

Two Sleeping Giants:  
African American Perceptions of China, 1900-1939

Destin K. Jenkins

Senior Thesis  
Columbia University  
History Department  
April 2010

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: From the African Diaspora to the Far East: Early Phases of Black Internationalism.....	11
Chapter 2: World War I: The Emergence of Different Strands of Black Internationalism.....	32
Chapter 3: African American and Chinese Critique of Christianity.....	56
Chapter 4: Conflicting Reports: The Role of Foreign Correspondents in Shaping Coverage of Wartime China.....	81
Conclusion.....	101
Bibliography.....	105

## Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my parents for challenging me to reach for the galaxies. The Columbia History Department for its generous financial support of my work. Dean Hazel May and The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship for introducing me to the prospects of becoming a professional historian. I do not know where I would be without my advisor Eric Foner. I thank you for humbling me early on in the writing process and pushing me to write two pages per day. My mentors Samuel Roberts and Christopher Brown for being objective supporters of my work. I can honestly say that I look at you both as genuine friends. I would also like to thank the librarians and staff at Columbia University, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, the University of Minnesota, and Princeton University for exposing me to the historiography surrounding this topic and helping me conduct archival research. Thanks to all of my friends and loved ones who put up with my incessant preoccupation with African American perceptions of China. I hope you can all forgive me for neglecting our friendships while I was immersed in the personal papers of past leaders.

Apparently “only good niggers” travel to Paris, observed Harlem radical Chandler Owen. For the members of the African Blood Brotherhood, the African American leaders of the National Race Congress for World Democracy, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and International League of Darker Peoples, their attempt to call for radical racial reform as delegates to the Paris Peace conference would not materialize.<sup>1</sup> Disappointed by the failure of Wilsonian democracy, many African Americans began to look to the colonized world for alliances. During the 1920s and 1930s, China became an ally against racial and economic exploitation.

But what distinguished the “good nigger” from the bad? If Owen came to this conclusion based solely on his socialist perspective, then Marcus Garvey, Mary Church Terrell, and William Monroe Trotter would have to be among the “good.” Yet, Owen was not merely a socialist. Indeed, relying on strict categorization to identify supporters or critics of China belies the fact that different strands of black internationalism emerged between 1917 and 1919. Using a wide disposal of ideological weapons, black American leaders in cities like Chicago and New York formulated their opinion of China based on the combinations of various ideologies, their own

---

<sup>1</sup> Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, 18-20.

## *Introduction*

experiences with colonialism and U.S. racism, and the economic inequalities rampant in metropolitan areas.

As political agents, the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier*'s early coverage of China relied on Orientalist rhetoric to describe that country as a stagnant, docile nation. Following World War I, many African Americans lumped the "darker races" together, obscuring real and critical differences between non-white peoples. By 1924, the *Defender* was completely at odds with the *Courier*'s coverage. The *Defender* often endorsed China's protest against all forms of imperialist aggression. I argue that one reason for the *Courier*'s unabashed support of Japan can be attributed to founder Robert L. Vann's commitment to "uplift ideology." Using this framework, the *Courier* saw China as akin to the black masses who were content with mediocrity. Moreover, W.E.B. Du Bois's position as one of its most prominent correspondents on foreign affairs bolstered the *Courier*'s support for Japan.

Du Bois is of supreme importance because, as I show in chapters one and two, from the late nineteenth century to 1945, Du Bois remained an apologist for Japan. Du Bois extended his talented tenth philosophy to the international sphere, viewing Japan as engaging in benevolent uplift. As a result, he often denigrated China's protests against Japan.

Towards the end of the 1920s and particularly during the Great Depression, black Americans developed a heightened awareness of the far-reaching hand of economic exploitation. As such, many depicted China not as a "colored nation" fighting against "white world rule," but a colonized nation struggling against the forces of capitalism, imperialism and racism. By examining events in China, African Americans became aware of the entanglement of race and class. As a result, many discovered the connections between their struggle and that waged by Chinese protesters during the 1920s and 1930s.

## ***Introduction***

From their analyses of China, these African Americans found models for development. During China's protest against Christianity and imperialism during the 1920s, the *Defender* looked at China's use of the boycott as a strategy against job discrimination. In 1937, the *Defender* reaffirmed the similarity by concluding both the Chinese and millions of black Americans "have no national program, no leadership, and no unity." According to the weekly, unity among both groups was essential to bright about the "miracle of racial cohesion."<sup>2</sup>

In this thesis, I argue that by examining the African American encounter with China, we can better understand the long civil rights movement of the north. As recent scholars have shown, African Americans living in northern cities saw the connections between 1960s black America and the third world.<sup>3</sup> Through an analyses of African American perceptions of China between 1900 and 1939, we discover that the roots of the 1960s critique of the black community as a colony can be traced to 1920s Chicago, Harlem, among other northern cities. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, African Americans have always had an international perspective, which helped clarify and develop methods of protest against racism at home.

## **Historiography**

This thesis examines a set of black intellectuals on the international stage, drawing from the recent work of historians such as Brenda Gayle Plummer, Robin D.G. Kelley, Penny Von Eschen, Reginald Kerney, Ernest Allen, Jr., Gerald Horne, among others, who have delved deep into the field of black international history. These historians have explored black internationalism at a local level, demonstrating how African Americans expressed solidarity with

---

<sup>2</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "We Can Learn from Chinese Women," September 4, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> For scholarship on the Northern Civil rights movement, see works by Martha Biondi, Matthew Countryman, Peniel Joseph, Robert Self, and Thomas Sugrue, among others.

## *Introduction*

those under colonial rule, and how leaders used the international sphere to critique domestic policies.

