

THE USE OF RACE AND RACIAL PERCEPTIONS AMONG ASIANS AND BLACKS: THE CASE OF THE JAPANESE AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

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I

In the 16th century the arrivals of black Africans who served as servants aboard Portuguese and Dutch ships were recorded as the first contact between blacks and Japanese. From the mid-sixteenth century a significant number of black Africans came to Japan on Portuguese ships, as crewmen, indentured servants or slaves. Not surprisingly their presence generated a great deal of interest and curiosity on the part of the Japanese. In the 1550s, the Portuguese merchant Jorge Alvarez reported that the Japanese “like seeing black people, especially Africans, and they will come 15 leagues just to see them and entertain them for three or four days. In 1581, a Jesuit priest in the city of Kyoto had among his entourage an African whom the townspeople desperately wanted to see. In order to achieve their aim the door of the Jesuit residence was unceremoniously broken down by the overzealous throng of curiosity seekers. Upon hearing of this great commotion, the warlord Oda Nobunaga, had the African brought to him. Nobunaga was so impressed with the appearance of the African, who had come to Japan two years earlier from Mozambique, that he gave the Mozambican money and a new name (Yasuke) and enlisted him into Nobunaga’s army. Akechi Mitsuhide captured ‘Yasuke’ after a battle in which Nobunaga was forced to commit suicide but was later released because he was not Japanese.¹

During the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), Gary Leupp believes the increasingly negative view toward Buddhism gave cause for the Japanese to reevaluate their views toward and relationships with darker peoples. The frequent presentation of African slaves by the Portuguese to the Japanese Court would have understandably left negative impressions about Blacks in the minds of the Japanese. Considering these circumstances, black Africans and other darker peoples went from being at times revered, to endured and finally despised. By the time of the Meiji Restoration (1868) negative attitudes toward blacks and darker non-Western peoples began to proliferate in Japan.

It must be noted, however, that the Japanese valued “white” skin as beautiful and deprecated “black” skin as ugly before European ships touched Japanese shores. As early as the Heian period (794–1185) standards of beauty were equated with long, black, straight hair and very white skin. *The Pillow Book*, a series of essays, and *The Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki, described eleventh and twelfth century beauties in this manner, “Her color of skin was very white and she was plump with an attractive face” and “Her color was very white and

¹ Michael Cooper, comp. *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543–1640* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p.66; Gary P. Leupp, “Images of Black People in Late Mediaeval and Early Modern Japan, 1543–1900, *Japan Forum* 7:1 (April 1995), pp.1–13.

although she was emaciated and looked noble, there still was a certain fullness in her cheek.”²

The Japanese, like other nationalities, valued the whiteness of untanned skin because it symbolized a leisurely lifestyle and was an attribute of the privileged class, which was, spared strenuous outdoor labor. In contrast, darkened skin was associated with menial labor performed by the peasant class. Sometimes Japanese artists depicted the people of India and saints such as Bodhidharma as being very dark skinned. Apparently the Japanese had been exposed to darker peoples they could admire. And curiously enough at one time men and women of the privileged class valued blackened teeth. It appears that although the Japanese equated lighter skin with positive attributes, the concept of superiority based on skin color alone did not have the same connotations in Japanese culture as it had in some European cultures.³

This seems even more remarkable considering the “wisdom” the Dutch imparted upon the Japanese. Writing in 1787, a Japanese scholar of Dutch wrote what he had learned from his Dutch teachers:

These black ones on the Dutch boats are the natives of countries in the South. As their countries are close to the sun, they are sun-scorched and become black. By nature they are stupid...The black ones are found with flat noses. They love a flat nose and they tie children's noses with leather bands to prevent their growth and to keep them flat...Africa is directly under the equator and the heat there is extreme. Therefore the natives are black colored. They are uncivilized and vicious in nature.⁴

The basis for the negative views of black peoples by the Japanese scholars would be expanded with the sudden arrival in Yokohama of coal burning foreign ships that belled black smoke as they cut through the water.

In 1853, Commodore Matthew C. Perry arrived in Japan on a mission to force open the doors of trade and to propose a trade and commerce treaty thinly disguised as the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Friendship (Kanagawa 1854 Treaty). Among his crew were “tall jet black Negroes, completely armed to the teeth” whose job it was to escort the men who on July 14, 1853, delivered Commodore Perry's credentials and a letter from President Fillmore to the Japanese shogunate. Perry reportedly chose to have himself surrounded by the black men because they appeared to be the most intimidating. The use of black guards was an obvious attempt to impress the might of the United States on the Japanese officials and to intimidate them into signing an agreement as quickly as possible.⁵

Apparently this tactic was helpful because on March 23, 1854 the treaty was concluded and a celebration commemorating the fact soon followed. Commodore Perry and the white American sailors aboard the flagship *Powhatan*, choose to express their blissfulness by treating the Japanese delegates to a good old-fashioned minstrel show performed in blackface. According to diaries the Japanese “were entertained by an exhibition of negro minstrelsy, got

² Hiroshi Wagatsuma, “The Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan,” *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, (Boston, MA Spring 1967).

³ Leupp, *op.cit.*, p.4; For more about tooth-blackening and other practices see Catharina Bloomberg, “A Strange White Smile”: A Survey of Tooth-Blackening and Other Dental Practices in Japan’, *Japan Forum* 2:2 (October 1990), pp.243-252.

⁴ Wagatsuma, *op.cit.*

⁵ Matthew Calbraith Perry, *The Japan Expedition, 1852-1854, The Personal Journal of Matthew C. Perry*, ed. Roger Pineau (Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968), p.98.

up by some of the sailors, who, blacking their faces and dressing themselves in character" sang 'Mistah Tambo' and "Mistah Bones' to an apparently delighted Japanese audience. Not content with displaying their talents in front of a limited audience, some of the 'performers' later toured other parts of Japan with their successful "act".⁶

Minstrel shows, which were performed by white men who blacken their faces by applying dark oil, depict African Americans as buffoons and idiots. The shows were an attempt to keep African Americans "in their place" after reconstruction started in the American south. This display staged by the sailors of the Powhatan was the first introduction of African American "culture" to the Japanese people. The seeds of America's peculiar brand of racism had now been sown on Japanese soil. As with most other areas the Japanese were eager to mimic their Western teachers. These same minstrel characters would later appear during the latter half of the twentieth century in the form of Sambo dolls and mannequins and would be the subject of boycotts of Japanese goods by African Americans.

