

TOKYO BOUND: African Americans and Japan *Confront White Supremacy*

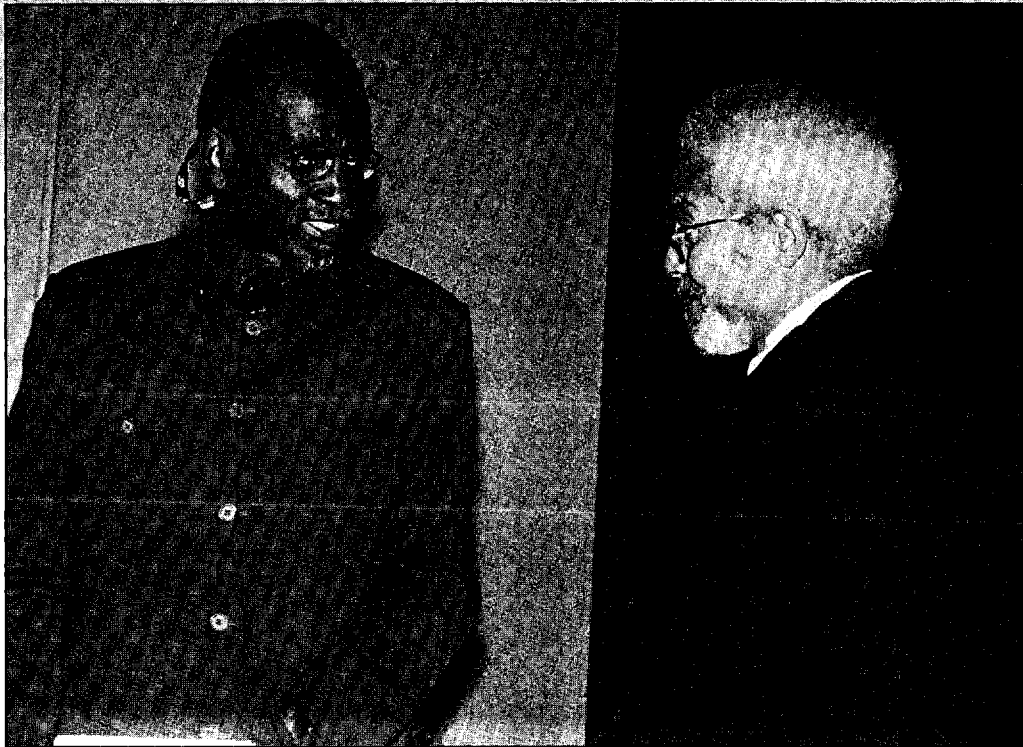
Gerald Horne

In the period before World War II, Japan was probably the nation most admired among African Americans. Du Bois, Garvey, Booker T. Washington, and others may have had conflicts among themselves, but all looked to Tokyo as evidence for the proposition that modernity was not solely the province of those of European descent and that the very predicates of white supremacy made no sense.

This is an important point to consider for many reasons. Those who have focused on the appeal of the former Soviet Union to Americans need to consider that the choice was not necessarily between the *herrenvolk* democracy of the United States and the imperfect socialism of Moscow, but Imperial Japan was also considered as an alternative. Furthermore, historians have increasingly begun to point to external factors as a major reason for why Jim Crow began to crumble in the United States; this is usually put in the context of the Cold War, Soviet aid to African

liberation movements, and the indisputable point that Washington had difficulty winning hearts and minds in Africa and elsewhere among the world's majority as long as peoples of African descent in the United States were faced with Jim Crow. This focus on external factors as a cause for the erosion of Jim Crow is also important because it sheds light on why progress toward racial equality tends to flag when external pressure seems to lessen, for example, today. But in assessing this external factor, we must take into account the specter of Japan, particularly in the first four decades of the twentieth century, and not just the USSR from 1917 to 1991.

In addition, scholars on the left have been criticized for not treating race as an independent variable, as an unmediated factor. Bringing Japan into the equation suggests the difficulty of seeking to treat race as an independent variable, however, just as the fact that scholars doing historical research on race—even those examining the first four



Gerald Horne and Manning Marable. Photo by John Smock

decades of the twentieth century—commit scholarly malpractice when they fail to take Tokyo into account.