Many of these historical works examine African American views towards Communism, particularly during the Cold War Era. Kate A. Baldwin's *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1932-1963* explores the writings and experiences of Paul Robeson, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes, thus revealing the ways black intellectuals were influenced by "Soviet Internationalism."<sup>4</sup>

Brenda Gayle Plummer has shown how African Americans influenced international affairs through diplomatic channels. Her *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* explores a wide range of black perceptions towards colonial nations, revealing how various black leaders attempted to use the League of Nations and United Nations as a platform to bring attention to the horrors of U.S. racism.

Other scholars have used an international lens to examine relations between members of the African Diaspora. Along with Plummer's study of black American responses to U.S. occupation of Haiti, William R. Scott has illustrated in *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War 1935-1941*, how black Americans in northern cities responded to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Organizations such as the Friends of Ethiopia in America and United Aid for Ethiopia not only pledged financial support but also attempted to travel to Ethiopia to fight against Italian aggression.

Still other historians have explored African Americans perceptions of those beyond the African Diaspora. In his most recent work, *The End of Empires: African-Americans and India*, the prolific scholar Gerald Horne demonstrates how Indian conceptions of spirituality and culture

---

<sup>4</sup> Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1932-1963*, 7.

## *Introduction*

influenced the political programs of leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and those within the Nation of Islam.

Despite the efforts to trace African American international perspectives during the twentieth century, there is still a dearth of scholarship examining African American perceptions of East Asia. Reginald Kearney, Ernest Allen Jr., Marc Gallicchio, Vijay Prashad, and Robin D.G. Kelley have tried to fill this void. Allen Jr. contends that following the Russo-Japanese War, Japan became the “Champion of the Darker Races” in the eyes of African Americans.<sup>5</sup> Kearney has seconded the importance of Japan on African American international thought.<sup>6</sup>

In *The African American Encounter with Japan & China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*, Marc Gallicchio traces black perceptions of Japan and China. He argues that while there were certainly those who criticized Japan’s imperial ambitions in the Far East, for the most part, black Americans remained insensitive to China’s plight until the early years of World War II. He argues that from 1905-1945, “many black internationalists continued to defend Japanese actions, and to varying degrees they argued that Japan’s victories benefited all of the darker races, including the Chinese.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, most historians exploring African American perceptions of Asia during the twentieth century have primarily focused on African American affinity towards Japan. My senior thesis examines individual leaders, organizations, and newspapers, in an attempt to explore exactly *who* supported or critiqued China, *how* these perceptions changed over time, and *why* some of these figures came to recognize China as an ally during the early twentieth century.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ernest Allen Jr., “When Japan Was the ‘Champion of the Darker Races’: Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism.” *Black Scholar* 24(1994), 28.

<sup>6</sup> See Reginald Kearney’s *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?*

<sup>7</sup> Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan & China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*, 85.



## ***Introduction***

This thesis also provides a more nuanced version of the historical account provided by Kearney, Allen Jr., and Gallicchio. For example, Gallicchio's over reliance on the *Pittsburgh Courier* and W.E.B. Du Bois informs Gallicchio's central argument. However, by examining the *Chicago Defender*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, the *Messenger*, *Negro World*, and previously ignored publications such as the *Student Association Newsletter*, I show that African Americans supported the anti-Christianity and anti-imperialist movement in China during the 1920s.

For the *Defender*, *Amsterdam News*, and *SAN*, China's protest was presented as a struggle for self-determination and equality. While there were those who still believed Japan was fighting to uplift the "darker races," in the context of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and Japan's recognition of Italy's conquest, African Americans developed a deeper critique of imperialism and the global trend towards fascism. As a result, China was seen as fighting a valiant struggle against the forces that threatened to annihilate the non-white world.

## **Methodology**

A word on methodology is necessary. I have primarily relied on two black newspapers, the *Chicago Defender* and *New York Amsterdam News*.<sup>8</sup> Newspapers served as political agents and were responsible for making international events accessible to local populations. During the first half of the twentieth century, the *Defender* sold approximately 150,000 copies per issue. African Americans in various cities, both north and south, either read the *Defender* themselves, or listened while the literate read aloud.<sup>9</sup> At its height during the late 1920s and early 1930s, the

---

<sup>8</sup> Although I examine a few articles in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, I have not delved fully into its coverage of China. This is due to the fact that historian Marc Gallicchio uses the *Courier*, particularly during the 1930s, as one of the primary sources of evidence to support his thesis.

<sup>9</sup> Frederick German Detweiler, *The Negro Press in the United States*, 6-8.

## ***Introduction***

*Amsterdam News* sold approximately 100,000 copies per week.<sup>10</sup> Thus, over the course of the early twentieth century, these newspapers provided routine coverage of events in China for millions of black Americans. I also examine the NAACP's *Crisis Magazine*, the UNIA's *Negro World*, *The Messenger*, and the *Student Association Newsletter*, as well as the personal papers of Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Hubert Harrison, to determine why these leaders supported and/or dismissed China's struggle.

## **Terminology**

In order to prevent the reader from feeling as though I am trafficking in racial epithets, it is important to define a few terms used throughout this work. I use the term "darker races," "colored races," and a variation of the two terms in order to capture a moment in time in which everyone from W.E.B. Du Bois to Lothrop Stoddard appropriated the nineteenth century color typology used to categorize races to refer to all non-white, oppressed peoples. More importantly, reference to the "darker races" became synonymous with the colonial world. The appeal to the "darker race" served to facilitate alliance building.

Marc Gallicchio has defined the term "black internationalism" as the "ideology that stressed the role of race and racism in world affairs."<sup>11</sup> However, this definition is highly problematic. The point made by Brenda Gayle Plummer that black Americans "never expressed a single, monolithic opinion on international matters," is important for complicating Gallicchio's confining definition of black internationalism.<sup>12</sup> To take into account the combination of political ideologies by African American leaders and journalists, I argue that there were and continue to

---

<sup>10</sup> Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson II, *A History of the Black Press*, 138.

<sup>11</sup> Marc Gallicchio, *The African American encounter with Japan and China : Black internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, 1.