Whites from Britain provided the technology for the Japanese railroads, postal system, telegraph system and navy. Whites from France provided the models for the judicial system and the military and domestic police. Whites from the United States provided the models for the primary school system and the national banking system. Whites--who were far superior to the Japanese in terms of technology and military know-how and who depicted black people as primitive and subhuman -- undoubtedly negatively influenced Japanese views on race. Of course the whites did not inform their Japanese pupils that African Americans had also had a hand in the technology that was being transferred to Japan. For example, the Japanese were never told that Jan Matzelinger, an African American, invented the lasting machine which enabled shoes to be made much faster and efficiently by machine. Or about A.B. Blackburn, another black man, who invented a switching device for the railroads, which would become so important during Japan's industrial revolution.

In 1860, while on a mission to the United States for ratification of the Harris Treaty (also known as the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce) which had been negotiated by Townsend Harris in July of 1858, Japanese envoys (among whom Fukuzawa Yukichi was included) described the blacks they encountered as "inferior as human beings, extremely stupid, black and ugly like devils, and lewd." The white hosts' of the Japanese were kind enough to point out the differences between blacks and whites in the United States. "Preston was a big man, around thirty-eight or thirty-nine years of age. He was proud as he pointed out the flags of the Rising Sun to me, saying "very good." As he singled out black women, he said they were the same color as the black wool suit he had on, and sneered at them, calling them ugly. He seemed very pleased with the white people and, whenever he saw white women, said "very good," and pointed them out to me."⁷

The Japanese envoys took copious notes while touring factories, hospitals, life insurance companies, banks, post offices and sugar refineries in the United States. What also interested

⁶ Foster Rhea Dulles, *Yankees and Samurai. America's Role in the Emergence of Modern Japan: 1791-1900* (New York, Harper & Row, 1965), pp.76-77.

⁷ The major provisions of the treaty were the opening of Edo, Osaka, Hakodate, Kanagawa (Yokohama), Nagasaki, Niigata, and Hyogo (Kobe) to foreigners; consular courts and extraterritorial rights for foreigners; fixed tariff rates on goods imported to Japan; and most-favored nation treatment. Similar treaties were later signed with Holland, Russia, Britain, and France by October 1858. All treaties came into force in summer 1859; Masao Miyoshi, *As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to the United States (1860)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

Fukuzawa and his colleagues were the social practices and institutions, not only family structure and relations between the sexes but relations between black and white Americans. These observations would later be disseminated among the population and imitated as well as the other learned customs imported from the West.

II

It was around this same time that African Americans became interested in the Japanese and the land in which they lived. The first African American newspaper to write about the Japanese was the San Francisco *Elevator* in 1865. Peter K. Cole described his impressions of the Japanese from the eastern port city of Yokohama. His letters, which were reported in the *Elevator*, described the inhabitants of "Mikado's kingdom" as a likable people who were "polite even to within a hair's breath of infinity" and who possessed a mind "capable of taking and weighing into a just balance the finites of roguery after having been rouged." Cole also reported that the Japanese had a thirst for learning more about the world outside of their shores and were anxious to "imbibe the very essence of foreign virtues and vices."⁸

A certain amount of condescension informed some of the early reports from Japan. One observer noted that the Japanese were a likable and sincere people because "their men, their manners, and their government [were] rapidly tending toward our standard of civilization. The men had placed aside their "barbarous rite of shaving their heads" and had begun to dress "after our fashion." The women were seen as preferring to remain in their unenlightened state because they still wore the traditional kimono. They were also reported never to have worn a bonnet or hat or "civilized shoe."⁹

When the issue involved business, Cole described Japanese merchants as practitioners of "unscrupulous business habits" and owners of a "a tongue so oily, that the electric eel would find it difficult to pass over it." Cole was so concerned that he took it on himself to issue a stern warning stating, "merchants should be very careful how they send over grain, sugar, and rice at this time because the Japanese are beginning to be far-seeing sharp traders--so sharp in their dealing with the foreigners as to know when they best can slide from under an agreement which does not suit their preconceived arrangements."¹⁰

On the whole Cole painted an uneven portrait of the "Nipponese" and this view was echoed in other African American newspapers of that time. The Japanese were said at times to be polite and courteous to guests but "not a demonstrative people" and kissing was "unknown among them." They were seen as "kind but mighty shrewd" and were also described as brave and loyal to their family and friends and would undergo almost any test to demonstrate this fact. The most impressive trait of the Japanese was their patience and ability to concentrate. When attending Kabuki (Japanese theater) the patrons would bring their lunches with them so that they would not miss any part of the performance, which would last from six to eight hours.¹¹

⁸ Peter K. Cole, Letter from Japan, No.14, *San Francisco Elevator* (April 10, 1870).

⁹ A.F. to the editor in *San Francisco Elevator* (January 17, 1874).

¹⁰ Peter K. Cole to the editor, August 23, 1867, in *San Francisco Elevator* (September 27, 1867); also Cole to the editor, April 10, 1870 in *San Francisco Elevator* (May 27, 1870).

¹¹ Baltimore *Afro-American* (August 3, 1894).

To what extent Cole personally collected his information about the Japanese remains difficult to ascertain. Surely he did not have much personal contact with the Japanese as he himself admitted that one New Year's holiday "presented itself in the form of barrenness in friendship." It is certain that Cole did "borrow" some of "his impressions" of the Japanese from European descriptions, which were found in local English language newspapers. In one European newspaper account the Japanese women were described as possessing a beauty "common to the female sex" but it was necessary that they be seen in the morning before "the thick coat of rouge has disguised the truth." When describing the physical and moral attributes of the Japanese, Cole presented the Dutch Embassy's version as his own. Cole wrote, "it cannot be denied there is a certain beauty common to the female sex; but to speak confidentially of the cause, I think it necessary to see them in the morning, before as Lucien says, 'the thick coat of rouge has disguised the truth.'"¹²

The rather unflattering view of the Japanese greatly improved in 1905 when Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War. The fact that a "colored" nation could defeat a mighty white power instilled a sense of pride and awe in African Americans and in the African American press. Quite literally overnight the Japanese were transformed from an improvident, ignorant, superstitious people to a courageous people who "did not fear death in any form."¹³