To be fair, part of the difficulty in unraveling Japan's influence is the reticence of European and Euro-American elites when it came to confronting the race question beyond the black-white dyad. For example, in fighting the inaugural war of U.S. imperialism—the war against the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century—one general order of the U.S. Army declared that “such delicate subjects as . . . the race question, etc. will not be discussed at all except among ourselves and officially.”²¹ This trend continued during the Pacific War. Theodore White, one of the most highly regarded U.S. journalists of the twentieth century, acknowledged during his tenure in China during the war that “the ethic of the

time forbade one from reporting in terms of race.”²²

Frank Furedi, who has authored one of the more salient books on race in recent years, writes that not only was there reticence, but, as well, “[It] is striking how little racist thinking was questioned before the Second World War. Even radical critics of imperialism were reluctant to criticize the racist justification for national expansion.” Referring mostly to Europe, he adds, “It is striking to note how much more willing writers were to discuss class rather than race.” The fear of racial revenge, which, unlike class revenge, conceivably did not have limits, at least as far as Europeans were concerned, “was a major reason for this relative silence.”²³

James Belich, the leading scholar of the titanic wars that led to a stalemate between the

British invaders and the indigenous people of New Zealand, argued that as a result of this humbling episode, Great Britain resorted to its "final safety net," which was "to forget."⁴

John Dower writes,

If one asks Americans today in what ways World War II was racist and atrocious, they will point overwhelmingly to the Nazi genocide of the Jews. When the war was being fought, however, the enemy perceived to be most atrocious by Americans was not the Germans but the Japanese and the racial issues that provoked greatest emotion among Americans were associated with the war in Asia Japan's aggression stirred the deepest recesses of white [supremacy] and provoked a response bordering on the apocalyptic.⁵

The war with Japan awakened the idea of racial revenge, that Japanese in league with African Americans and other Asians would seek retribution for a racialized colonialism and imperialism. So provoked, European and Euro-American elites moved, even as the war was unfolding, to begin the reluctant and agonized retreat from apartheid, though like a child awakening from a nightmare, they largely chose to forget a major reason why they were taking this monumental step.

Such a retreat was far from the mind of Commodore Matthew C. Perry of the U.S. military when he stepped onto the shores of Japan in 1853, prying that nation out of more than two centuries of self-imposed isolation. Interestingly, at this turning point in world history, Perry decided to wade ashore, "marching between two orderlies, both tall and stalwart Negroes."⁶ Other than the fact that in the nineteenth century a disproportionate number of U.S. sailors were black, it is unclear why Perry chose to be accompanied by Negroes at this fraught moment. Perhaps

he thought that the fact that Euro-Americans could subordinate and subjugate "tall and stalwart Negroes" would convince the Japanese of the invaders' power while warning them of what fate awaited them if they did not acquiesce.

Japan took the hint and over the next few decades engineered an amazing turnaround that led to the construction of the first major non-European power by the end of the century.

Rather quickly, Japan became a beacon of attraction for African Americans, who thought they could learn lessons from Tokyo in how to subdue white supremacy. W.E.B. Du Bois was among the many Africans and Asians who saw the beginning of the end for white supremacy in Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905, since, as he wrote, "The Negro problem in America is but a local phase of a world problem."⁷ In 1912, Booker T. Washington told an inquiring Japanese correspondent,

Speaking for the masses of my own race in this country I think I am safe in saying that there is no other race outside of America whose fortunes the Negro peoples of this country have followed with greater interest or admiration . . . in no other part of the world have the Japanese people a larger number of admirers and well-wishers than among the black people of the United States.⁸

A few years later, the FBI reported nervously that Marcus Garvey "preached that the next war will be between the Negroes and the whites unless their demands for justice are recognized, and that with the aid of Japan on the side of the Negroes, they will be able to win such a war."⁹

