ways that broaden our understanding of the Korean War.

The War of the Intimate

Judy Tzu-Chun Wu

Monica Kim's book, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War*, is a tour de force. She offers an original and compelling interpretation of the Korean War. According to Kim, the conflict was not just as a struggle over territory or ideology but also as a dispute over the very nature of the human subject and the subject's relationship to a legitimate state. She directs our attention beyond the battlefields and command centers to sites of interrogation. These encounters were laden with power and powerlessness, as depicted on the book's beautifully rendered and ominous cover.

These locales of interrogation varied greatly. Interrogation rooms were constructed in prisoner of war camps both south and north of the 38th parallel. They were established on military vessels transporting U.S. POWs back home.

Kim also points out the expansive and improvisational nature of interrogations. Moments of interrogation could occur anywhere. Uncertain of each other's identities, beliefs, and actions, political and military enemies sought to ascertain, catalogue, and determine each other's fates. Anyone could initiate these encounters, including individuals or groups affiliated with military, political, paramilitary, and putatively civilian organizations. The interrogations could involve physical and psychological abuse as well as unexpected forms of connection. After all, the personalized nature of these encounters made them, in essence, expressions of intimacy.

Kim argues that these interrogations, which took place in the midst of "war" and "peace," symbolized the meaning of the conflict on the Korean peninsula. The interrogations sought to determine the hearts and minds of individuals, to ascertain and convert their wills and subjectivities. They were not just battles that measured territorial control or tallied body counts. They were struggles over the individual political subject, attempts to discern the authenticity of choosing capitalism, communism, or neutrality. The interrogations exemplified the development and use of psychological warfare by the United States, the Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China and their official as well as unofficial emissaries. Kim's argument amplifies and illuminates what was at stake politically and ideologically in these face-to-face encounters. In the language used in interrogation rooms north of the 38th parallel, the "hopes and desires" of the person being interrogated offered ideological justification for which "side" should be the political victor.

I was struck by three main themes in Kim's work. First, assigning the identity of the interrogatee and the prisoner of war was a political challenge in an ambiguous conflict. Affixing the identification of POW, a category recognized and weighted with political rights in the 1949 Geneva Convention, presumed that the military conflicts on the Korean peninsula occurred between recognized nations. Mutual recognition of nationhood, however, was what was being denied to decolonizing, socialist state formations during the Cold War by the West and its allies. So, to recognize an enemy combatant as a POW implied what was being actively denied: political legitimacy.

Furthermore, how does one determine political subjectivity and identity? Geography, affiliation, and even actions may not necessarily reflect an individual's "beliefs,"

especially as hopes and desires change over time and in the midst of warfare. These challenges were compounded by the high stakes involved: literal life and death or a more protracted social life or death, not just for the individual but for family members not in the immediate vicinity of the interrogations.

Second, these difficulties of discernment were compounded by linguistic and racial differences. Kim points out the asymmetry between the interrogations north of versus south of the 38th parallel. The Chinese and Korean interrogators demonstrated their fluency in English and understanding of American history and culture. In contrast, the U.S.-led interrogations tended to rely upon linguistic translation and were often fueled by Orientalist beliefs of inscrutability and/or barbarity. What is particularly fascinating for me in these analyses of encounters are the roles of racialized Americans—most notably Japanese American and African American soldiers—who themselves had conflicted relationships with the United States. Sam Miyamoto, for example, the subject of the chapter entitled "The Interrogator," was in essence rendered stateless by both the U.S. and Japanese governments during World War II. Yet he became a recognized American spokesperson, an interrogator, due to his linguistic abilities and, perhaps, his racial affinities with his interrogatees.

Equally intriguing is the life of Clarence Adams, an African American soldier from Memphis who chose not to return to the Jim Crow United States after the 1953 armistice. American racism extended to the military abroad and into the POW camps north of the 38th. Self-designated patriots formed KKK units to surveil and discipline U.S. soldiers suspected of communist sympathies and collaboration. This conflation of whiteness and U.S. national identity shaped political choices (albeit not always in expected ways), everyday strategies of survival, and approaches towards interrogation encounters.

Third, in shifting our historical attention away from the battlefields, Kim also illuminates the unending nature of war. This is a political fact, given that the armistice devolved into an ongoing conflict, a persistent "state of emergency," on the Korean peninsula. In addition, the book points to the continual, seemingly unending process of interrogation that persisted after the official/unofficial conflict ended. There were the "interrogations" on the 38th parallel, conducted by the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission, to determine whether a POW repatriated, stayed, or chose a third country. There were "interrogations" after the release of POWs, conducted on board U.S. military ships crossing the Pacific, a method of transportation selected to prolong the process of "debriefing." There were the unauthorized interrogations that occurred within POW camps by factions for or against particular political ideologies or sides. There was social and cultural suspicion of returnees, especially given the public discourse regarding "brainwashing." This charge implied that U.S. soldiers might constitute human time bombs. They physically resembled their former identities but were fundamentally altered and lacked the will to affirm their loyalty to their homelands. In detailing and illuminating the unendingness of war as well as the psychological and physical ordeals of POWs, Kim's work joins and expands upon the insights of critical refugee studies.

Kim is a master at narration and analysis. She illuminates the political and the ideological as she draws us into tense and unexpected encounters of intimacy. At times she overstates her argument. For example, she claims that in the post-1945 world, Western powers recognized that "war

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would have to be conducted in the name of ‘humanity’. . . as a disavowal of war itself” (5). I understand that this insight might be particularly fitting for the Korean War, since it was designated a “police conflict” and not a war. However, the practice of making war while crying peace could also be seen in previous wars. The United States has a proclivity for proclaiming its own innocence and idealism.

I also believe Kim could have extended her analysis of gender in her work. She discusses the gendered implications of protecting U.S. masculinity in POW camps north of the 38th parallel, but I wanted to learn more about the women (clearly the minority but present nonetheless) in POW camps south of the 38th. How did they understand their role in warfare and decolonization? In addition, how did the Korean and Chinese men who were captured understand their masculinity and obligations to their states, communities, and families? Given the intimacy of the interrogation room, it seems particularly fitting to try to understand how immobility, surrender, capture, and resistance (all of which have gendered connotations) challenge, reinforce, and alter one’s subjectivity.