Whereas Japan had been looked on as a "heathen" nation, it could now be excused for rejecting the advances of Christian missionaries, not because they were ignorant pagans but rather because they avoided "all the ludicrous follies of the white man." The business acumen that Peter K. Cole described was now held up as an example by none other than the father of black thrift and hard work himself, Booker T. Washington. The president of Tuskegee Institute thought that African Americans could do well to imitate the Japanese when it came to business and described them as a "convincing example of the respect which the world gives to a race that can put brains and commercial activity into the development of the resources of a country." In Los Angeles, a city where the Japanese outnumbered blacks, the Japanese were also admired for having "learned not only to organize 'man'" but to "have been taught the lesson of organizing 'money.'"¹⁴

The Japanese army was praised as one of the best in the world and the Japanese fighting soldier as a model for the rest of the world with "muscles like whipcord," a "sure shot," an "eye for landmarks and a memory for locality." It was claimed that a Japanese soldier could do with three hours of sleep. In short, he was superhuman. Quite characteristically at the same time in the pages of one African American newspaper, the Japanese were being described outside of war as an "extremely childlike creature" or as "little brown gunners" with characteristically poor eyesight.¹⁵

Interestingly around this same period some African American periodicals began making the claim that the Japanese had black blood flowing through their veins. No doubt the Japanese victory of Russia had an influence on the timing of these articles. The *Freeman* (Indianapolis, IN) stated, "The phenomenal successes of Japan seem at length to have shamed into silence those sympathizers with Russia who were wont to animadvert upon the color of

¹² Peter K. Cole, Letter from Japan, No.11, *San Francisco Elevator* (August 28, 1868).

¹³ *Baltimore Afro-American* (March 4, 1905).

¹⁴ *California Eagle* (Los Angeles) (February 26, 1926).

¹⁵ *Washington Bee* (February 13 and September 3, 1904); *Philadelphia New Age* (June 11, 1904).

the little brown conqueror; and yet it does not lie in Saxon mouths to wax enthusiastic over the negro or negro blood which is authoritatively regarded as the dominant strain in the Japanese." The Reverend James Marmaduke Boddy wrote in the pages of *The Colored American Magazine*, "the African Negro possesses well known physical variations...as the physical characteristics of the Japanese race is neither Mongolian, Semetic, Celt, Teuton, nor Saxon, they must be akin to the Negro race."¹⁶

If some African Americans were trying to establish blood relationships with the newly powerful Japanese they would soon find their overtures rejected. Black Americans would later learn that not only did the Japanese see themselves as non-black but at least one person of Japanese descent sought to prove that the Japanese belonged to the white branch of the human family tree.

Having just defeated Russia, a major power, the Japanese were expecting to be treated as equals, or if not equals at least as respected pupils in a world that was defined by military might. From 1868 to 1894 the prime goal of Japanese foreign policy was revision of the unequal treaties, which would provide Japan with equal treatment in matters of foreign affairs. Extraterritoriality and tariff control greatly limited the sovereignty of Japan and relegated the country to semi-colonial status. Japanese perception of its' standing in the international community however, differed from that of the United States. As far as some citizens of the United States were concerned the Japanese by virtue of being Japanese, were different.

Proof that people of Asian origin were considered different came on October 11, 1906, when the San Francisco School Board passed a resolution requiring the ninety-three Japanese pupils enrolled in the city's schools to attend classes with the Chinese in a segregated Asian school. Initially African Americans supported the resistance of the Japanese to be separated but many did so not because they felt a kinship with the Japanese but on the grounds that no race should be forcefully segregated. *The Colored American Magazine* made it clear to their readership that Japanese was sometimes guilty of the same actions that were now being used against the Japanese:

The San Francisco Board of Education has let loose what promises to be a regular Pandora's box of evils by ordering that hereafter Japanese children attend schools with Chinese and not with Americans. Japan is getting mad about it, for Japan hates the Chinese, and furthermore the act savors of race prejudice--something, however, the Japanese themselves were very quick to demonstrate...when some one classified them as Negroes, and advised that they be entertained as such in this country. They were in haste then to show their contempt for the Negroes of this country and we are sorry for them in this their present dilemma. We do not subscribe to American race prejudice.¹⁷

The magazine went on to criticize the *New York Times*, which suggested that because the Japanese were threatening to boycott American made goods the United States couldn't afford to discriminate against the Japanese. The *Colored American* wondered aloud whether the darker races of the world would be forced to buy justice from a country that was reluctant to

¹⁶ Indianapolis *Freeman* (June 10, 1905); Rev. James Marmaduke Boddy, "The Ethnology of the Japanese Race", *The Colored American Magazine*, 9:4 (October 1905), pp.577-585.

¹⁷ *The Colored American Magazine*, XI (November 1906), p.285.

extend equality to other races for reasons other than economics.¹⁸

For obvious reasons any African Americans quickly denounced acts of racial prejudice, even it those being discriminated against were perceived as an economic threat as the Japanese in California were gradually being characterized. President Theodore Roosevelt, in the words of the *Chicago Journal*, “threaten[ed] California with federal action and the big stick unless the yellow children of aliens [we]re placed on equal footing with the grandsons of forty-niners. African Americans supported the president on this issue because they were hopeful that the same standards that applied to the Japanese could be applied to African Americans. The Indianapolis *Freeman* observed, “if it be determined that the treaty is the supreme law of the land and empowers the federal government to intervene and set aside the local regulations of a state then the federal government can by the same token step into any of the Southern states and force Negro children into the white schools--if they are citizens of a nation protected by the treaty rights under which Japan now makes her claim.”¹⁹

One Japanese parent unsuccessfully sued the school board in the case of *Keikichi Aoki v. M.A. Deane*, which came before the Supreme Court of California in March 1907. Deane was principal of the Redding primary school that barred the ten-year-old Japanese-born Aoki from attending. Keikichi’s father, Michitsugu Aoki, interpreted the word “reside” in the 1894 treaty as including attendance in public schools.²⁰

Because Japan began to increase pressure on the United States by threatening a boycott of American goods, President Theodore Roosevelt forced the San Francisco school board to rescind it’s order (at least as it applied to the Japanese-Koreans and Chinese were still segregated) and a Gentlemen’s Agreement which “voluntarily” limited Japanese emigration to the United States was signed in February 1908. This action incensed some African Americans who saw a double standard being applied. An editorial in the *Freeman* summarizes the feelings of many African Americans at that time:

While sympathizing deeply with the President’s desire to do what he can to improve the condition of the Japanese who have come to find a home upon our shores, the millions of black Americans, robbed of their suffrage, discriminated against on the railroads and places of public accommodation and lynched in defiance of the law--would have felt some real enthusiasm had he asked for enlarged federal jurisdiction with a view of protecting our lives, liberty and property by the invincible arm of the federal government at Washington.²¹

An article in the Washington *Bee* accused America of cowardice because the Japanese government was able to achieve for its’ subjects what African Americans had been unable to obtain since the founding of the republic. “America can only boast of her bravery, when she is dealing with her own subjects, namely the colored Americans” the journal wrote. African American anger was directed not at the Japanese but at the American justice system. Indeed the African Americans admired the power of the Japanese who were able to compel Russia to feel her power and who had “sufficient intelligence to protect her subjects against American

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *New York Age* (February 7, 1907); *The Colored American Magazine*, XI (November 1906), p.285; Booker T. Washington, *Putting the Most Into Life* (New York, 1906), p.33; Indianapolis *Freeman* (November 10, 1906).