Du Bois, Washington, and Garvey were simply expressing the widespread admiration for Japan that permeated Afro-America. To



Elijah Muhammad and Nation of Islam Members. Photo by New York Courier Courtesy of Schomburg Center Archives

cite one example, members of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, according to one scholar, "believed that the ability of Japanese to compete with Europeans and Americans on their own terms dispelled the myth of white superiority. Thus, AME leaders wholeheartedly supported the Japanese in the war against Russia. . . . Japan fascinated church members, who demanded information on every aspect of Japanese life and culture."¹⁰

Of course, the organization that was to become the Nation of Islam was probably the most zealous of the pro-Tokyo elements in Black America, with its leader Elijah Muhammad even going so far as to claim that Negroes were "Asiatic," not African. But even before he arrived at this conclusion, others had beaten him to the punch. Harry Dean was a grandson of the legendary Paul Cuffee. In the early nineteenth century, Cuffee may have been the most prominent African American in the nation, and certainly one of the most affluent in that he controlled a number

of ships. In the late 1890s, Dean, who stressed, "I am an African and proud of it," sailed to southeast Africa, where he encountered a chief whose "name was Teo Saga" and who was "more Japanese than African." Dean was told that

before the cataclysm South Africa, Madagascar, Sumatra, Java and even Korea and Japan were all connected by land, and formed a great, illustrious, and powerful empire. The people were highly cultured, the rulers rich and wise. When the great flood came over the land it left only the remote provinces. However that may be, one may still find such Japanese names as Teo Saga on the coast of Africa to this very day.¹¹

This admiration for Japan was also reflected in literature. In 1913, *The Crisis*, journal of the NAACP, published a story that imagined a military alliance of Japan and Mexico against the United States, further supported by black deserters from the U.S.

Army and the secession of Hawaii, led by angry Japanese Americans. The U.S. president was forced to appeal to Jed Blackburn, a Jack Johnson-type character who led a force of 10,000 black soldiers on a suicidal counterattack of Japan's invasion of Southern California.¹²

This literary provocation was matched across the Pacific. General Sato Kojiro's 1921 potboiler, *Japanese-American War*, imagined the surprise destruction of the U.S. Pacific fleet, occupation of Hawaii, and an invasion by Japanese forces of the U.S. mainland supported by 10 million Negroes led by Marcus Garvey. There was more about Garvey and black unrest in the 1924 nonfiction book *The Negro Problem* by Mitsukawa Kametaro.¹³

Interestingly, these stories mirrored real-life events. In 1916, the Plan of San Diego was revealed. This plan involved, it was alleged, an abortive attempt by Chicanos and Mexico, in league with Japan and other foreign powers, to dismember the United States—kill all the white males in the West and Southwest and establish independent black and Indian republics while reclaiming territory for Mexico that had been lost to the United States when Mexico itself was dismembered seventy years earlier.

As this episode suggests, like other foreign nations seeking leverage over the United States, the Japanese catered to disaffected minorities. This was not a new tactic. France had a well-merited reputation for brutality in colonizing West Africa, yet African Americans as ideologically diverse as Josephine Baker, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and others too numerous to mention viewed Paris as a welcoming second home. Of course, there are those in Tel Aviv today who view the Arab minority in that nation as something of a security threat, subject to being wooed by less-than-friendly neighbors.

The Diplomatic Archives in Tokyo reveal that the Japanese paid close attention to

African Americans. They maintained details on blacks in the U.S. military; the racial breakdown of various states; and material on Negro illiteracy, death rates, occupational status, as well as lists of "influential Negro Leaders" and "important Negro publications."¹⁴

This attention from Japanese elites was mirrored among the Japanese masses. Walter White's novel *The Fire in the Flint* was translated into Japanese with the title changed to *Lynching*; this new edition was a best-seller due in no small part to a publicity campaign by the Japanese government pointing out that the novel pictured the kind of barbarian acts that were tolerated and even encouraged in a nation, the United States, that was then criticizing Japan's policies in China.¹⁵ Even Japanese opposed to the policies of their government, for example, Katayama Sen—a founder of the Communist Parties of Japan, the United States, and Mexico, a man who had matriculated at Fisk University and was a friend of the Jamaican-American poet Claude McKay—likewise found U.S. racial policies abhorrent.