The Interrogation Rooms is an amazing work. It brings together the intimate and the epic; the racial, cultural, and philosophical with the diplomatic and the military; the focus on political subjectivity with the study of subjugation. I highly recommend this work to scholars and students interested in understanding the messiness and complexities of war.

Review of Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War*

Arisa H. Oh

Recently, historians inside and outside the United States have published a stream of books that have done much to deepen and enhance our understanding of the Korean War. Taking its place alongside existing diplomatic and military histories of the war is scholarship that seeks to expand our understanding of the significance of the Korean War by looking at it from ten thousand feet—by situating it in a larger Asia-Pacific or global frame. Another, more granular strand of scholarship looks at the war close up, documenting the war on the ground and through the lived, everyday experience of ordinary people, whether civilians or combatants.

Monica Kim seeks to do both. In *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War*, she places the Korean War at the nexus of century-shaking global processes of colonialism and decolonization and also locates it in the context of Korean history: of the Japanese imperialism before the war, and the red-baiting and lingering suspicions that would dog Koreans at home and abroad long after the war had been paused—not ended—in 1953.

Also in the last few years, some have bemoaned the seeming decline of military history, dismissing what others call the new military history. Yes, they say, the social histories of war that recount the experiences of noncombatants, women, and children are all very nice, but the real history—the important, substantive history—is to be found in the traditional places: on the front lines and at the negotiating tables. Kim represents the new military history with the questions she poses early in her book: What can we learn about a war by looking beyond the battlefield? What can we learn about a nation or a war—or warfare itself—by looking at the refugee camp, the GI barracks, or the interrogation room?

I see in Kim’s book three arguments for the value of this new military history. First, she shows how looking beneath the seemingly smooth narratives produced through interrogation reveals layers of historical processes, including “the intimate (and indispensable) relationships between language and war-making, race and historical memory, and bureaucracy and violence” (128). By focusing on the Japanese Americans who did the vital translation work in the interrogation rooms, Kim brings into sharp relief the afterlives of U.S. and Japanese imperial projects in the Pacific.

In chapter 3, Kim introduces a Nisei (U.S.-born Japanese American), Sam Miyamoto, who was incarcerated with his family by the U.S. government after Pearl Harbor, then sent to Japan as part of a POW/hostage exchange in which Japanese and Japanese Americans were bartered for white Americans. After the war, Miyamoto returned to the United States and was drafted by the military to serve in Korea, where he interrogated Korean prisoners of war. Having been recategorized from enemy alien to

citizen-soldier, Miyamoto now helped the U.S. government categorize the people he questioned on its behalf into new bureaucratic categories, namely communist or anti-communist POW. He did this by speaking Japanese to Korean prisoners, who knew Japanese from that nation’s occupation of Korea, and translating their responses into English. Here we see the many entanglements and ironies of overlapping U.S. and Japanese empires.

Second, a consideration of the Korean War from the vantage point of the interrogation room connects war to postwar migrations, which are very much part of the story of war but are more often discussed by historians of immigration rather than military historians. We know that Japanese colonization and the Korean War, and their aftermaths, acted as centrifugal forces that sent Koreans abroad—as workers, political exiles, students, independence activists, war brides, adoptees—creating a diaspora of millions. Kim shows that this group also included former POWs who rejected both North and South Korea in favor of a neutral third country. Thinking about former POWs as migrants allows us to reflect on questions at the intersection of war and migration. How was the non-repatriate POW’s experience similar to or different from those of other Koreans abroad? How did POWs come to choose to emigrate rather than repatriate? Where do people belong and who has the right to decide? Whose decisions are legitimate and deserving of recognition? What are the conditions under which people make those decisions (in an interrogation room or, for some of the Nisei interrogators themselves, in a Japanese internment camp)?

Kim reminds us that the label ‘POW’ was not a temporary, bureaucratic status relevant only for the duration of the war but one that marked them permanently. It followed them overseas, too, as did other stigmatized statuses like ‘war bride’ or ‘Red’—statuses, like POW, which were imposed from the outside and could be rooted in nothing more than mere suspicion. Thinking about these categories directs our attention to overseas Koreans and the identities and the politics of diasporic Korean communities overshadowed by the politics of a lingering war.

Finally, looking at the Korean War from the interrogation rooms recenters the subjectivity and humanity of the POWs themselves: complicated, ambivalent, with competing ideas and agendas. It is easy to read histories of war and begin to think of people labeled POWs as being not terribly dissimilar to the symbolic figure of the Oriental POW that the U.S. government showed the American public—that

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is, to see them as a monolithic category of people and to elide their individual humanity. Kim asks questions that emphasize the interiority of the Korean POW. For example, what did Koreanness mean to the POW from an undivided but colonized peninsula—from a Korea that was whole but not independent?

Whether communist or anticommunist, POWs saw the stakes of the war as nothing less than what a postcolonial, free Korea would look like. In a poignant example, Kim describes POWs singing to mark liberation day, expressing their belief that it was liberation, not divisions of North and South, that was their predominant concern and ultimate goal. The anecdote nicely illustrates that the Korean War was not just about the Cold War but also the inner subjectivities of individuals not bound by the externally imposed categories of communist, POW, or enemy. In the examples that remind us of the complicated, multilayered humanity of POWs, Kim shows what gets missed when we think of the Korean War in the familiar and hardened terms of North Korean versus South Korean, communist versus anticommunist.

Kim's study is ambitious, contributing to the scholarship of the Korean War, the Cold War, empire and decolonization, and discussions of the meanings of concepts like sovereignty, humanity, and recognition. The book is stuffed with the fruits of years of labor in archives. The ambitiousness of her project sometimes seems to prevent her from getting into specifics, however. Her book is aimed not at the layperson or undergraduate who needs detailed information about the Korean War, the POW repatriation issue, and the armistice negotiations, but at the reader who already knows a good deal. Moreover, her reader must be willing and able to follow her into frequent abstraction.