## ***Introduction***

exist *different strands* of black internationalism. As such, it was not a paradox for the *Chicago Defender* to combine a class analysis of capitalism with a critique emphasizing the racial elements of imperialism when discussing events in China.

Lastly, I interchange “African American” and “black American” throughout my senior thesis. I do this for three reasons. From the standpoint of style and flow, my work naturally reads better with language variation. Secondly, my thesis does not just examine native born blacks such as Du Bois and A. Phillip Randolph. With the migration of blacks from the West Indies between 1910-1920, the African American community expanded to include various members of the African Diaspora. As such, I often use black American when describing the writings and sentiments of Jamaican leader Marcus Garvey, and African American to describe Harlem radicals like Randolph. Still, as scholar Kevin K. Gaines has pointed out, “it is far easier to agree on incorrect designations for group identity than on a single ‘correct’ one.”<sup>13</sup>

## **Outline**

Chapter One serves as a background chapter in which I document the early phases of black internationalism. In particular I explore the significance of the Russo-Japanese war. Japan’s 1905 victory was responsible for bringing the Far East to the attention of African Americans. I also explore the *Defender* and *Courier’s* early coverage of China. Early coverage employed common tropes and stereotypes to describe China as a stagnant, docile nation. However, following the 1911 Revolution in China, the *Defender* and *Courier* appropriated Orientalist rhetoric to describe China’s “awakening” in a positive light.

---

<sup>13</sup> Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, “A note on Usage.”

## *Introduction*

Chapter Two reveals how different strands of black internationalism emerged following the Great Migration of blacks from the south and the West Indies to northern centers. From this migration emerged new leaders who also had new ideological weapons at their disposal to not only critique American racism and imperialism but each other as well. Following World War I, these leaders combined different weapons to develop an analysis of China. For many, China was seen as a part of the “rising tide of color.” The vague grouping of China with Japan and Mexico called for international solidarity between the “darker races.” Such solidarity would either lead to a race war and result in the overthrow of white world rule, or force white Americans and Europeans to enact racial reform to prevent global annihilation. By grouping all non-white peoples together, African Americans included themselves in the “rising tide of color,” a part of a global struggle against any and all forms of “white” exploitation.

In Chapter Three we see African Americans substitute the vague analysis of the “rising tide of color” with a detailed examination of the anti-Christianity and anti-imperialist movement in China. African Americans writing for the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News*, as well as the many readers of these two papers, supported the Chinese protests against cultural imperialism. African American support of the protests was due in large part to the recognition that “white Christianity” had left a trail of destruction both in the United States and around the globe. Moreover, the unexpected support for China among African American, college educated, Christians, shows how the direct encounter between black students and Chinese Christian students and leaders allowed members of the Student Division of the YMCA to criticize U.S. imperialism. Subsequently, these students organized information networks informing black students of political and economic affairs in China.

## *Introduction*

Chapter Four explores the role of correspondents in shaping the coverage of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Indeed, the *Defender* and *Courier* provide a radically different portrayal of the war. During the 1930s, the *Chicago Defender's* main foreign correspondent, Homer Smith and the foreign editor Metz T.P. Lochard saw Japan as an imperialist nation, no different from the United States and Britain. While the *Defender* supported China's attempt to fight off Japanese imperialism, the *Courier* appropriated Orientalist rhetoric to urge African Americans to avoid China's stagnant path. This difference in coverage can be attributed to the ideological differences between the *Defender* and *Courier's*.

From the African Diaspora to the Far East: Early Phases of Black Internationalism

### **Chapter Outline**

The rise of the United States as an imperial power served as the catalyst for the development of twentieth century black international thought. Nineteenth century black internationalists tended to combine a black nationalist critique with an international perspective centered on possible sites for black migration. Faced with the intensification of southern white supremacy and the reality that many of the northern states that outlawed slavery did not provide for black enfranchisement, nineteenth century black internationalists such as Martin Delany and James Theodore Holly called for black migration to Liberia and Haiti, respectively. Nevertheless, these nineteenth century black internationalists rarely examined the internal dynamics of non-white nations. Thus, they developed a limited international consciousness based on separatism.<sup>1</sup>

The 1900 Pan-African Conference exposed members of the African Diaspora to the connections between U.S. racism and colonialism. Still, it took Japan's victory over Russia for many black Americans to examine affairs in the Far East. African Americans along with many other colonized subjects looked at Japan as a model for their own development. Moreover, many saw the victory of one colonial nation as a victory for all non-white peoples. As a victim of imperialism, African Americans took great interest in China following the 1911 revolution. In its

---

<sup>1</sup> Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, 11.

early coverage, the black press often used Orientalist rhetoric to describe Chinese culture, religion and political affairs. While China's awakening confirmed fears of the "yellow peril" for mainstream members of the American press, the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* appropriated Orientalist rhetoric to view China's emancipation from its stagnancy as a positive occurrence for all non-white nations. The *Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* stressed the need for African Americans to emulate China's political model of intrepid, collective leadership.

### **The nascent connection between U.S. Racism and Colonialism**

Following the Spanish-American and Philippine-American war, the United States entered the world stage as an imperial power. The United States' imperial status helped foster a new phase of black international thought which recognized that, in many ways, imperialism was akin to U.S. racism. The direct encounter between African American and Filipino soldiers reinforced the nascent recognition of the relationship between racism and imperialism. African American soldiers fighting in the Philippines saw white, American soldiers "commonly characterize the Filipinos on the whole as filthy, diseased, lazy," even appropriating the term "nigger" to apply to Filipinos. African Americans also experienced disparaging remarks and were subjected to inferior treatment while serving in the Philippines.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, the African American press noted with concern the implications of U.S. involvement in the Philippines and the racial character of the war. Indeed, editors writing for black newspapers such as the *Washington Bee*, *Richmond Planet*, and *A.M.E. Church Review*, were some of the earliest to equate American imperialism in the Philippines to the Jim Crow South, even going so far as to discourage black enlistment during the Philippine-American war.<sup>3</sup> The equivalence between imperialism and U.S. racism was at the heart of this strand of early

---

<sup>2</sup> Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States & the Philippines*, 102-103.