Increasingly, on both sides of the Pacific, a perception was growing among peoples of color that they had a common enemy in white supremacy. Certainly this was the viewpoint of W.E.B. Du Bois. He argued that the exclusion of Japanese from the United States had resulted from a deal between the South and the West in which the former endorsed the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924 in exchange for the sacrifice of the Dyer federal anti-lynching bill. A similar analysis could be made concerning U.S. opposition to Japan's attempt to insert a clause concerning racial equality in the post-World War I Versailles treaty. White Southerners fearing what this might mean in terms of Negroes united with those in the Far West who were concerned about what this might mean about Asian Americans and Native Americans. And of

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course, Japan's bitter experiences at Versailles and with the 1924 anti-immigrant bill worsened relations between Tokyo and Washington.¹⁶

Of course, Japanese and Negroes faced similar racist rationales. Tom Ireland, a Euro-American who was regarded widely as one of Cleveland's finest men, with a B.A. from Princeton and an LL.B. from Harvard, wrote in 1935, "The Mongolian race is too divergent from a biological standpoint to intermarry or to assimilate with the Caucasian for the good of either." "Such miscegenation," he added, is "invariably bad." Hence, unlike Europeans, Asians should be barred from the United States.¹⁷

Bruised by the indignities of white supremacy, Tokyo adroitly played on these sentiments and made a concerted and not unsuccessful attempt to win over the black community to pro-Japan positions. The popular historian of the black experience J.A. Rogers traveled to Ethiopia to cover the Italian invasion and brought the eager readers of his newspaper columns stories about a possible merger through marriage of the Japanese and Ethiopian royal families; of course, it would have been ludicrous—perhaps even an offense worthy of a lynching—to even suggest a comparable merger through marriage of, say, the British and Ethiopian royal families. Supposedly, Rogers was entertained royally in Japan and allegedly had promised Tokyo "favorable publicity" when he returned to the United States.¹⁸

On the other hand, Rogers may have had an incentive to provide favorable publicity, even setting aside the courting he supposedly received. Rogers wrote in the *Amsterdam News* in 1934, even before the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, that Japan was aiding Africa by selling cheap clothes there. Before the arrival of their cotton goods, he argued, Africans wore clothes until they were filthy, thus breeding "lice, typhus and other dis-

eases." He quoted an "overworked doctor" in Tanganyika who said the "purchase of cheap Japanese rubber soled shoes has done more to check hookworm here than all the efforts of the health department." The flood of Japanese imports into British controlled territory was one of the many factors exacerbating tensions between the two island nations and accelerating the drive toward war.¹⁹

Because of their sympathy for Japan, many African Americans were less than sympathetic to China after the Japanese invasion in 1931. The *Pittsburgh Courier* writer Ira Lewis summed up the sentiments of many when he argued in a front-page article that "between the Japanese and the Chinese, the Negroes much prefer the Japanese. The Chinese are the worst 'Uncle Toms' and stooges that the white man has ever had." With barely concealed rancor, he added, "as soon as he gets a chop suey place which is anything like decent, the first thing he does is put up a color bar."²⁰ Du Bois tended to agree, as he contrasted invidiously what he saw as China's tepid response to racist U.S. immigration laws, compared with Japan's robust response. He too referred to Chinese as "Asian Uncle Toms" of "the same spirit that animates the 'white folks [Negro] in the United States.'"²¹ Moreover, many African Americans in the Far West held firmly to the perception that Japanese Americans were much more willing to flout the dictates of Jim Crow and serve black customers in their restaurants and hotels than Chinese Americans, who were seen as much more willing to observe the dictates of antiblack racism.