In chapter 4, for example, Kim juxtaposes two physical sites. The first is a POW camp on Koje Island, where communist POWs kidnapped the U.S. camp commander, Brigadier General Francis Dodd, and held him for three days in 1952. The second is Panmunjom, at the 38th parallel, where negotiations dragged on for eighteen months before an armistice was signed in July 1953. At stake in both locations, she says, were "the meanings of effective postcolonial liberation and sovereignty" and "the legitimacy of the 1947 elections held in the north and south" (174). Her point seems to be that although the UN and the United States did not recognize North Korea as a sovereign state, they went to war against North Korea anyway.

She sees a parallel on Koje Island, where the POWs who held Dodd captive "were essentially reenacting the sovereign claims of [North Korea] over their own selves, using the Geneva Conventions as the framework and General Dodd as the medium for their claims" (189). But the connections between Panmunjom and Koje Island threaten to get lost under a pile of (very fascinating) observations about Dodd's kidnapping. The reader might gain a tentative grasp on what she means when she says the POWs and Dodd were having a one-day Panmunjom, but her arguments would be clearer and more effective if she more explicitly connected the concrete and the conceptual.

Kim's capacious arguments often cut across received knowledge. She questions, for example, whether something should be understood using the typical Cold War axes of communism and anti-communism or viewed through a larger, different, or more conceptual lens that looks at humanity, or liberalism, rather than the familiar boundaries of nation-states or power politics. Even her starting point, the interrogation room, reframes conventional wisdom: as Kim shows, rather than spaces of torture and coercion, U.S.

military interrogation rooms were imagined by American leaders to be liberal spaces that featured persuasion, free will, and choice. In these rearrangements of what we think we know, Kim not only offers new ways to think about the Korean War and the Cold War but may also suggest some ways forward in the ongoing debate about what counts as military history.

Review of Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History*

Zachary M. Matusheski

One of the most compelling reasons to study the Korean War is the way that it can be examined simultaneously as an international Cold War confrontation, a civil war, a regional war, and a war of decolonization. Monica Kim's book, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History*, analyzes the war and the prisoner of war (POW) repatriation process through a lens of decolonization and shows how the war influenced contests over statehood, the international system, and national identity. There are a couple of issues on which I think her analysis misses the mark—the first having to do with the role that morality played in the decision to demand voluntary repatriation, the second involving POW camps run by the United Nations Command (UNC). On the whole, however, the book makes an important contribution to discussions of the ways in which ideas about identity and the international order influenced the war.

Kim views the Korean War primarily as a war of decolonization, and she argues that the United States brought an occupation ideology to the peninsula that drew on traditions of American imperial rule. This ideology held that Koreans were not mature enough for independence, either culturally or politically. In the postwar era, Kim writes, the United States and other Western powers "were moving unevenly from the tropes of 'civilization' to markers of 'governance' in how they racialized the global order." At the same time, the United States was promoting an international order that tied legitimacy and peace to international engagement in the United Nations.

Koreans contested these views, asserting, where possible, claims to a historically determined identity. This showdown between the United States and Korea further escalated around the question of state recognition when the United States embraced nonforcible repatriation. This policy held that Korean and Chinese POWs could choose whether to return to the country they were fighting for. Kim portrays this policy as solely aimed at delegitimizing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Here she is able to depict the intersection between Korean POW history and U.S. Cold War strategy.

Kim's sophisticated argument about identity, decolonization, and ideas about the international order connects with Korean War historiography related to POWs and social history. Her emphasis on the significance of political contestations over Korean War POWs fits well with Charles Young's book, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad*. Her representation of the central role played by average Korean POWs also matches the findings in Masuda Hajimu's book, *Cold War Crucible: the Korean Conflict and the Postwar World*. Whether in portrayals of the choreographed capture of General Francis Dodd on Koje-do island in 1952 or the Korean POW blood petitions of 1953, Kim's depictions of

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Koreans adds to a continuing discussion of how Korean people “came to accept and participate in the reality of the Cold War,” to use Masuda’s apt phrase.² Intersection with these texts on the Korean War underscores the value of this book.

Overall, the book has much to recommend it. Kim’s framing of the war’s history as part of the “American genealogy of overseas military projects and interests,” a lineage that includes U.S. rule in the Philippines, helps show how U.S. involvement in the Korean War can be reimagined outside the boundaries of the Cold War.³ Kim also captures new voices by using interviews she conducted with Japanese-American interpreters. These oral histories show how American policy in the Pacific in the first half of the twentieth century connected with the Truman administration’s approaches to the Korean War.

In a later chapter, Kim reviews the goals that Indian leaders brought to the repatriation hearings and discusses how the few combatants who chose neutral nations as their repatriation destination fared. Throughout the book, she links readers with the voices and stories of average Koreans stuck in POW camps and explains why they made certain choices. It is impossible to read this book and not walk away with a new appreciation for the way the Korean War shaped the experience of Korean people.

Kim’s depiction of U.S. policy and choices is more problematic. She doesn’t account for the improvisational approach to the occupation and war that is essential to any appraisal of events in Korea. In her discussion of the occupation period, for example, she portrays General John R. Hodge as having a clear understanding of security in Korea and a well-formulated ruling ideology. In truth, Hodge’s choices in Korea were more makeshift. Indeed, Allan Millet suggests in his book *The War For Korea, 1945–1950: A House Burning* that Hodge’s “haphazard and hurried” occupation policies in the first months after Japan’s defeat created “a large and confused civil bureaucracy.”⁴ A review of Hodge’s occupation choices from start to finish shows a commander reacting to events on the ground, rather than a leader with a grand idea about how to govern Korea.