<sup>3</sup> Kramer, 119.

twentieth century black international thought. Indeed, the spread of American racism around the world via imperialism led “budding internationalists to sympathize with the nonwhite subjects of empire around the globe.”<sup>4</sup>

A central component of the African American critique of imperialism was that white nations were perpetuating it. African Americans could not ignore the striking reality that whether in the Belgian Congo, French Algeria, or British India, many of the world’s non-white peoples were victims of white subjugation. European spheres of influence in Africa and Asia combined with U.S. imperialism in the Philippines reiterated the relationship between white skin and imperialism.

As early as the mid-eighteenth century, discussions of geographical determinism, or the belief “that a people’s virtue and political capacity depended on climate and topography,” greatly influenced European notions of race. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the “centrality of racism” became a regular feature of European society due in large measure to increased colonization of the world’s non-white world and the need to justify the brutality of European imperialism.<sup>5</sup> Late nineteenth century America also saw a similar intensification of racial theories to justify racism. Faced with the “Negro Problem,” white social scientists argued that “the Darwinian laws governing race development heralded nothing short of the extinction of American blacks.”<sup>6</sup> Such theories were used to justify the inferior treatment of blacks based on “scientific” facts. Moreover, social scientists also used these theories to classify the world in terms of race, defining the Chinese and Japanese as members of the Yellow Race, Native Americans as members of the Red Race, and those from Africa as part of the Black race.

---

<sup>4</sup> Marc Gallicchio, *The African American encounter with Japan and China: Black internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, Volume One*, 201-204.

<sup>6</sup> Mia Bay, “‘The World Was Thinking Wrong About Race’: *The Philadelphia Negro* and Nineteenth-Century Science,” in *W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and the City*, ed. Michael Katz and Thomas Sugrue, 42-44.



## **1900 Pan African Conference: Du Bois on the World Stage**

To be sure, editors of newspapers such as the *Washington Bee* and *A.M.E. Church Review* were minority voices in their recognition of the global relationship between imperialism and U.S. racism.<sup>7</sup> For the most part, late nineteenth and early twentieth century black internationalists instead attempted to promote solidarity among members of the African Diaspora. The Pan-African Conference of 1900 brought together thirty-two delegates in London that summer to discuss the need for solidarity between participating nations and the relationship between imperialism and racism.

Many of the participants were well acquainted with the white supremacist and the colonial officer. Eleven participants traveled from the United States, and burgeoning black leaders including W.E.B. Du Bois and Anna J. Cooper spoke on topics such as the “The Negro Problem in America.” These black internationalists were further exposed to the effects of imperialism in Africa and the West Indies. Four participants from Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast spoke on the dreadful conditions back home and the demand for independence. The eleven representatives from the West Indies, representing Trinidad, Jamaica, and Antigua, among other islands, spoke of the colonial agent and systematic job discrimination.<sup>8</sup> Many of these delegates returned home with a heightened awareness of the internationalism of racism and economic exploitation.

The participation of the thirty-two year old W.E.B. Du Bois is particularly notable. Du Bois’s preceding activity in helping to organize the Conference led him to formulate an international consciousness which would, with some exceptions, remain relatively consistent well into the twentieth century. Just seven months before traveling to London, W.E.B. Du Bois

---

<sup>7</sup> Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement: a history of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa*, 138.

<sup>8</sup> Geiss, 183.

presented a paper entitled “The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind” at the third annual American Negro Academy in 1899.<sup>9</sup> The paper is marked by three notable features, namely Du Bois’ language describing the composition of the world, the suggestion of a “global color line,” and the need for solidarity with the “dark races.” Still, though W.E.B. Du Bois commented on the plight of non-white peoples, his speech is a reflection of European, Romantic classifications of civilization as well as his standing as a middle class intellectual.

Like other African American editors and church leaders, W.E.B. Du Bois paid special attention to the United States’ rise as an imperial power. As a precursor to his famous phrase, “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” Du Bois urged his audience to reflect on the reality that “the social problem of the twentieth century is to be the relation of the civilized world to the dark races.”<sup>10</sup> However, Du Bois did not directly criticize U.S. imperialism. Du Bois instead saw U.S. acquisition of the Philippines as being “the greatest event since the Civil War and demands attention and action on our part.” Du Bois, noting that with Philippine acquisition, “the colored population of our land is...about to be doubled,” thus argued that African Americans’ stake in U.S. imperialism rested on the numerical strengthening of the nonwhite population. With this sentence we discover how W.E.B. Du Bois thought about imperialism, not in terms of how imperialism would affect the colonized nations, but how the inclusion of their status as imperial subjects might lead to the overall strengthening of the black Americans.

Du Bois’ comments also reveal that his understanding of imperialism was greatly influenced by his status as an elite intellectual. Having received educational training at Harvard and the

---

<sup>9</sup> Nahum D. Chandler, “The Figure of W.E.B. Du Bois as a Problem for Thought,” *The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2007), 42.

<sup>10</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind,” in *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, ed. Eric Sundquist, 48.

University of Berlin, Du Bois was undoubtedly influenced by nineteenth-century European ideas on race, and the relationship between civilization and progress. One cannot overlook his time as a graduate student in Berlin. Many scholars have written about German influence on Du Bois's scholarship, arguing that German emphasis on "using science as its foundation for social policy reform" forced Du Bois to shift his intellectual emphasis from philosophy and history to science.<sup>11</sup> Few, however, have discussed German influence on W.E.B. Du Bois' international thought.