Moreover, many blacks were overreacting to the denunciation in the mainstream U.S. press of the Japanese invasion in China, which they saw as hypocritical in light of these same papers' failure to condemn the white supremacy that Europe and the United States had imposed on Shanghai, for example. Du Bois summed up the thoughts of

many African Americans when he posed this query on arriving in China in the 1930s: "Why is it," he inquired, "that you hate Japan more than Europe when you have suffered more from England, France and Germany than from Japan." Du Bois, for example, announced in late 1941, "The British Empire has caused more human misery than Hitler will cause if he lives a hundred years . . . it is idiotic to talk about a people who brought the slave trade to its greatest development, who are the chief exploiters of Africa and who hold four hundred million Indians in subjection, as the great defenders of democracy."²² Months after Pearl Harbor, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., concurred with Du Bois when he noted that the "difference between nazism and crackerocracy is very small" since "crackerocracy [too] is a pattern of racial hatred."²³ Parenthetically, as I examine Chinese foreign policy in the 1970s in southern Africa, which featured alliances with apartheid South Africa and U.S. imperialism, it is difficult to escape the idea that African-American intellectuals may have been on to something when they complained about China's willingness to collaborate with European and Euro-American imperialism.

Thus, as tensions rose between the United States and Japan in the 1930s, Tokyo came to realize that it might have an ally in African Americans. This sentiment was cultivated assiduously by a number of Japanese nationals who resided in black communities, for example, Harlem. A keen example was Yasuichi Hikida, an animated, graying little man who always showed up at Negro social functions accompanied by a Negro woman. Like many Japanese nationals in New York who were collaborating with Tokyo, he worked for an affluent white family in Forest Hills while maintaining a residence in Harlem. He wrote an unpublished biography of Toussaint L'Ouverture and had one of the finest collections of books on blacks in New York, short of the

Schomburg Library (he was also a close friend of Arthur Schomburg). As late as 1941, he appeared at a debate in Harlem where, as he put it idiomatically, "Chinese were Jim Crowed by whites"; he also referred to blacks as "our darker brothers." Hikida was not unusual. W. C. Handy, composer of the "St. Louis Blues," recalled a Japanese cook who traveled about the country for five years as a member of his vaudeville troupe and who later turned out to be an eavesdropping Japanese army officer. The Japanese valet of the actor Charlie Chaplin also turned out to be an agent of Tokyo.²⁴

The U.S. government was not totally oblivious to these maneuvers. Before Pearl Harbor, U.S. intelligence agencies intercepted a Japanese message that spoke of their use of a "Negro literary critic" whose purpose was to "open a news service for Negro newspapers. The Negro press is so poor that it has no news service of its own and as I have told you in various messages, [we] had been getting relatively good results . . . because of the advantage we have in using men like this . . . as an experiment," the message went on ominously, "I am now instructing Mr. [name deleted] of the National Youth Administration, and a graduate of Amherst and Columbia to be a spy." The message continued, "in organizing our schemes among the Negroes . . . Washington . . . should be our hub"; though it was added, "in the arsenals of Philadelphia and Brooklyn there are also a few unskilled Negro laborers, so I would say that in the future there will be considerable profit in our getting Negroes to gather military intelligence for us . . . we have already established connections with very influential Negroes to keep us informed with regard to the Negro movement."²⁵ The scholar Tony Matthews has argued that Tokyo turned for spying to the "American Negroes, a massive force of largely disgruntled citizens, many of whom had a special racial axe to grind."²⁶

Of course, the antifascist tendencies among African Americans should not be underestimated, though I should add that I find it striking that the man considered the “brains” of U.S. fascism—a man who met with Mussolini, attended the Nazi Party gathering at Nuremberg in 1937, and wrote voluminously—was a black graduate of Exeter and Harvard: I refer to Lawrence Dennis. On the other hand, it is arguable that pro-Japan organizations attracted many more adherents among blacks than their pro-Soviet counterparts. Thus, Robert Hill, the leading scholar of Garveyism, writes that the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World “gained a substantial black nationalist following during the 1930s. One longtime leader, David D. Erwin, claimed that it had forty thousand members in 1936, while other estimates went as high as one million.”²⁷ Nor should we forget that one of the more influential organizations among African Americans today, the Nation of Islam, is a direct descendant of this pro-Tokyo movement.