²⁰ For more about this case and U.S. government reaction see Amos S. Hershey, “Japanese School Question and the Treaty-making Power,” *American Political Science Review*, I (May, 1907), pp.393–400.

²¹ Indianapolis *Freeman* (December 15, 1906).

prejudice and oppression." African Americans saw Japan as a nation that was willing to defend the rights of her subjects, so it should come as no surprise that some African Americans began to look to Japan for assistance in matters of racial justice.²²

II

After World War I the "Big Five", which included the United States, England, France, Italy and Japan, gathered in Washington to "consider subjects affecting the future course of the world for all time to come." Many African Americans were excited by the report that Japanese newspapers were "suggesting that Japan and China raise the race question at the upcoming conference with the aim of securing an agreement that would effectively eradicate racial discrimination throughout the world." The *New York Age* reported the conference had generated "a great deal of interest" among African Americans and Africans. In fact Japan and China were viewed as the only serious contenders when the issue involved insuring racial equality, because both nations were populous and independent. Any other "colored nation" could only take the question up by way of petition, which meant that they would lack the necessary authority to enforce their demands. The other "colored" nations were identified as Liberia which had "always been too weak for such service" and Haiti, which was entitled to a place at the peace, table because it had declared war on Germany. But Haiti was no longer independent and African Americans could no longer "hope for much from her," according to the *New York Age*.²³

In the summer before the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 several prominent African Americans of that era, including, A. Philip Randolph, Ida Wells-Barnett, Madame C.J. Walker, and Monroe Trotter, went to the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York. Their purpose was to visit the Japanese delegation to secure assurances that Japan would acknowledge the plight of blacks in the United States and work "to remove prejudice and race discrimination in all nations of the earth." The assembly left having been reassured that Japan would indeed stand up for its' "colored" brethren.²⁴

Not all leaders were in agreement that a "domestic question" should be argued on the world stage, but in the end it became apparent that little might be lost by taking such a stand. Some African American leaders thought that Japan could not be trusted to promote its claims for universal equality, and A. Philip Randolph thought the Japanese to be "reactionary," "imperialistic," and "autocratic," in calling Japan the "Prussian state of the east". He went on to admonish his readers not to respond to appeals based on color because Japan was only interested in Japan. According to Randolph only one and a half million people were allowed to vote in Japan out of a total of fifty million and he reasoned that if Japan had no problems oppressing its own people it would not be unreasonable to assume that Japan would oppress foreigners as well. Randolph claimed that the Japanese held little interest in race prejudice

²² *Washington Bee* (March 2, 1907).

²³ *New York Age* (November 30, 1918); *Savannah Tribune* (November 10, 1921); *New York Age* (November 30, 1918).

²⁴ *Chicago Defender* (January 4, 1919); *Baltimore Afro American* (January 18, April 26, 1919).

because they were untouched by its sting.²⁵

As it turned out, by the conclusion of the conference the Japanese backed down on the racial equality point and settled for supremacy in Asia, especially Manchuria, without interference from the European powers. The African Americans had unknowingly been used as a bargaining chip at the conference table. Playing on the fears of integration and on the blatant racism that existed in the United States and the other white nations, the Japanese shrewdly requested that a racial equality clause be inserted in the League of Nations Covenant, which would state “that the principle of equality of nations and the just treatment of their nationals... [shall be] a fundamental basis of future international relations in the new world organization.” This tactic backed the Americans into a corner. The system of Jim Crow segregation was alive and well in the democratic United States and there was no chance that President Wilson or any other white American leader would do anything to change the official policy of discrimination. The Anglo-American powers, fearful of giving darker peoples equal rights, abstained from voting on the proposal, which was equivalent to voting against it. In return for withdrawing the proposal Japan was allowed to roam freely in Asia without interference from the European and American powers. This opened the door for Manchuria to be invaded, just as Japan had hoped and Manchuria was invaded in 1931.

Acknowledging the fact that Africans Americans had been duped into thinking that Japan would stand up for the rights of African Americans and other oppressed peoples but making the most of it was James Weldon Johnson. Writing in the *New York Age*, Johnson recognized that Japan most probably used the racial equality position to pressure the other powers into giving it free reign in Asia. He conceded that Japan deemed her “unquestioned supremacy in the East of greater importance than a paragraph in the covenant of the League of Nations” which would have compelled all nations to grant their citizens equal rights. Without apology, Johnson defended the actions of Japan by drawing a parallel between Japan’s role on the international stage to the role of the disenfranchised African Americans. He believed Japan was wise enough to realize that mere words in the covenant of the League of Nations would not guarantee absolute equality of treatment unless “she had the power to enforce the fulfillment of those words.”

Johnson saw power as the only way to appeal to the sensibilities of white civilization and so far as he was concerned Japan was “perhaps the greatest hope for the colored races of the world.” The agreement that Japan negotiated with the other powers allowed for an invasion of China but Johnson did not feel that it violated “the principle of ‘self-determination’” so far as China was concerned because it was better that China be “dominated by Japan than to be dominated by some European government.” Writing in the *New York Age* Johnson felt strongly about this position and unashamedly wrote, “we want to see Japan grab as much as she possibly can. We should like to see Japan relatively as powerful in the Orient as the United States is in the western continent. We should like to see an Asiatic Monroe Doctrine with Japan as its interpreter and administrator.”²⁶

²⁵ “Japan And The Far East,” *Messenger* 2 (July 1918); A. Philip Randolph as quoted in Reginald Kearney, “Japan: Ally In The Struggle Against Racism, 1919–1927,” *Contributions in Black Studies*, 12 (1994), p.118.

²⁶ *New York Age* (May 24, 1919).