One historian has characterized the period from 1790 to 1890 as the age of "Romantic Dominance." Indeed, Romantic thought influenced nearly all aspects of German life. The German concept stressed the importance of racial essence, using language as a barometer to classify and arrange the world's races. Geographical determinism and the necessity of analyzing the specific historical development of each race were also critical tenets of German Romantic thought.<sup>12</sup> The development of Romanticism was taken to its extreme conclusion at Göttingen University in which "the chief unifying principle of its content was ethnicity and racism."<sup>13</sup> During the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, professors at Göttingen constructed biographies of peoples, devised complex divisions of the races, and established a racial hierarchy of the world. It was not uncommon for Göttingen scholars to argue that the human race living outside of Europe had degenerated due to unfavorable climate conditions.<sup>14</sup> German romanticism and nationalism contributed to Eurocentricism, the "culturalist phenomenon" that "assumes the existence of irreducibly distinct cultural invariants that shape the historic paths of different

---

<sup>11</sup> Barrington Edwards, "W.E.B. Du Bois Between Worlds: Berlin, Empirical Social Research, and the Race Question," *Cambridge University Press*, (2006), 396-401. See also Francis Broderick's *German Influence on the Scholarship of W.E.B. Du Bois* and Sieglinde Lemke's *Berlin and Boundaries: sollen versus geschehen*.

<sup>12</sup> Bernal, 205.

<sup>13</sup> Bernal, 215.

<sup>14</sup> Bernal, 219.

peoples.”<sup>15</sup> These three factors fostered the notion of Europe’s duty to uplift the worlds lesser races.

Although Du Bois did not study at Göttingen University, as a student at Berlin University, two of his most influential professors, Adolf Wagner and Heinrich Von Treitschke, were products of the bastion of German Romanticism. Du Bois studied under the political economist Wagner and took a series of lectures offered by Treitschke.<sup>16</sup> From these products of Göttingen, Du Bois would have no doubt been exposed to and influenced by a Romantic conception of racial essence. As a student at Berlin, Du Bois read and was influenced by Gottfried Von Herder’s 1774 treatise *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der Menschlichen Seele*.<sup>17</sup> As one of the architects of Romanticism, Herder argued that there was a continuum of civilization, ranging from the lower to more civilized, sophisticated peoples.<sup>18</sup> We find a similar principle in Du Bois’ 1897 speech, “The Conservation of the Races” in which Du Bois argued that there were “spiritual and mental differences” between the “eight distinctly differentiated races” of the world. Du Bois attributed certain characteristics to each European individual race, associating constitutional liberty with the English, and science and philosophy with Germans.<sup>19</sup>

Upon his return from Germany, Du Bois was well equipped to tackle the biological determinism of U.S. social scientists. However, while historian Mia Bay is correct when she writes that during the late nineteenth century Du Bois “broke ranks” with American sociologists such as Herbert Spencer and Frederick Hoffman and their pseudo-scientific theories of the inherent inferiority of African Americans, as of 1899, Du Bois used European ideas on race,

---

<sup>15</sup> Samir Amin, *Eurocentricism*, translated by Russell Moore, vii.

<sup>16</sup> Edwards, 407.

<sup>17</sup> Translated: Johann Gottfried Von Herder’s *On Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*.

<sup>18</sup> Sieglinde Lemke, “Berlin and Boundaries: Sollen versus Geschehen,” *Boundary 2*, Vol. 27, No. 3, (Fall 2000), 61.

<sup>19</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Conservation Races,” in *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, ed. Eric Sundquist, 42.

civilization and progress to formulate his conception of the role of imperialism.<sup>20</sup> With this in mind, we can begin to understand Du Bois' strand of black internationalism.

Du Bois developed a ranking system in order to reconcile his strong belief in European notions of progress with the undeniable terror caused by European imperialism. Much like his appraisal of U.S. acquisition of former Spanish territories, Du Bois also argued that African Americans had a stake in the Second Boer war of 1899-1902. According to Du Bois, the war "is of interest to us because it means the wider extension among our own kith and kin of the influence of that European nation whose success in dealing with underdeveloped races has been far greater than any others."<sup>21</sup> For Du Bois, Great Britain demonstrated the capacity to uplift the "underdeveloped races." Du Bois made an exception for British imperialism: "say what we will of England's rapacity and injustice (and much can be said), the plain fact remains that no other European nation-and America least of all- has governed its alien subjects with half the wisdom and justice that England has." Du Bois clearly ignored the glaring contradiction between British "injustice" and that nations alleged "just" treatment of imperial subjects.

Though British imperialism in India and Egypt was by no means benign, Du Bois still believed that British rule "is at least a vast improvement on Arab slave traders and Dutch brutality."<sup>22</sup> The distinction and comparison between the "rapacity" of one country versus the "brutality" of another was a common feature of Du Bois' international perspective during the twentieth century. Although the countries to which he referred and the terminology he used would change, Du Bois continued to stress the importance of uplifting the "underdeveloped races." The use of a ranking system with which to evaluate the actions of imperial nations gave Du Bois the chance to reconcile the tension between his affinity towards European/Romantic

---

<sup>20</sup> Bay, "The World Was Thinking Wrong About Race," 42-44.

<sup>21</sup> Du Bois, "The Present Outlook," 48.

<sup>22</sup> Du Bois, "The Present Outlook," 48.

ideals and the cruelty of European imperialism. Moreover, this idea would greatly influence Du Bois' thought towards Japan. Following the Russo-Japanese war, Du Bois replaced Britain with Japan. Because of Japan's image as a "civilized," "colored nation," Du Bois ignored Japanese imperialism in China by extending the idea of the "talented tenth" to the global sphere, seeing in Japan as being best equipped to uplift the Asian masses.