Robert Leonard Jordan was one of the key leaders of this movement. Born in Jamaica in 1900, he moved to England at the age of fourteen, and at eighteen left on a Japanese ship; by 1920, like so many other Jamaicans, he was in Harlem. By 1936, he was President-General of the Ethiopia Pacific Movement, with an office at 204 Lenox Avenue in Harlem. That year he addressed a lengthy letter to the Japanese foreign minister, Hachiro Arita; the stationery listed one “T. Kikuchi,” a Japanese national, as the group’s “chief business advisor.” This letter, which can be found in the Diplomatic Archives in Tokyo, noted that “we the dark race of the Western Hemisphere through the Ethiopia Pacific Movement . . . are putting our entire confidence in the Japanese people with the hopes that in the very near future, we will desire a very close relationship with the Japanese government.”²⁸

Along with Elijah Muhammad, Jordan was among the most prominent of the pro-Tokyo spokesmen in the United States; certainly he was the most prominent of this group in Harlem. The FBI reported that while toiling for the aforementioned Japanese shipping company and residing in Japan he “found the Japanese to be very friendly to the Negroes and that he had the privilege of studying the customs of the Japanese and becoming a member of . . . society in Japan.”²⁹

By early 1942, Japan’s largely successful invasion of Asia had revealed that many Asians saw no reason why they should fight for colonial masters who openly professed white supremacy in London and The Hague. African Americans like Jordan were arriving at the same conclusion. In January of that year, a meeting of black leaders voted thirty-six to five (with fifteen abstaining) that African Americans were not 100 percent behind the war. Before that, in 1939, the FBI reported that “enlightened Negro leaders’ had told them ‘that between eighty and ninety per cent of the American colored population who have any views on the subject at all, are pro-Japanese as a result of the intensive Japanese propaganda among this racial group.’” Right after Pearl Harbor, one-half of the Negroes interviewed in New York City told black interviewers that they would be better off, or at least no worse off, under Japanese rule.³⁰

Inferentially, on December 13, 1941—days after Pearl Harbor—the *Amsterdam News* revealed some of the linkages that tied blacks to Tokyo:

Immediately following [Pearl Harbor, the NYPD] invaded Harlem and began rounding up all Japanese suspects In view of the fact that with the exception of marked facial distinction there is somewhat of a striking similarity in hue between the [Japanese] and many Harlemites . . . colored policemen played an invaluable role in the mass arrests.



Tokyo. Courtesy of Impact Visuals

... the area on Lenox Avenue between 110th and 116th streets [is] noted for some [Japanese] restaurants: ... Many of the sons of Nippon ... declared "me colored man, too" when they were tabbed.

Yet it was men like Jordan, and also Carlos Cooks, a man venerated by Elombe Brath, one of Harlem's leading black nationalists of

today and a host of a popular radio program on Pacifica Radio, who were in the vanguard of this trend. But as between Jordan and Cooks, it was the former who was probably better known in Harlem at the time. The *People's Voice*, a popular front newspaper that despised these nationalists, conceded that Jordan, whom it called the "Harlem Mikado," had an "eloquence [that] is said to have

driven a number of competing street speakers to introduce [Japanese] propaganda in their talks to hold audiences."

This evident ideological hegemony of Jordan apparently drove the popular front in Harlem to distraction. The *People's Voice* told its readers that Japan had a "BB Plan," that is,

Black Followers of Buddhism [which] preached Buddhism as the religion of people of color the world over [and] the key to racial success. . . . Under the BB Plan, American Negroes who become Buddhists automatically won Japanese citizenship, would get chances to visit Japan, study sciences and professions, receive military and naval training. . . . Success of the plan would mean establishment of a black empire in Africa. . . . PV's investigations have uncovered the fact that there may be some connection between the world B plan and the activities of Duse Mohammed Ali.