III

In California, between World War I and World War II, the relationship between African Americans and Japanese and Japanese Americans could be described as congenial. Articles, which appeared in African American newspapers, described the contact between the two groups based on a “friendly spirit of cooperation and sympathetic understanding.” In Oakland, California, for example, Japanese businesses advertised in the local African American newspaper, the *Oakland Sunshine*. The weekly carried advertisements for the Mikado laundry, the Nadaokaco soft drink stand an Osaka silk agent, a dentist, and a shoemaker. On the classified pages of *The California Eagle*, adjacent to a blurb for the Black and Tan Jazz orchestra, readers would find an advertisement for Dr. M. Shinohara, “Japanese Occultist”, and The Tokyo Company tailoring store.

Within the United States African Americans viewed the Japanese not only as fellow victims of American’s racial policy, but as a people ready to treat African Americans with dignity, respect, and equality. The Japanese hospital in Los Angeles employed two African American surgeons. “At a time when seemingly all hospital doors were being closed to member of the race, it is gratifying to know that Japanese leave their doors wide open to all people, where on can have the care of his own physician,” the *California Eagle* reported. Those African Americans who had actually visited Japan further enhanced this image of fair treatment to African Americans. Many returning Black servicemen who served in China and the Philippines as well as an assorted group of domestics, and musicians had only words of praise for the display of kindness shown by the Japanese.²⁷

Widespread African American support of the Japanese quickly took a negative turn when Takao Ozawa, an immigrant resident alien, sought to prove his eligibility for American citizenship on the grounds that he was white. Ozawa was born in Japan but graduated from a high school in Berkeley, California and had finished three years at the University of California-Berkeley. Before he applied for naturalization in 1914, he had resided in the United States for twenty continuous years. The District Court denied his application for the Territory of Hawaii even though the Court felt that Ozawa was “well qualified by character and education for citizenship.”²⁸

The law in 1914 stated the citizenship was limited to aliens who were free white persons and to aliens of African nativity and of African descent. Ozawa’s attorneys insisted that the words “free white persons” did not intend to exclude the Japanese and argued that the words “neither in their common and popular meaning, nor in their scientific definition, define race or races, or prescribe a nativity or locus of origin.” They claimed the word “white” signified a class of individuals who were considered superior and who did not have “Negro blood.”²⁹

Ozawa’s argument disturbed the *Chicago Defender*, which concluded that the Japanese government supported the legal challenge as a way of sidestepping naturalization restrictions imposed by the United States. “Japan had risen as a yellow people but ‘as soon as it got up it

²⁷ *California Eagle* (Los Angeles) (June 24, 1921).

²⁸ *Takao Ozawa v. United States*, 260 US p.178 (1922).

²⁹ *Takao Ozawa v. United States*, 260 US p.183-84 (1922).

wanted to be 'white'." Until the "great blunder" the sympathy of African Americans for Japan was "universal," the *Defender* asserted. But the support and admiration of Japan by African Americans dissipated with the image of Ozawa and his supporters "begging to be classed not as yellow people, but as a branch of the Aryan tree." By this act, the *Defender* expostulated; Japan had served notice "that her yearnings were beyond her blood." Ozawa's case reached the Supreme Court of the United States as a result of his contention that the Japanese, as descendants of aboriginal Ainu, were a Caucasian people. His plea however fell on deaf ears, the Supreme Court in 1922 ruled that Japanese immigrants were not eligible to become naturalized citizens in the United States.

In 1936 W.E.B. Du Bois, intellectual par excellence, traveled to Asia and wrote a series of columns for the *Pittsburgh Courier* describing his impressions of China and Japan. Du Bois also attempted to underline the connection between issues in Asia and similar issues in black America. Describing himself as a citizen "none too welcome in his native land," Du Bois was stunned to be welcomed in Japan by such a wondrous reception. Du Bois interpreted the warm welcome as being meant for all of black America, which signaled recognition as a "common brotherhood, a common suffering and a common destiny."³⁰

Du Bois was enchanted with Japan, a land that was run by colored people for the benefit of colored people. On arriving on Japanese soil, Du Bois believed he stood in a land where, for the first time, white people neither directly nor indirectly controlled the land. Also absent was the "English overbearance" and "American impudence" that he experienced in China, India, Africa, the West Indies and the United States. Du Bois must have been pleased and also felt a sense of kinship when he concluded the Japanese could easily be mistaken for American mulattos.³¹

In Asia, there were two defining moments for Du Bois that reflected the spirit of China and Japan. The first was an experience in China. One day on a road in Shanghai, Du Bois witnessed a young white boy, whom he estimated to be four years of age, order three adult Chinese out of his path. The three docile Chinese men immediately complied and moved aside. For Du Bois, the actions he witnessed reminded him of the treatment of African Americans in America; whites always dominated, while colored people were humiliated.

The second incident transpired at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. While Du Bois was paying his bill, a "typical loudmouthed American white woman" barreled in and demanded service, as she was probably accustomed to doing in the United States. The desk clerk "neither winked nor turned his head," but continued to wait on his darker guest until all business had been completed. After bowing politely to Du Bois, the clerk then "turned to America" and began transacting business. Du Bois hoped the attitude of the Japanese toward white people would rub off on African Americans.³²

So positive, enthusiastic and uncritical was Du Bois in his support for Japan that he soon found himself being accused of being paid by the Japanese government for propaganda work in the United States. In an editorial, the pro-China *China Weekly Review* named Du Bois as a suspect in the dissemination of Japanese propaganda. An official of the Consumer-Farmer Milk Cooperative who had liberal ties to Washington, asked Du Bois to make a statement

³⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier* (March 20, 1937).

³¹ *Pittsburgh Courier* (February 20, 1937).