### **Japan Becomes the Champion of the "Darker Races"**

The Russo-Japanese war expanded black internationalism by forcing African Americans to look beyond the African Diaspora. Subsequently, black Americans paid special attention to Japan. According to historian Ernest Allen Jr., Japan's defeat of Russia marked the "dawn of pro-Japanese sentiment among African Americans."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, other historians have argued that from 1905 until the 1940s, "black intellectuals, journalists and editors, leaders of radical mass movements...frequently viewed international events from a Japanese perspective."<sup>24</sup> It is true that from 1905 to 1922, Japan was by in large measure seen as the "Champion of the Darker Races." However, while offering a compelling account of black perceptions of Japan, these historians have oversimplified the complex strands of black international thought that developed during and immediately after World War I.

For nearly thirty years, Russia and Japan had been on the brink of war. During an age of intense competition over land, power, and resources, Russia's decision to construct the Siberian Railway project in 1891 was seen as a further example of Russia's ambitions to dominate Asia.<sup>25</sup> Thus, international onlookers were hardly surprised when the two nations officially declared war in February 1904. Indeed, "the Russo-Japanese war was the long anticipated flashpoint of the

---

<sup>23</sup> Ernest Allen Jr, "When Japan Was the 'Champion of the Darker Races': Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism," *Black Scholar* 24 (1994), 28.

<sup>24</sup> Gallicchio, 3.

<sup>25</sup> R.M. Connaughton, *Rising Sun and Tumbling Bear: Russia's War with Japan*, 13.

enmity between two expanding powers.”<sup>26</sup> The outcome, however, was a surprise to all.

Following nineteen months of warfare, Japan emerged as the victor and entered onto the world stage as a force to be reckoned with.

Even before the Russo-Japanese war, Japan was widely seen as a formidable threat because of its strong centralized state and ideal qualities of manhood. Unlike the Chinese or Filipino, who were seen as docile, cowardice and effeminate, the Japanese were disciplined, self-determined, and assertive, demonstrating the same degree of manhood as the Anglo-Saxon. In short, “anti-Japanese racism was not based on an assured belief that the Japanese were inferior, but on a fear that they were *not*.”<sup>27</sup>

The “darker races” were among the millions of followers of the Russo-Japanese war. Japan’s defeat of the “mighty” Russian Empire stimulated nationalist movements in the Philippines, throughout Southeast Asia, the Ottoman Empire and India.<sup>28</sup> Japan’s victory “became a model for emulation and admiration among people under, or threatened with, colonial rule.”<sup>29</sup> Though African Americans were not colonized subjects in the strictest sense of the word, they were victims of U.S. racism and disenfranchisement. Thus, the war had a psychological impact on black Americans who became convinced that a non-white power could defeat white world rule.

Scholars have written about the impact of Japan’s victory on individual leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington.<sup>30</sup> However, Du Bois articulated his favorable views towards Japan some eight years earlier. In 1897, Du Bois provided a bleak assessment of China and strong affinity towards Japan. On the one hand, China served as “an example of that

---

<sup>26</sup> Rotem Kowner, *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Moon-Kie Jung, *Reworking Race: The Making of Hawaii’s Interracial Labor Movement*, 82-84.

<sup>28</sup> Kowner, 19-20.

<sup>29</sup> Kowner, ii-2.

<sup>30</sup> Gallicchio, 15-16.

marvelous internal decay that overcomes the nation which trifles with Truth and Right and Justice, and makes force and fraud and dishonesty and caste distinction the rule of its life and government.”<sup>31</sup> According to Du Bois, the Qing Dynasty suffered from more than racial problems. China was a *cultural cul de sac*; a once great nation that had degenerated due to stagnant caste-like systems of political rule. W.E.B. Du Bois did not specify which “advanced” country or race had committed “unbridled injustice” against China. What was important for Du Bois was the fact that China, much like the Ottoman Empire, was the victim of years of internal decay which “ultimately paralyzed the pristine vigor” of the Middle Kingdom.

Then there was Japan, described by Du Bois as the “one bright spot in Asia.”<sup>32</sup> Well before the Russo-Japanese war, Du Bois admired Japan not only because of “her recent admission to the ranks of modern civilized nations,” but also because Japan was successful in ridding itself of European foreign consular courts, which was the “greatest concession to the color line which the nineteenth century has seen.”<sup>33</sup> From his early opinion of Japan, especially when compared to his description of China, we discover that Du Bois placed a premium on being a “civilized,” “developed” nation. Moreover, Du Bois’s emphasis on self-rule without foreign intervention speaks directly to the point that Japan became “a model for political development” following the Russo-Japanese war.<sup>34</sup>

The Russo-Japanese war not only “punctured the myth of white supremacy” among non-white peoples, but also incorporated China into black international consciousness.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, any form of resistance throughout the non-white world was seen as a victory for the darker races. Thus, when China launched a boycott against American goods in 1905 following U.S. extension

---

<sup>31</sup> Du Bois, “The Present Outlook for the Dark Races of Mankind,” 49.

<sup>32</sup> Bernal, 49-50.

<sup>33</sup> Bernal, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Allen, 28.

<sup>35</sup> Gallicchio, 3.



of the Chinese Exclusion Act, African Americans supported China's attempt to liberate itself from foreign manufacturing.<sup>36</sup> It is important to note however, that early opinion among black Americans towards China was not radically different from that of mainstream America. African American newspapers tended to focus on the "superstitiousness" and stagnancy of the Chinese, descriptions that were all too common among African Americans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

### **Early Coverage of China**

With the founding of the *Chicago Defender* in 1905 and *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1907, new voices made their appearance in black America. Although the mandate of all black periodicals was to cover the news, activities and achievements of African Americans, topics largely ignored in the mainstream press, the editorial stance of these two newspapers were radically different. Founded in 1905 by Robert S. Abbott, the *Defender* routinely reporting on the widespread lynching's and hypocrisy of Wilsonian Democracy. As a radical voice with communist leanings, the *Defender* became one of the earliest critics of Japanese Imperialism and supporters of China's struggle against foreign domination.