Reactive responses instead of thoughtful action typified the U.S. approach to the larger war itself. The first U.S. units deployed to Korea from the Eighth Army were woefully unprepared for combat; as a result, American forces suffered. When the tide changed after Inchon, and the UNC allies started capturing large numbers of enemy soldiers, they found themselves unprepared to house, care for, and manage those who had surrendered.⁵ Among other places selected for camps, Koje-do Island became overcrowded quickly. Guard understaffing made this combustible situation worse.⁶ Lack of preparation by the United States and the UNC was a central factor in the rise of rightist and other groups in the camps, something Kim could have analyzed more closely.

In addition to being unprepared for the war, the U.S. administration had a moral vision that shaped the decisions it made about Korea. Kim misses the mark when discussing the motives behind nonforcible repatriation. She simplifies the Truman administration’s debates on this issue by claiming that the only reason U.S. leaders embraced nonforcible repatriation was that they wanted to delegitimize the DPRK and the PRC. She also labels Truman’s words about forced repatriation being a moral injustice “propaganda” that “signaled a more fundamental problem than a simple claim to morality in the post-World War II global order.”⁷

While blocking the DPRK and the PRC from gaining recognition was important, ideas about morality played a role in the way members of the Truman administration thought about the question of repatriation. Even though the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) had reservations about nonforcible repatriation, that advisory body listed humanitarian

concerns as a factor in the debate. In an August 8, 1951, report from the JCS to the secretary of defense, the JCS predicted that repatriated POWs would be executed or placed in labor camps. The Joint Chiefs then argued that “humanitarian considerations prompt that these prisoners not be forced to return.”⁸ The JCS placed these considerations ahead of the propaganda value of the decision. A few weeks later, Secretary of State Dean Acheson wrote that he agreed that there was a moral dimension to this problem.⁹

These views hardened in 1952. In a February 1952 letter to the president, Acheson claimed that forcing POWs who believed they would be executed after repatriation to return to the DPRK and the PRC would “be repugnant to our most fundamental moral and humanitarian principles on the importance of the individual and would seriously jeopardize the psychological warfare position of the United States in its opposition to Communist tyranny.”¹⁰ Acheson’s words clearly demonstrate that the U.S. motives for nonforcible repatriation included moral considerations along with the propaganda aims Kim highlights. Kim’s analysis of the psychological warfare goals of the policy is helpful, but it would have been much better if she had analyzed the moral dimensions more closely.

These flaws aside, Monica Kim’s *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War* is a significant contribution to Korean War historiography. She offers new perspectives on the repatriation issue through her analysis of Korean prisoners and Japanese-American interpreters, and she makes a strong case for seeing the Korean War as a war of decolonization bound up with Korean identity and ideas about the state in the post-World War II international order. The book should encourage more thoughtful analysis of where the experiences of the Korean War POWs fit within Korean history and the history of American empire.

Notes:

1. Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History* (Princeton, NJ, 2019), 47.
2. Masuda Hajimu, *The Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World*, (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 4.
3. Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms*, 43.
4. Allan Millet, *The War for Korea, 1945–1950: A House Burning* (Lawrence, KS, 2005), 64.
5. See Walter G. Hermes, *The United States Army in the Korean War: Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Honolulu, 2005), 233.
6. Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York, 2013), 258.
7. Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms*, 174.
8. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, vol. VII, Korea and China, Part 1*, eds. John P. Glennon, Harriet D. Schwar, and Paul Claussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1983), doc. 792.
9. Barton J. Bernstein, “The Struggle over the Korea Armistice: Prisoners of Repatriation?” in *Child of Conflict: The Korean-American Relationship, 1943–1953*, ed. Bruce Cumings, (Seattle, WA, 1983), 277.
10. *FRUS, 1952–1954, vol. XV, Korea, Part 1*, eds. John P. Glennon, Harriet D. Schwar, and Paul Claussen (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1984), doc. 44.

Review of Monica Kim’s *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History*.

Peter Banseok Kwon

Did the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs) during the Korean War (1950–1953) give rise to the American liberal empire in world politics from the mid-twentieth century onwards? Such is Monica Kim’s claim in *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History*.

Kim's groundbreaking study offers significant insights into the POW camps during the Korean War, a topic that up to now has not been extensively treated.

Her account begins against the backdrop of the 1949 Geneva Conventions on the Treatment of Prisoners of War, which mandated the repatriation of POWs at the end of hostilities. In January 1952, the UN (backed by the United States) proposed that each POW be given voluntary repatriation—i.e., the freedom to choose whether to “return to his own side or join the other side”—in spite of North Korean and Chinese insistence on mandatory repatriation (8). This issue became the central obstacle in the armistice negotiations between the two sides, which dragged on for over a year. During this period, as Kim argues, a major diplomatic and psychological battle was waged in the interrogation facilities, as both the US-led UN coalition in South Korea and the communist forces in North Korea (backed by China) tried to convince POWs where to relocate after the war. For both sides, their decision would represent to the world which of the two Korean governments should be recognized as the sovereign Korean state.

In the age of de-colonization, the US treatment of POWs became central to the broader American effort to refashion its imperial identity as the guardian of the free world and an exemplar of liberal democratic values. The repatriation choice of POWs became critical for authenticating the American project of liberation in Korea; more specifically, the refusal by North Korean and Chinese POWs to repatriate would legitimize the US military occupation and nation-building efforts in South Korea. According to Kim, the importance of the American manipulation of POWs to produce the “correct subjects”—i.e., foreign natives who supported the United States—did not lie simply in the vindication of its role in the Korean War. The United States would use this experience to establish a template that it would continue to employ to justify its post-Korea “wars of intervention” abroad (358).

Kim's people-centered approach is significant in that her work provides an alternative to traditional military historiography of the Korean War, which focuses on the Cold War superpower conflict and state-level battle tactics while minimizing the significance of POWs—oftentimes reducing them to faceless victims of state propaganda machines. Kim expands our understanding of the complexity of POW experiences as she shows how forces such as liberalism, decolonization, orientalism, Western and Japanese imperialism, and anti-Black racism converged and played out in the personal narratives that emerged from the interrogation rooms.