³² *Pittsburgh Courier* (March 13, 1937).

indicating his “official position on the Sino-Japanese conflict, so as to lay to rest, once and for all,” ugly rumors circulating about his head. Du Bois responded with this statement:

I have never received a cent from Japan or from any Japanese and yet I believe in Japan. It is not that I sympathize with China less but that I hate white European and American propaganda, theft and insult more. I believe in Asia for the Asiatics and despite the hell of war and the fascism of capital, I see in Japan the best agent for this end.³³

Du Bois cited the Japanese Exclusion Act, the refusal of the League of Nations to take a stand on race equality, and the cavalier treatment of Japan by America as evidence that the United States was not really concerned with the plight of darker people in the world. In Du Bois’s mind, African Americans had nothing to loose by supporting Japan.³⁴

Other prominent African Americans such as T. Thomas Fortune and James Weldon Johnson had visited Japan before World War II. Dr. Du Bois exhibited much stronger reactions than they did but one African American who saw Japan in a totally different light was the well-known author Langston Hughes. Hughes had criticisms of Japan’s policies claiming they were undemocratic. While visiting Japan Hughes contacted Tokyo Leftists and was promptly deported in 1933.³⁵

After the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the African American journalist Roi Ottley reported, “a number of Japanese of attractive manners and sound knowledge of American affairs came to the United States and posed as menials, seeking social ties with Negro domestics and professing inviolable racial kinship.” Ottley went on to write that some African Americans became so trusting of these Japanese that they began to view their new foreign friends as belonging to a messianic race, “which would lead black men out of bondage.” In addition, a man calling himself “Major” Satokata Takahashi was reportedly had close contact with and deeply influenced several radical African American organizations during the 1930’s. Apparently the Japanese government consciously targeted African Americans for a propaganda campaign with the aim of making African Americans sympathetic to the policies of Japan.

IV

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which authorized and directed military commanders to prescribe military areas from which any or all persons could be excluded. This order was specifically aimed at alien Japanese and Japanese Americans living in Hawaii, the West Coast and Western Arizona. In effect, American citizens were imprisoned in concentration camps due to an accident of birth. After the United States government removed 112,000 persons of Japanese ancestry from their place

³³ W.E.B. Du Bois ; edited by Herbert Aptheker, *Against racism: unpublished essays, papers, addresses, 1887-1961*, (Amherst, Massachusetts, 1985), p.185; “Serious Racial Element in the Sino-Japanese Struggle,” *China Weekly Review* (December 1938).

³⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois p.451.

³⁵ *Kansas City Call*, (September 22, 1933); Langston Hughes, *I Wonder As I Wander* (New York: Rinehart, 1956), 259-76; James Weldon Johnson, *Along The Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (1933, reprint, New York: Peguin, 1990), 393-405; Emma Lou Thornborough, T. Thomas Fortune: Militant Journalist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1972), pp.236-37.

of residence, it transported them to ten different relocation camps, where they were detained against their will. The War Relocation Authority that was created by Executive Order No. 9102 on March 18, 1942 administered these camps. These relocation camps, commonly known as internment camps, were located in seven different states.

When the government first began to roundup and incarcerate Japanese agricultural workers, the Los Angeles branch of the National Negro Business League (NNBL) saw it as the "greatest opportunity ever offered by the State of California." Pointing to the virtual monopolization by Japanese of truck farming, commercial fishing, and even a number of domestic positions once dominated by African Americans, the NNBL argued that Americans ought to be free of dependence on produce grown by people from a nation with which the United States was at war.³⁶

The removal of the Japanese, in the opinion of members of the NNBL, presented African Americans with a dual opportunity: they could make an important contribution to the national defense and, at the same time, "entrench" themselves "in a manner not previously granted." One state official endorsed the position of the NNBL with the observation, "You don't have to distrust a Negro face in a boat plying in California waters; nor would you need to fear a traitor in our lettuce fields."³⁷

The *California Eagle* advised its readers to "continue normal relations in schools, businesses, and in our social relations with the Japanese residents of our communities." But, while recognizing the need to maintain normal relations with Japanese Americans, the *California Eagle* was not blind to the fact that the misfortune of Japanese Americans could be an opportunity for the African American community. In February 1942, just one month after advising normal relationships with the Japanese, an editorial in the daily rationalized, "If [an agrarian empire] must be lost to [the Japanese], why shouldn't it fall into our hands?"³⁸

Writing in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, George Schuyler suggested the possibility of African American truck farmers supplanting the Japanese in the Pacific Coast States. In a letter to the editor, one reader cast doubt on Schuyler's plan stating that "there were not enough Negro truck gardeners or farmers in [New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey]...to supply the vegetable needs of the members of [the] Abyssinian Baptist Church." The reader concluded that because of the "present unpreparedness as vegetables growers, I do not believe we shall be called upon to supplant the Japanese farmers."³⁹

As it turns out, the African Americans were never able to set their plans into motion. Much to the consternation of African American truck farmers in California, the Farm Security Administration (FSA), in cooperation with the Federal Farm Administration (FFA), would not certify any transactions between African Americans and Japanese American farmers. In a letter to George Schuyler, an African American resident of San Diego, California outlined the difficulties of obtaining land confiscated from Japanese Americans on the West Coast. Schuyler in turn enlightened his readers through his weekly "Views and Reviews" column. "My step-father, a successful truck gardener, had completed all arrangements to take over a truck farm here in the valley, but the Federal Farm Administration together with FSA

³⁶ *California Eagle* (Los Angeles) (December 18, 1941).

³⁷ *California Eagle* (Los Angeles) (January 1, 1942).

³⁸ *California Eagle* (Los Angeles) (February 12, 1942).

³⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier* (March 14, 1942); Charles E. Hall, Letter to the editor, *New York Age* (March 28, 1942).

would not certify the deal," the resident wrote. "The reason being that THEY HAD AGREED TO GIVE ONLY WHITE FARMER OPERATORS CERTIFICATION. In addition, a rumor was circulating among African Americans that "when Japanese people asked Negroes to take over properties for them, the [Japanese] were told by white banking officials and FBI men that the NEGROES WERE TO BE EVACUATED ALSO."⁴⁰

Once the actual round up began however, African Americans began to draw comparisons between themselves and the plight of United States citizens of Japanese origin. Ironically, it was the *Pittsburgh Courier* that protested loudest against the interment of the Japanese. Other African Americans viewed interment of the Japanese Americans as the first step towards eroding the rights of African American citizens. "The Japanese...were American born and according to our Constitution, citizens the same as our racial group," one reader wrote. "I wonder just how long it would be before we would be in the same boat." Schuyler personally regarded the internment policy as "indefensible," "revengeful," and "racially-prejudiced." In his daily column, Schuyler attributed the policy to "shiftless and incompetent white people" who jealously envied the "economic efficiency" of Asian Americans on the West Coast. He defended the Japanese Americans by stating that they were "no more danger to the United States than [we]re Italian-Americans, German-Americans, Franco-Americans, Russian-Americans or any other native-born white hyphenated group." The column concluded with an ominous warning: "This may be a prelude to our own fate. Who knows?"⁴¹