In trumpeting this alliance between Buddhists and Muslims and followers of Moorish Science, this left-wing paper noted "the scope of the world B Plan of the Japanese is almost unbelievable"; it scornfully denounced the "cunning of an Oriental group" that has "gone back to the wars of the Crusaders in the interest of Christianity."³¹

What had driven the popular front to the point of hysteria was the fear that pro-Japan sympathies among African Americans, carefully cultivated over the years by Tokyo and propelled by a vile white supremacy, could complicate the war effort and lead to the victory of the anti-Comintern Axis. In the fall of 1942, many of these pro-Tokyo blacks were arrested. The indictment of James Thornhill, one of these leaders in New York, charged that he said that "colored United States soldiers should not fight the Japanese" and that, like the man who became Malcolm X, he might "shoot the wrong man" if drafted and

given a rifle. Thornhill was also born in the Caribbean, in the U.S. Virgin Islands; like Jordan he derisively referred to the United States as the "United Snakes of America." Repeatedly he told Harlemites, "you should learn Japanese"; "when they tell you to remember Pearl Harbor, you [should] reply 'Remember Africa.'" With fervor he added, "the white man brought you to this country in 1619, not to christianize you but to enslave you. This thing called Christianity is not worth a damn. I am not a Christian, we should be . . . Moslems."³²

With evident anxiety, the FBI reported in 1943 that "numerous complaints have been received that the American Negroes favor a Japanese victory in the present war."³³ This sentiment was not unique to black Americans. The Colonial Secretary in Kingston, Jamaica, was told in 1941 that at one "Cold Supper Shop" there was frequent "anti-British talk" heard via the "wireless."³⁴ It should not be forgotten, even when analyzing communists' approach to the war, that it was hard for many, particularly those of African descent, to accept the argument that Britain was the fountainhead of democracy, particularly when Churchill already had announced that the Atlantic Charter's promise of democracy did not apply to those subjected to a racialized colonialism. Even Hugh Mulzac, a member in good standing of the popular front, wrote that there was a "strong feeling among colored Americans in 1941 that the colonial powers be allowed to destroy each other. As a former British subject I felt this keenly."³⁵

Thus, just as black nationalists expressed outright sympathy for Tokyo, some blacks on the left found it difficult to provide unalloyed support for the Allies in light of the latter's white supremacy. As Du Bois put it, "If Hitler wins, down with the blacks! If the democracies win, the blacks are already down."³⁶ The Allies were well aware of this black hostility to white supremacy that made Africans

worldwide susceptible to Tokyo's siren call. Hence, during the war, the British Colonial Office was reluctant to initiate an anti-German campaign among West Africans because officials calculated that such propaganda might encourage a revolt against rule as such. "Having been encouraged to hate one branch of the white race, they may extend the feeling to others," warned one memorandum.³⁷

Strikingly, the ideological ancestors of today's black conservatives also were both sympathetic to Tokyo and highly critical of the Allies. George Schuyler is Exhibit A in that regard. A prolific journalist and novelist, he too had been courted by Tokyo and wrote a series of articles on Japan in the 1930s that were so pro-Nippon that his publisher refused to print them.³⁸

In September 1940, as many black communists were scoring Tokyo because of its policies in China, Schuyler took an opposite tack; he saw this invasion as an exemplar of the

progressive deflation of white supremacy and arrogance in the Orient. Where white men once strutted and kicked coolies into the street, they now tread softly and talk in whispers. . . . The Japanese have done a fine job in making the white man in Asia lose "face" and shattering the sedulously nurtured idea of white supremacy. Of course the white people hate them because they fear them.³⁹

In his withering denunciations of white supremacy, the conservative Schuyler often used rhetoric that would have made black nationalists proud. By 1944, the fervor in the black community for the Double V campaign against fascism at home and abroad had dissipated as many shifted to a pro-Allies stance. But not George Schuyler. Days after D-Day in Europe, he wrote acerbically that

the Europeans have been a menace to the rest of the world for the past four hundred years,

carrying destruction and death wherever they went. . . . True, their system of world fleecing directly benefited only a handful of Europeans, but indirectly it benefited millions of supernumeraries, labor officials and skilled workers. . . . Europe has been a failure and a menace. The European age is passing. One can derive a certain pleasure from observing its funeral.⁴⁰