Kim also expands both the local and international perspective of the Korean War through vivid accounts of the diverse individuals in the POW camps run by the US military, the North Korean and Chinese militaries, and the Indian Custodian Force. In her hands the POW accounts become a microcosm of global politics, offering a new interpretation of the impact of the Korean War on the United States and the world. Her book is poignant, personal, deeply touching, and complex, a penetrating reflection on the multiplicity and variegated realities of this war, beyond the prevailing approaches towards the conflict.

The book aptly captures the totality of modern warfare in the twentieth century, which involved a complete erosion of territorial and ideological boundaries. The interrogation rooms of the Korean War became a new battlefield,

substituting for geopolitical territory the terrain of “human interiority” (7). The reader should be aware that the book is not designed to provide a comprehensive account of the Korean War per se, nor an account of the POW experiences themselves, as the author herself notes (16). Rather, it uses select case studies of POWs and interrogators to provide an in-depth look at the ideological warfare over political subjecthood during the Cold War and in the process weaves together the “trans-Pacific histories of the interrogation room, the prisoner of war, and the interrogator of the Korean War” (26).

Kim's book will be of interest to scholars of the comparative history of imperialism and empire-building. This vast empirical study, drawing from multi-lingual archival sources—including declassified U.S. military investigation files of POWs as well as the author's interviews with former POWs and interrogators—results in an unprecedented insider's account of the POW camps during the Korean War. Through these fascinating narratives of lesser-known historical figures, Kim offers a unique bottom-up perspective from which to re-analyze this war. Her reframing of the conflict not only brings what was peripheral into the center of analysis but puts a human face on larger movements and structural forces occurring during the war.

Kim presents many illuminating and previously unknown accounts of POWs and interrogators such as Clarence Adams, an African-American POW who decided not to repatriate to the United States but to stay in China (343–44; 352–53); and Sam Miyamoto, one of the formerly interned Japanese-Americans who was recruited to serve in the US military in Korea as part of Washington's plan to showcase its embrace of “Orientals” to Korean and Chinese POWs (123–29; 138–40; 160–64; 167–68). She even sheds new light on more familiar tales, such as the story of the communist POWs in “Compound #76” who took their US camp commander hostage to demand the cessation of the US military repatriation screening that forced POWs to renounce North Korea's sovereign claims over them (171–89).

Spanning the years from the US military occupation of Korea in the aftermath of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945) through the post-Korean War release of the POWs, the book is at its best and most revelatory when discussing the US side of the war and its trans-Pacific history through the stories of American POW repatriates (who journeyed from North Korean POW camps back to the US) and Japanese-American interrogators in the US POW camps in Korea. The book also excels in its explanations about the US reactions and adaptations to the postcolonial world and its new methods of self-representation as a liberal hegemon. In comparison, the passages that discuss the Korean side of the conflict are generally less detailed and conceptualized. Kim's treatment of South Korean experiences under the US military occupation, for example, often follows the postcolonial viewpoint found in the work of historian Bruce Cumings.

Having finished *The Interrogation Rooms*, I pondered the truism that one's greatest strengths can become one's greatest weaknesses. Kim's ambitious attempt to set the struggle over Korean War POWs in its larger international context can make it appear that she has stretched her research to incorporate too many diverse elements, actors, and themes. Is it really the case that the key to unlocking the new winds of US imperialism, the postcolonial re-

conceptualization of statehood, and the non-alignment movement can be found in the Korean War interrogation rooms?

While the insights provided into those rooms are invaluable, the broader connections Kim finds can appear to be unevenly argued, with some links not as tightly drawn as others. Likewise, the extent to which the US project with Korean War POWs can be said to have both reflected and given impetus to the emergence of a new US liberal paradigm remains a bit vague, especially since it is hard to clearly define and trace this new US framework that was born, as Kim claims, during the Korean War. Her argument likely would have been even more compelling had it been more tightly constructed, with a focus on fewer key actors and fewer dimensions, or if the study had been presented as two separate works dealing with different aspects of the Korean War's consequences.

Despite the numerous details of individual accounts excavated from the discrete archival and oral sources, the limitations of archival sources still make themselves felt. Though no fault of her own, many of Kim's examples fall short of providing adequate context, and readers may find themselves lost in the narrative chronology, as anecdotes sometimes appear incomplete or fragmentary. One of the consequences of the missing archives is that there is a noticeable imbalance between Kim's accounts of US/South Korean interrogation camps and their interrogation tactics and the Chinese/North Korean side, which likely stems from Kim's lack of access to classified material in North Korea and China. These gaps, including the largely missing narrative of the Chinese POWs, make it difficult to ascertain whether the book's findings truly reflect the larger trends of POW camps implicated in Kim's book, or whether significant differences existed between each side's interrogation facilities on the Korean peninsula. In this sense, David Cheng Chang's recent publication, *The Hijacked War* (2020), which highlights the experiences of Chinese POWs during the Korean War, complements Kim's work well.

Overall, Kim's narrative enriches our understanding of the war by incorporating rarely seen personal narratives and non-traditional themes such as US imperial ambitions within a trans-Pacific frame. At the same time, the book powerfully demonstrates how the ideological Cold War found its way into the furthest reaches of the POW camps. Despite her efforts to give primacy to the people's history over the state-centric analysis of the Cold War, Kim's work in some ways is a convincing example of how Cold War-driven national interests and powerful state propaganda machines penetrated deeply into the minds of ordinary people. The book's depiction of highly effective psychological interrogation tactics by the POW institutions, including how much POW camps and their personnel adopted, bought into, and implemented state agenda, affirms both the binary power struggle and the top-down features of Cold War historiography. The ideas and arrangements implemented in the interrogation rooms reflected the goals and values endorsed by major superpowers of the Cold War and illustrate that the POWs trapped in the recesses of interrogation rooms were first and foremost subject to the competing binary forces of capitalism and communism.