The *Courier's* editorial stance was "anti-union, anti-communist, and somewhat isolationist."<sup>37</sup> Robert L. Vann's commitment to capitalist enterprise and racial uplift greatly influenced the *Courier's* support of Japan. The *Defender* and *Courier* were highly instrumental in formulating different strands of black internationalism, covering international events that were pertinent to the racial crisis in America. Still, while these black newspapers developed dissimilar internationalist perspectives, their early coverage of China tended to reflect broader American perceptions of that country.

---

<sup>36</sup> Gallicchio, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Aurora Wallace, *Newspapers and the Making of Modern America*, 56-61.

The period between 1882 and 1943 has been classified as “an age of exclusion” for Chinese immigration.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, this period saw the passage of numerous discriminatory immigration laws such as the Scott Act of 1888, which denied return to 20,000 Chinese laborers who had temporarily left the United States; the Gresham-Yang Treaty of 1894, which placed a ten year ban on Chinese laborers entering the United States; and the infamous Immigration Act of 1924. Newly arrived Chinese migrants were also subjected to “separate but equal” policies in San Francisco, restricting their access to public school education.<sup>39</sup>

Although California was the leading state advocating Chinese exclusion, anti-Chinese sentiment was a national phenomenon.<sup>40</sup> Efforts led by the Boot and Shoemakers’ White Labor League, the Workingmen’s Party, and other labor unions, helped to produce a climate that depicted the Chinese immigrants as displacing white laborers. In periodicals such as *The Wasp* and *Puck Magazine* stereotypes abounded, with the Chinese portrayed as a superstitious, stagnant, and ignorant race.<sup>41</sup>

Black newspapers also employed these stereotypes. Just as the larger country saw the Manchu pig tail as a mark of China’s anachronistic traditions, so too was this opinion expressed in the *Defender*. In two of its earliest articles covering affairs in China, the *Defender* declared that as a “badge of submission” to Manchu rule, “undoubtedly the pigtail must go.”<sup>42</sup> The *Defender* was well aware of the numerous depictions of the Chinese by cartoonists. Indeed, the same language was used twelve years before in *Puck Magazine*: “The Pigtail has Got to Go.” In a political cartoon, *Puck Magazine* illustrated a white woman as the beacon of civilization,

---

<sup>38</sup> Sucheng Chan, *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, viii.

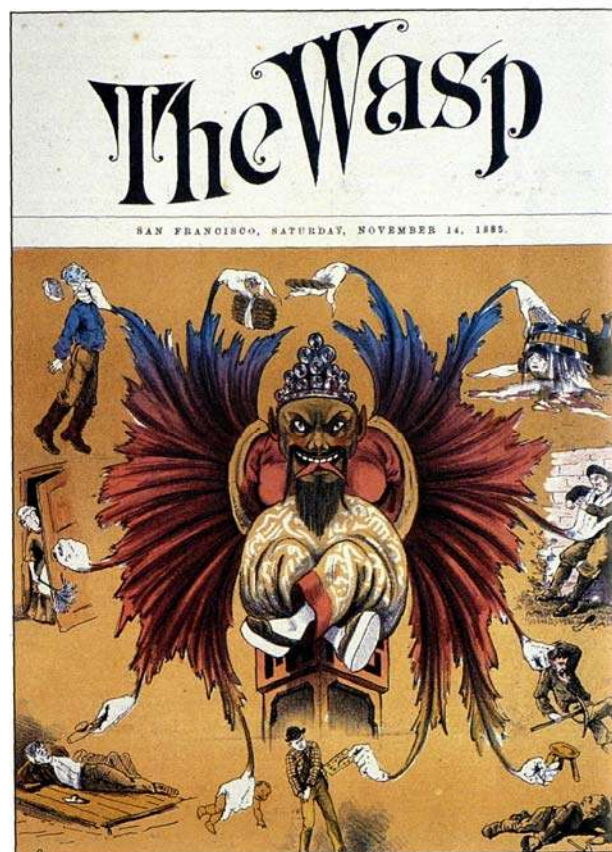
<sup>39</sup> Phillip P. Choy, et. al., *Coming Man: 19<sup>th</sup> century American Perceptions of the Chinese, 169-170*.

<sup>40</sup> Christian G. Fritz, “Due Process, Treaty Rights, and Chinese Exclusion, 1882-1891,” in *Entry Denied*, ed. Sucheng Chan, 25.

<sup>41</sup> See Phillip P. Choy’s *Coming Man: 19<sup>th</sup> century American Perceptions of the Chinese* for illustrations.

<sup>42</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Article 3-No Title,” April 8, 1911. See also *Chicago Defender*, “The Pig Tail Not Chinese,” December 9, 1911.

equipped with large scissors with the words “19<sup>th</sup> century” and “Progress” etched into the blades. The civilized woman used her scissors to cut the Chinese pig tail, described as one of China’s “worn out traditions.”<sup>43</sup> The cartoon as well as the *Defender*’s article underscores the widespread belief in Chinese cultural inferiority, stagnancy, and the progress of white civilization.



“Yellow Peril” propaganda in *The Wasp*.

That the *Defender* employed common stereotypes used by many of the same politicians and journalists who saw African Americans as inferior, points to the issue of authorship. Who wrote the various articles on foreign affairs? How did African American newspapers receive information about events in China? With inadequate financial resources and limited staff, many

<sup>43</sup> *Puck Magazine*, “The Pigtail Has Got to Go,” cited in *Coming Man*, 67.

black newspapers relied on a tailoring system, or the practice of rewriting articles taken from the mainstream press, to provide coverage of both domestic and international affairs. Interestingly, it was not uncommon for other members of the black press to rewrite articles taken from the *Defender*. In this way, the *Defender* served as a *de facto* news agency for the black press.<sup>44</sup>