The *Pittsburgh Courier* also discussed the internment issue on the editorial page. The editors were outraged with the lack of discussion in the main press about the interment. What especially upset the editors was the manner in which white editors and commentators "sought to make it appear that [Japanese Americans] were nationals of an enemy nation. The interment was viewed as similar to "Hitler's deportation of Jews." The editorial concluded with a warning disguised as a question: "Today it is the citizens of Japanese ancestry who are being deported...what assurance has ANY citizen that he will not be summarily deported to distant territories on the shallow pretense that he MIGHT commit a crime?"⁴²

In an article written for *The Crisis*, Harry Paxton Howard stated color was the only possible reason American citizens of Japanese ancestry were interned in camps. Howard saw the Japanese Americans as having been deprived of their constitutional rights and constitutional protection due to "the misfortune...of includ[ing] among their ancestors persons of a non-white country...it is the 'non-white' which must be emphasized." The article went on to assert: But the American government has not taken any such high-handed action against Germans and Italians--and their American-born descendants...Germans and Italians are "white."⁴³

Like Schuyler, Howard drew a connection between African Americans and the discriminatory manner of treatment of Japanese Americans. Howard was surprised that African Americans along the West Coast failed to comprehend the Japanese American interment was fundamentally racial, and directly concerned themselves. The writer was convinced the "barbarous treatment of [Japanese] Americans [was] the result of the color line."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Pittsburgh Courier* (April 25, 1942).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Pittsburgh Courier* (April 4, 1942).

⁴³ Harry Paxton Howard, "Americans in Concentration Camps," *The Crisis*, (September 1942) pp.281-301.

⁴⁴ Howard, p.284.

Generally African Americans made a differentiation, however, between Japanese Americans and Japan. The United States was at war with Japan and African Americans were overwhelmingly on the side of their homeland. Writing in *The Crisis*, Benjamin Mays, a religious leader and college president, urged African Americans to remain loyal because "the race's destiny" depended on it and because Japan was "no friend of the American Negro." Mays, who stated he had once visited Japan and admired the "skill and efficiency" of the Japanese nonetheless felt heathen Japan was not interested in democracy or "in the darker peoples of the earth." Although predicting that World War II would "scarcely increase the Negro's participation in American democracy," Mays placed his faith in the United States. In an obvious appeal to the white readership, Mays sought to reassure America that African Americans were not only patriotic but Christians as well:

It is the nature of the Negro to be loyal to the United States...We accept the Holy Bible as our rule of conduct and Jesus the Christ as our Lord and Savior...Japan has no particular love or interest in the darker peoples of the earth. And she will seek to suppress and does suppress her darker brothers in the same way as imperialistic white nations. The idea that existed...that Japan would be the nation around which the darker races of earth might rally and look to for guidance is utter nonsense. His [the Negro's] salvation must be worked out here where the ideals are democratic and the religion is democratic.⁴⁵

Mays would find out after the War that his efforts at pandering to the whites would fall short of his intentions. Returning servicemen would be met with racial epithets, housing discrimination, job discrimination and an overall lack of gratitude from white Americans. This would be the reward for the part African Americans had played in the War for "democracy".

V

In 1945 the War Relocation Authority made plans to close most of the internment camps by Christmas. Beginning in May, Japanese Americans began leaving the camps and returning to their homes. In Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley, the returning internee's were met by a large concentration of African Americans who had supplanted them. Many observers, mainly whites but including some African Americans, predicted there would be tension between the two groups which could have had the potential for a race war.

In a confidential government report, African Americans were seen as "[o]ne of the greatest potential sources of trouble for the returning Japanese." The government believed their own propaganda despite a report from a "reliable informant" that stated the return of several Japanese "...ha[d] caused no trouble." Moreover, the report cited several instances of predominately African American organizations publicly supporting the return of the Japanese Americans. These included, the Berkeley Inter-Racial Group, The Catholic Inter-Racial Council, the Citizen's Committee for Inter-Racial Action, the American Council on Race Relations, and the San Francisco Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of

⁴⁵ Benjamin E. Mays, "The Negro and the Present War," *The Crisis*, (March 1942) pp.159-164.

Colored People (NAACP).⁴⁶

The leader of the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL), Teiko Ishida, believed "the most pressing problem" at that time was "locating adequate housing for Japanese who return to San Francisco." The confidential report quoted Ishida explaining, "although many Negro families now occupy dwellings formerly occupied by Japanese, no trouble between Negroes and Japanese is anticipated because leaders of both races recognize that their position as racial minorities renders it advisable for them to settle their difficulties amicably and to date this policy has been pursued by both groups."⁴⁷

In Los Angeles, headlines in the local white newspaper bellowed, "JAPS RE-INVAD E LITTLE TOKYO." A meeting by African Americans in "Little Tokyo" was headlined, "MEET TONIGHT TO PROTEST JAP RETURN." In the next edition however, the rhetoric was toned down to provide a more realistic appraisal of the state of affairs: "NEGROES TO WELCOME RETURNING JAPS."⁴⁸

In Los Angeles' "Little Tokyo," almost all of the African Americans who were now living there had migrated from southern states to seek employment in the West Coast defense industry. Lockheed, Douglas and other war plants beckoned African American cotton field hands and maids working in white family kitchens from the South, to win the war with work. Because of Jim Crow, the only area in town that would welcome them with vacancy signs was "Little Tokyo." A few local African American businessmen had taken over part of the area by leasing buildings left empty by the 15,000 evacuated Japanese Americans at the start of the war. But African American ownership of property in "Little Tokyo" would never exceed 6 percent. White business interests quickly caught "the golden chance to speculate" and devoured choice locations which were subdivided to accommodate the African American population, which swelled from 50,000 to 150,000 during the war years. Bronzeville, as it was now called because of the large number of African Americans living there, was not a part of the historical black business district but rather an enclave with its own distinct culture. Although overcrowded and lacking sanitation, African American southerners that had no other alternative due to restrictive covenants, soon began to occupy the area in substantial numbers.⁴⁹

Evidently, at least one African American newspaper columnist on the East Coast and possibly more was not entirely comfortable with Japanese Americans. Irene West, a columnist for the *Baltimore Afro American*, was "shocked" and "perturbed" at seeing Japanese Americans and African Americans drinking together at bars located in Bronzeville. Although admitting that the Japanese were Americans and were returning to re-claim their property, the predicament nevertheless puzzled her.⁵⁰

In part, West's attitude may be explained by sociological studies indicating people, both black and white, on the East Coast knew little about Asians except through California

⁴⁶ District Intelligence Officer, Twelfth Naval District. Director of Naval Intelligence, "Counter-Intelligence Report on Recent Developments in Japanese Situation, Twelfth Naval District," Report B-7-J-1654 in Roger Daniels ed., *American Concentration Camps: A Documentary History of the Relocation and Incarceration of Japanese Americans, 1942-1945*, 8 vols.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Herald-Express* (August 3, 1945); *Herald-Express* (August 4, 1945); *Herald-Express* (August 5, 1945).