Response to Roundtable

Monica Kim

June 2020 marks the seventieth year of the Korean War, the one "hot war" of the Cold War that has never officially ended. A ceasefire signed in 1953 is the only thing that has held outright physical conflict in abeyance on the peninsula. For me as a historian, the unending and ongoing nature of the Korean War presents a fundamental

question: How does one write a history of a war that has not ended? Or, more to the point, how do I write a history of a war in a way that points to and insists upon noticing how this war has not ended? Beneath these questions about crafting historical narrative are the more urgent and fundamental political questions of why and how a perpetual state of war on the Korean peninsula is, in fact, useful for the different states involved—and has been, for seventy years and counting.

The task, then, is not to write a story of the Korean War as a discretely bounded event, but rather to write a story about the war that locates it in the most ordinary and everyday moments. And I am honored to have the scholars involved in this roundtable engage so thoughtfully and generously with the book, when their own work on U.S. warfare has pushed the bounds of where we locate "war" temporally, geopolitically, and materially.

Mitch Lerner has put together a roundtable of scholars whose scholarship spans the three fields that inform how I approached the challenge of unsettling mainstream narratives of the Korean War: critical ethnic studies, critical Asian studies, and the historiography of U.S. empire and diplomatic history. Although each of these fields have pointedly different origins in Cold War academia, one common thread that can be selectively pulled through the fields is the anti-imperial critique of U.S. militarism and warfare.

I bring up these genealogies of critique, protest, and resistance within academia because although I did not set out to write a "new military history," as Arissa Oh puts it in her review, I do believe that particular scholars in these fields had already been challenging what is considered to be in the purview of military history. As a result, I am very gratified that each of the reviewers in the roundtable articulated and distilled the interventions of the book in how we conceptualize the story of the Korean War.

I began this project with a commitment to writing a history of the Korean War that was more "bottom-up" than "top-down." Peter B. Kwon's comment on my "people-centered approach" is indeed an accurate depiction of the driving force behind how I eventually arrived at the interrogation room as the site for my research and narrative. I begin my story of the Korean War inside the interrogation room because such a move undermines and explodes two hallmark characteristics of mainstream stories about U.S. imperial warfare: that the wars are exceptional, and that they happen "over there." The interrogation rooms in my book are ordinary. They are part of the everyday. They can be spontaneously improvised, or they can be highly ritualized. And this framework for the book came out of my determination to begin with a social history of the war, with people's experiences that would be more instructive to the reader and myself about how to pay attention to military occupation, violence, and policies.

Take, for example, the story of a Korean peasant farmer named Chang Sung Sum, whose home and rice paddy fields were supposedly along the 38th parallel (his story serves as the introduction to chapter 1). In April 1946, South Korean and U.S. military interrogators all went together as a group to question this humble peasant farmer. Why? Well, Chang had hung up a sign on the side of his house that said, in three languages—Korean, Russian, and English—"Beyond this house is South Korea." This sign was absolutely brilliant. What did it mean? Did it mean that his house was *in* South Korea? The story of Chang is important because his trilingual sign not only denaturalizes the 38th parallel, but it also immediately shows how the ordinary, non-elite person on the ground was already understanding and navigating global geopolitics. To begin the story of the Korean War with the interrogation of Chang Chung Sum in April 1946 is to tell the story of the war as one about decolonization. What did liberation, power, loss, negotiation look like on

the ground? Chang was negotiating right there and then to keep access to his home and his livelihood, which was literally land, and he did not trust the foreign occupation powers.

Social microhistory as a way to examine international diplomatic history is an important methodology I employ in the book. Judy Wu describes how my focus on the interrogation room reveals “the personalized nature of these encounters [which] made them, in essence, expressions of intimacy.” What I discovered was that the intimate scale opened up a global history. The book is a prolonged investigation into a sudden political phenomenon that occurred during the early years of the Korean War: the interrogation room became the flashpoint of a heated, international debate over how to regulate warfare, a controversy that, at its most fundamental, was a struggle over determining what kind of governance would shape the post-1945 world. Every state, every organization was claiming to have the interrogation room that best exemplified democratic or liberatory ideals. I trace this global history of the Korean War through four different military interrogation rooms: those created by the U.S. military, South Korean paramilitary youth groups, the North Korean and Chinese militaries, and the Indian Custodian Force.

Opening with Japanese American internment and the U.S. occupation of Korea, the book spans three continents as it follows two generations of people creating and navigating landscapes of interrogation in the United States and Asia from 1940 through the 1960s. It accompanies a thousand Japanese Americans to Korea after the United States drafted them as interrogators for the Korean War; traces the postwar journeys of Korean prisoners of war as they were subsequently shipped by the United Nations and Indian military to India, Brazil, and Argentina; and maps out the experiences of American POWs through the Chinese and North Korean interrogation network within POW camps. Arissa Oh’s remark on my focus on migration very much touches upon an important narrative intervention I wanted to make: the expansion of our field of vision regarding wartime movement not only of migrants but also military personnel. And indeed, what happens when the migrant becomes the soldier, or vice versa?

The critical geography of war that emerges from the book radically departs from the usual periodization and scope of the Korean War, as both Americans and Asians became central to the story of the making of liberal warfare in an era marked by WWII internment, the Korean War, and the non-alignment movement. The interrogation rooms of the Korean War position the war undeniably within the histories of anti-imperial neutrality and internationalism. Those two facets of the war simply have not been part of the public or scholarly consciousness, whether in the United States or in South Korea.

The central stakes of the book reside in my focus “on the Korean War as a war of decolonization,” as Zachary Matusheski writes. I would push this formulation even further and say that I claim that we can understand the Korean War as a war *over* decolonization. Because the Korean War is still ongoing, many of the histories written on the war focus on the question of who “started” the war, and for that reason these histories focus a great deal on the top-level decision-making on the battlefields and in the rooms where diplomatic negotiations took place. With our focus on the process (and not the event) of decolonization, we can see the Korean War within the broader colonial

context of the British in Kenya or the French in Algeria in the mid-twentieth century. The liberal preoccupation in the United States with individual “interiority” as the terrain of warfare and liberation must be seen within the geopolitical and temporal frames of colonial preoccupations with a populace demanding sovereignty.