Schuyler was also probably the staunchest critic of the internment of Japanese Americans in the United States, returning to this subject again and again. That this internment, he asserted, was "a scheme to grab [Japanese-American] holdings and hand them over to white people is shown by the efforts to prevent Negroes from taking them over. . . . This may be a prelude to our own fate. Who knows? . . . Once the precedent is established with 70,000 Japanese-Americans," he added ominously, "it will be easy to denationalize millions of Afro-American citizens."⁴¹

Ironically, after the war concluded, U.S. elites cracked down on the black communists, who were harshest in their condemnation of Tokyo, whereas those like Schuyler who took an opposing position were promoted. Interestingly, black communists who were the most consistently anti-Tokyo force among blacks during the war suffered most after Tokyo was defeated. The assault on black Reds created favorable conditions for the rise of black nationalists, who had been pro-Tokyo; thus the organization that was to become the Nation of Islam rose, just as the popular front and the left in the black community diminished.

The end of the war also marked the decline of pro-Tokyo sentiments among African Americans as Japan became a reliable ally of Washington. Indeed, the kind of sympathy for Asia that these pro-Tokyo movements symbolized did not arise again until the era of Maoist China.

On the other hand, this veritable race war, in which those who defined themselves as "white" seemed to be losing in the early stages of the conflict, helped to convince sober-minded elites in Washington to retreat from the more egregious aspects of white supremacy. Even as the war was unfolding, the United States sought to do away with the "white primary," which limited black voting rights, and struck from the books most of the Chinese exclusion laws. There is nothing like the prospect of losing a race war to convince even the most obtuse of the necessity of eroding racism.

Still, in 1944, during the height of the war, Du Bois concluded, "The greatest and most dangerous race problem today is the problem of relations between Asia and Europe."⁴² Yet in the United States today, the race discourse not only simply focuses on just the black-white dyad but refuses to stray beyond the shores of this nation. Indeed, though black intellectuals of an earlier era wrote voluminously about Asia, few do so today. This may be because blacks of an earlier day, because they were effectively denied citizenship, perforce were compelled to be internationalist; ironically, part of the downside of full citizenship rights has been the erosion of black internationalism. Moreover, the decision made decades ago to shroud the race question in Asia has borne fruit in the form of helping some to think that the vaunted "color-blind" approach characterizes relations between those of Asian and European descent. This misconception is heightened by the use of the vague term "Westerner," which is used to describe Europeans who reside to the west of Asia as well as Australians and New Zealanders who live east of there. African Americans are no longer "Tokyo bound," but race remains a global concern.

Notes

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2. Frank Furedi, *The Silent War: Imperialism and the Changing Perception of Race* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 164.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 101.
4. James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (Auckland: Auckland University Press), pp. 321, 235.
5. John Dower, *Japan in War and Peace: Essays on History, Culture and Race* (London: Fontana, 1996), pp. 258-259.
6. Samuel Eliot Morison, *'Old Bruin': Commodore Matthew C. Perry, 1794-1858* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 332.
7. W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Color Line Belts the World," in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Writings by W.E.B. Du Bois in Periodicals Edited by Others* (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson, 1982), p. 330 (from *Collier's Weekly*, October 20, 1906).
8. Booker T. Washington to Naoichi Masaoka, December 5, 1912, in Louis Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, eds., *Booker T. Washington Papers, Volume 12: 1912-1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), p. 84.
9. "Bureau of Investigation Reports," New York City, December 5, 1918, in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume 1, 1826-August 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 306.
10. Lawrence C. Little, "A Quest for Self-Determination: The African Methodist Episcopal Church During the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916," Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1993, pp. 227, 252.
11. Harry Dean, *Umbala: The Adventures of a Negro Sea-Captain in Africa and on the Seven Seas in His Attempt to Found an Ethiopian Empire* (London: George G. Harrap, 1929), p. 93.
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