⁴⁹ *Baltimore Afro American* (August 25, 1945); "The Race War That Flopped: Little Tokyo and Bronzeville upset predictions of Negro-Nisei battle," *Ebony* (July 1946) p.3.

⁵⁰ *Baltimore Afro American* (August 25, 1945).

anti-Asian propaganda. Stereotypes before and after Pearl Harbor indicated changes in the Japanese image perceived by white and black Americans. Japanese were typified as sly, treacherous, cruel and warlike during and immediately after World War II.⁵¹

Since 1941 in San Francisco's Fillmore district, the African American population had quadrupled in the newly available space for housing. When Japanese Americans began returning from camps in Utah and Wyoming, it was feared that the returnees from relocation centers "might create tensions and produce racial difficulties in the area." The same was said about the East Bay areas of Oakland and Berkeley. Predictions ran rife about the suffering of African Americans at the hands of returning Japanese Americans reclaiming their homes and other properties.⁵²

In San Francisco African Americans and the returning Japanese Americans peacefully re-integrated without incident. The assumption that African Americans would be evicted from apartment buildings and houses owned by the returning Japanese Americans, proved to be unfounded. In actuality, California law had prohibited ownership of property by first-generation Japanese (Issei) and most families were renting their properties.

A concern still existed that "the Japanese-owned properties [could] be used as a splitting wedge by the 'divide and rule crowd' to put the two minorities against each other." As was the case in Bronzeville, most of the tension between the two groups was fueled by outside white agitators. Writing in *The Crisis*, Thelma Thurston Gorham warned that absentee white Realtors had the most to gain if racial strife ensued. "When one realizes that a two-story, four-flat building can, and does, house up to twenty-five families, then one begins to see the extent to which the anti-Japanese racial propaganda can make that splitting wedge an incendiary and vicious weapon at the disposal of American-style Fascists and others who might profit by keeping the two groups at swords' points."⁵³

The lack of enmity toward Japanese Americans was attributed to the effort on their part not to do anything that would create racial animosity. Gorham believed African Americans in San Francisco felt friendly towards the Japanese, even before the war because "unlike the Chinese they [Japanese Americans] did not follow the established policy of the dominant group in dealing with Afro-Americans." Gorham was referring to reports that stated Japanese Americans allowed African Americans to eat in their restaurants even while whites were present. This reportedly did not happen in the establishments owned by the Chinese Americans. Blacks were apt to "remember former kindnesses and courtesies and ponder the question of why he should resent the return of the Japanese."⁵⁴

⁵¹ For more on sociological studies of blacks and other groups towards Asians see G.M. Gilbert, "Stereotype Persistence and Change among College Students," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 46 (April, 1951), pp. 245-54; Ralph H. Gundlach, "The Attitudes of Enemy, Allied, and Domestic Nationality Groups as Seen by College Students of Different Regions," *Journal of Social Psychology* 19 (1944), pp.249-58; Dorothy W. Seago, "Stereotypes: Before Pearl Harbor and After," *Journal of Psychology* 23 (1947), pp.55-63; Jacobus tenBroek et al., *Prejudice, War and the Constitution*, (Berkeley, 1968). Also see, James A. Bayton and E.F. Byoune, "Racio-National Stereotypes Held by Negroes," *Journal of Negro Education* 16 (1947), pp.49-56; James A. Bayton, "The Radical Stereotypes of Negro College Students," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 36 (1947), pp.97-102; Max Meenes "A Comparison of Racial Stereotypes of 1935 and 1942," *Journal of Social Psychology* 17 (1943), pp.327-36.

⁵² Thelma Thurston Gorham, "Negroes and Japanese Evacuees," *The Crisis* (November 1945) pp.314-15, 330.

⁵³ Gorham, p.315.

⁵⁴ Gorham, p.330.

In Bronzeville, most Japanese Americans were fearful of returning to their homes because African Americans now occupied their homes. Much to their surprise, Japanese Americans discovered African Americans were sympathetic to their cause and shared a sense of kinship that transcended racial barriers. Japanese Americans found African Americans to be “respect [ful]” and “very friendly.” The WRA called it a miracle in interracial adjustment.⁵⁵

The African American magazine, *Ebony*, featured an article with pictures of Japanese American barbers giving haircuts to African Americans, children from both cultures playing together at a day nursery and housewives mingling at a Japanese grocery store. The article also included pictures of a clinic, which was staffed by both African American and Japanese American doctors and nurses, which provided services to the community. Also, African American and Nisei American Veterans Committee members were photographed discussing strategies for fair employment. *Ebony* announced, “A heartfelt kinship has grown between the two minorities, both victims of race hate. And in this blending of common interests, Bronzeville and Little Tokyo have been betrothed. Out of a marriage of convenience has come a genuine attachment and affection between the two peoples.”⁵⁶

Since the first recorded contact between blacks and Japanese, the relationship in the United States between the two cultures has evolved along two sometimes-crossing paths. One path led to respect, understanding and coexistence. But, the frequency of direct contact between African Americans and Japanese Americans continued to be limited primarily to California. Accordingly, the other path led to a great deal of mutual misunderstanding and distrust despite efforts by individuals from both communities.

Between the Pearl Harbor assault by the Japanese and the end of World War II, Japanese Americans began to develop a new appreciation for African Americans. Many Japanese Americans compared the sorrow of living in prison camps as citizens of a country they were born in, to the sorrow of the African American people who were denied democratic rights in a country they helped build. Eventually, Japanese Americans realized that in the United States, as long as the rights of one minority are threatened, all minorities are at risk of having their rights abridged.

For their part, African Americans were willing to welcome a group that had different customs, ate different food, and celebrated different holidays. The plight of Japanese Americans during World War II reminded African Americans of the discrimination they knew all too well. Although African Americans once feared that Japanese Americans would all endeavor to become ‘Takao Ozawas,’ it was soon apparent that Japanese Americans wanted the same thing as African Americans--a piece of the American dream.

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⁵⁵ “The Race War That Flopped: Little Tokyo and Bronzeville Upset Predictions of Negro-Nisei Battle,” *Ebony* (July 1946) p.3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*