In his review, Peter B. Kwon asks about the Chinese POWs, and I certainly refer everyone to David Cheng Chang’s excellent *The Hijacked War: The Story of Chinese POWs in the Korean War* (Stanford, 2020), where Chang has conducted analysis and research that lie beyond my linguistic and scholarly capacities.¹ But it is important to note that the U.S. military focused much of its retrospective narrative of the POW experience on the Chinese POWs, because the U.S. military officials could not quite imagine the Korean Communist POWs acting independently from the Chinese. And the difference between the Chinese and Korean Communist POWs in terms of political stakes was critical: for the Korean Communist POWs, what was at stake was the question of postcolonial liberation, along with a previous relationship with the United States military as a foreign occupying force. I wanted to bring these often-effaced politics to the forefront in the story, and *The Interrogation Rooms* was the result: it is a trans-Pacific history of twentieth-century decolonization told through the prism of the military interrogation room.

I want to underscore that my framing of the Korean War as a war over decolonization should not be construed as a claim that this mode of warfare on the terrain of interiority is new. I insisted on the decolonization framework because I wanted to bring the Korean War explicitly into a comparative and connective historical context in terms of U.S. empire and twentieth-century colonialism. The earliest historical moment I analyze in depth within the book is the mission of the three Korean emissaries who traveled to the 1907 Hague Convention to protest the Japanese protectorate treaty that would lead to the annexation and colonization of Korea. I position the struggle over sovereign political recognition at the center of my narrative to highlight how the Korean War was not simply the usual wartime contest over territorial sovereignty. At the heart of the struggle was the question of political recognition, the key relational dynamic that formed the foundation for the post-1945 nation-state system.

During the Korean War, the ambitions of empire, revolution, and international solidarity converged upon an intimate encounter of military warfare: the interrogator and the interrogated prisoner of war. Thus, temporally, I wanted to expand how we situate the Korean War—less as the “forgotten war” bookended by the “good” war of World War II and the “bad” war of Vietnam—and more in the critical timeline of the Philippine-American War, U.S. counterinsurgencies in Latin America, the Asia-Pacific War, and the long anti-colonial wars of Vietnam.

All the same, it is important to pay attention anytime the United States insists that it is doing or creating something “new,” especially given how the United States needed to fashion itself as a power distinct from the “old” Western European colonial powers. And indeed, during the Korean War the United States government and military claimed that the U.S. military interrogation room was a “new” space within which the prisoner of war could exercise “free will” and make a choice regarding repatriation. This interrogation room was suddenly emblematic of liberal and bureaucratic governance, a site for individual free choice. The “moral

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reasoning” that Zachary Matusheski states that I overlook is, in fact, embedded in the Truman administration’s turn to the figure of the POW in 1951, when it became clear that the war was at a stalemate.

At this point, the initial reasoning Truman had given for entering the conflict—that North Korea had violated a sacred border, the 38th parallel—did not hold anymore. He had previously given General Douglas MacArthur the greenlight to make the war of “containment” into one of “rollback” by crossing northwards over the 38th parallel towards China. Since there was no compelling enemy figure for this “police action,” the Psychological Strategy Board fashioned a figure to be “rescued”: the prisoner of war. Through the POW repatriation proposal, we can see the development of a hallmark of latter twentieth-century U.S. wars of interventions for regime change, where the individual person becomes both the terrain for warfare and the *jus ad bellum*. Or in other words, the United States supposedly does not go to war for its own state interests, but rather on behalf of an individual elsewhere. The POW repatriation proposal, I argue, cannot be examined solely on the terms Truman himself was referencing, because the Psychological Strategy Board purposefully drew up the POW repatriation proposal with an eye to impacting the public’s enthusiasm and support for the Truman administration’s actions from the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty Conference to the eventual Korean political negotiations. It is the utility of warfare we must keep in focus.

To return to the unending nature of the Korean War, I would like to follow Judy Wu’s lead in noting “the continual, seemingly unending process of interrogation that persisted after the official/unofficial conflict ended.” We often think of interrogation as singular events, although those who are more familiar either politically or personally with police and carceral systems will state that interrogation is a violent landscape. The challenge of breaking down the notion of the interrogation room as an isolated space and experience was two-fold for me. The first part of the challenge was the archive. Certainly there was the difficulty of tracking a multi-sited and multi-national archive around interrogation practices and the prisoner of war from the Korean War. But we could also take for granted, quite easily, the coherency of the U.S. military interrogation report, where the bureaucratic language presents a narrative as self-evident and transparently total. My aim was to dismantle that documentation, to show, as Arissa Oh puts it, “how looking beneath the seemingly smooth narratives produced through interrogation reveals layers of historical processes.”

For example, I read through these U.S. military interrogation documents carefully—and a large archive of these remains the basis for writing the history of the U.S. military occupation of Korea—but it took some time before I finally noticed the names of the interrogators on the reports or even grasped what they signified: George Yamamoto. Jimmy Tanaka. And thousands of others. When I realized that the U.S. military interrogators could have been Japanese Americans, I was stunned at my own acceptance of the presentation in the interrogation reports. I had no idea, in fact, exactly who was in the room and what languages were being spoken. Subverting the bureaucratic coherence of the interrogation report in order to examine the experiences of interrogation also required extensive work with community oral history organizations. I conducted oral history interviews with former interrogators who were Japanese American and former POWs who were Korean.

The second challenge lay in presenting interrogation not as a singular event, but rather as an experience embedded in much larger and historical ecosystems of violence, surveillance, and self-presentation. For any official, state-sanctioned infrastructure of interrogation, there were multiple informal (yet critical) networks of interrogation in operation, working either in opposition to each other or in tandem to support each other. Briefly in this response, I would like to bring the histories of these informal networks from my book towards the present to lay out the ways in which the dynamics operating during the early 1950s Korean War have had deep structural afterlives in the present.

In my book, I show that the U.S. Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) was pivotal not only for the U.S. military occupation in South Korea, but also for interrogating U.S. POWs repatriating after the signing of the ceasefire.

Through my years of research, I was able to outline the intimate dependency of the CIC during the occupation on the rightist paramilitary youth group called the North West Young Men’s Association (NWYMA), which was notorious for its brutality in the Cheju-do massacres in 1948. This relationship not only had implications for the U.S. military government during the occupation but also for the later iterations of the South Korean national security state. The CIC helped found the Korean Counterintelligence Corps, which then later developed into the Korean Counter Intelligence Agency (now known as the National Intelligence Service). And more immediately, in terms of the Korean War, the CIC replicated this relationship with a rightist paramilitary youth group as a core form of intelligence-gathering within the POW camps by supporting the establishment of the Anti-Communist Youth League by Korean rightist POWs.

In other words, we cannot view the POW controversy of the Korean War as isolated from the long-reaching historical arc of the United States’s actions in creating the network, infrastructure, and practices for a South Korean “national security state.” This anti-communist “national security state” as fashioned by the United States during the cold war is dependent on sustaining a perpetual state of “war” in order to facilitate and justify U.S. militarization of the region (and in the case of Korea, the militarization of the Asia-Pacific).

The one critical element of the enduring archive created by the CIC and the NWYMA during the wartime and occupation years were the lists of Koreans labelled black (enemy threats), grey (possible sources of information but loyalty unconfirmed), or white (loyalty favorable to United States). The South Korean state stored these lists, and in the decades after the 1953 ceasefire reanimated them, using them especially to punish or threaten those deemed to be leftists, or those associated with them. These fissures of suspicion, which could open up at any time to bodily death or social death, have deep implications in the politics of people’s everyday lives, whether on the Korean peninsula or in the United States. The recently published works by Heonik Kwon (*After the Korean War: An Intimate History*) and Crystal Mun-hye Baik (*Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory Critique*) both trace the contours of this war in how people already understand and then navigate this precarious landscape into the present.²

The U.S. military archive revealed another informal network of interrogation that operated alongside the North Korean and Chinese military ones. It houses a collection of over one thousand case files of U.S. military interrogation

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reports on repatriating U.S. POWs and was declassified over a period of nine years past my initial Freedom of Information Act filing.

As the reviewers have mentioned, white ethnic Americans who were POWs recreated white supremacist groups modeled on the Ku Klux Klan in the camps along the Yalu River. These POWs often physically beat and threatened the others, usually racial minorities or men of white working-class backgrounds, if they suspected them of developing non-adversarial positions toward the internationalism offered by the North Korean interrogators. Judy Wu notes that my gender analysis of masculinity is the most sustained in this chapter about U.S. POWs, and indeed it was the gender analysis that was key to addressing the challenge of how to analyze a kind of archive that was like a room full of mirrors.

Without access to Chinese or North Korean state archives on Korean War interrogation, I had to develop an approach to this seemingly over-determined U.S. military archive on U.S. POWs. But through this one-thousand-plus case files, I was surprised at how much detail about everyday camp life could come to the fore, despite the efforts of the CIC interrogators and the POWs' own fears about being labelled a possible communist sympathizer. Ultimately, this chapter enabled me to challenge the longest-standing trope and myth of the U.S. POW experience during the Korean War: brainwashing. The U.S. military and government framed that what was at stake in the North Korean and Chinese interrogation rooms for the ordinary U.S. POW was the preservation of a national self that aspired to a white supremacist masculinity. And here, we can see why the social and political masculinity of the North Korean interrogators who offered internationalism as a possible common ground for conversation was so threatening to the U.S. military. As I put it in the book, the North Korean interrogators were the one who posed a larger, political question in their interrogations: how did one decolonize an American? Wu also asks about the women in the POW camps south of the 38th parallel. It is an important question, because it brings us back to the central issue of "the archive," and one on which I am currently writing a separate piece. In my book, I recount what one interrogator, Sam Miyamoto, relayed to me regarding the typical interrogation encounter with a Korean Communist POW. Without fail, this man would spit on the floor before entering a U.S. military interrogation room. However, the accounts of the Japanese American interrogators about the Korean Communist women POWs showed different

behaviors. The women still spat, but they spat right in the interrogator's face. They would also refuse to speak. In effect, they were refusing to become part of "the archive" by not even providing material to be recorded. I believe these women POWs had experience with the Japanese colonial police system, which maintained incredibly extensive records on anti-colonial movement fighters, especially in the form of forced, handwritten self-narratives.

Wu's question prompts me to reflect on how it was both the male white supremacist U.S. POW and the female anti-colonial Korean POW who operated outside of the formal "archive." They did so precisely because they were acutely aware of its power. But these two political subjectivities—one that was profoundly threatened by a decolonization in the form of internationalism, and the other that was deeply committed to a decolonization in the form of anti-imperialism—remind us of different currents of the unending Korean War in the present day.

It is an honor to have scholars who are grappling with these fundamental questions about power in the archives turn their attention to my book on the interrogation rooms of the Korean War. I have not been able to adequately address all of the questions they raised in their pieces, but I hope that the conversations generated in this roundtable provoke and inspire even more discussions on how elements of this unending Korean War connect and intersect with critical projects on empire, warfare, and race across historical time and geopolitical space. Marilyn Young once commented that "what is odd about Korea is that even *as it was being fought*, it was deemed forgotten."³ Through this roundtable that Mitch Lerner assembled, I very much appreciated being able to reflect upon how critical scholars are not arguing simply to remember the Korean War, but rather to stay with the "odd" character of this war, and to think through the strange, subtle, or spectacular violence that this unending war facilitates even today.

Notes:

1. David Cheng Chang, *The Hijacked War: The Story of Chinese POWs in the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).
2. Heonik Kwon, *After the Korean War: An Intimate History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) and Crystal Mun-hye Baik, *Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory Critique* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019).
3. Marilyn B. Young, "Korea: The Post-war War," *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 51, Issue 1, Spring 2001, p. 112.

In the next issue of *Passport*

- » A roundtable on Seth Jacobs, *Rogue Diplomats*
- » A roundtable on Lauren Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*
- » Keywords and U.S. foreign relations

and much more!