At times the tailoring system was problematic. With a proclivity for favoring sensationalist headlines over journalistic substance, often correspondents writing for the *Defender* did not fully investigate the events reported in its columns. As a result, black newspapers that rewrote articles from the *Defender*, did not receive a full and complete account of events. This proved to be an even greater problem when covering international affairs. When Claude Barnett established the Associated Negro Press (ANP) in 1919, he hoped to replace the *Defender* as the sole dispensary of news for the black press. While Barnett secured the membership of the Baltimore *Afro-American*, *Amsterdam News*, and *Negro World*, during the 1920s the ANP reported on international events only when mainstream American sources could be used.<sup>45</sup>

By using American sources to report on international affairs, the *Defender* reiterated the common stereotypes of China. We can better understand the *Defender*'s coverage of China by examining Edward Said's discussion of nineteenth century Orientalism. Modern Orientalism included not just the Near East, but the Far East as well.<sup>46</sup> Said writes that "in the nineteenth century a modern professional terminology and practice were created whose existence dominated discourse about the Orient, whether by Orientalists or non-Orientalists." From the nineteenth century onward, "a formidable mechanism of omniscient definitions would present itself as

---

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence D. Hogan, *A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1919-1945*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> Hogan, 116.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 120.

the only one having suitable validity for your discussion.”<sup>47</sup> Words such as “stationary,” “despotism,” and “superstitious” pervaded nearly all references to China. This was true for Karl Marx, among many, and was also true for the *Chicago Defender*’s early coverage of China.<sup>48</sup>

What is fascinating, however, is the ways in which black newspapers transformed the “omnicompetent definitions,” using Orientalist vocabulary to paint a positive portrayal of China. Early coverage of China in the *Pittsburgh Courier* is a case in point. During the “journalistic heyday” of reporting on the “yellow peril” during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, magazines such as *The Wasp* as well as newspapers owned by William Randolph Hearst warned Americans of diseased, Chinese opium addicts who were sexual predators.<sup>49</sup> The American discussion of the “yellow peril” built upon centuries of European religious fears of China as “the fourth beast of Daniel.”<sup>50</sup>

Unlike mainstream opinion, however, the *Courier* appropriated Orientalist rhetoric to show that the rise of China would benefit all non-white peoples. In 1911, the *Courier* published an article by Edward Alsworth Ross, a prominent sociologist and staunch opponent of Chinese immigration. The article forecast three outcomes of the “yellow peril.” Each outcome resulted in the rise of China and the demise of the West. If China “applied western knowledge to the serving of human life,” the result would be the “swamping of the slow-multiplying, high-wage, white societies.” Another possibility was the “overmatching of the white peoples by colossal armies of well-armed and well-drilled yellow men who, under the inspiring lead of some Oriental Bonaparte, will first expel the powers from eastern Asia, and later overrun Europe.” The third

---

<sup>47</sup> Said, 156.

<sup>48</sup> Said, 153.

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882*, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Miller, 110.

outcome was the “industrial conquest of the west by the Orient.”<sup>51</sup> Although Ross was not an African American, the *Pittsburgh Courier* included the article because the potential rise of China and the demise of the West would strengthen the collective non-white world. Thus, all discussions of the “yellow peril” were pertinent to African Americans.

A month earlier, in a section entitled “Chat on Current Literature Concerning the Negro,” the *Pittsburgh Courier* reaffirmed the relevance of events in China and Japan to African Americans. The *Courier* commented on an article appearing in a mainstream American newspaper describing the “New Japan.” The *Courier* seconded the fears permeating the article, writing that due to rapid growth in power and the potential to “arouse the Chinese from their sleep of centuries,” “Occidental nations are justified in their speculations about Japan’s future.”<sup>52</sup> Japan’s increased prestige, China’s “enormous population,” and Oriental “impenetrability” would pose a formidable threat to imperialist nations. Obscuring the ongoing tension between Japan and China, the *Courier* argued that a potential alliance between the two would result in the rise of a non-white power. Much like Japan’s victory over Russia, which had a mobilizing and inspirational affect on African Americans, an East Asian victory over the “Occident” would be a moment of success for all non-white peoples.

The first substantial article in the *Chicago Defender* covering political affairs in China reported on the 1911 Revolution. For the *Defender*, the Revolution and its aftermath marked China’s “awakening,” further proof that the twentieth century would see the rise of the “darker races.” The article also commented on the rise of new leadership in China, highlighting Yuan Shi

---

<sup>51</sup> *The Pittsburgh Courier*, “Afro-American Cullings,” June 10, 1911.

<sup>52</sup> *The Pittsburgh Courier*, “Chat on Current Literature Concerning the Negro,” May 27, 1911.

Kai, Li Yuanhong and Sun Yat-Sen. Through its commentary on China's new leadership, the *Defender* indirectly commented on the state of black American leadership.<sup>53</sup>

According to the *Defender*, the Revolution of 1911 brought an end to centuries of dynastic rule in China. The *Defender* appropriated Orientalist vocabulary to argue that the end of the Qing Dynasty signaled China's awakening. "For several decades the Chinese leaders have tried to arouse themselves from their lethargy, so as to become a wide awake, modern people." By embracing modern forms of government China would be able to assert itself on the world stage and resist white exploitation.

The *Defender* also placed strong emphasis on the rise of new leadership in China. For the *Defender*, Yuan Shikai, Li Yuanhong, and Sun Yat-sen, were well equipped to tackle foreign domination. What is most interesting is that, although Sun Yat-Sen is considered the architect of the revolution, he is treated as the third most important leader. Instead, Yuan Shi-Kai is described as being "pre-eminent" among China's new leadership. As the governor-general of Tianjin and commander of the Beiyang Army, Yuan Shikai used his military position to become one of the key leaders during and after the Revolution.<sup>54</sup> After being elected Premier in November 1911, Yuan subsequently used violence and corruption to cement his grip on power. Perhaps unaware of his repressive characteristics, the *Defender* admired Yuan Shikai's strong military past and saw him as "a man of action." Indeed, the image of Yuan Shi-Kai adjacent to the article itself substantiates his status as being the most important leader.

---

<sup>53</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "Yuan Shi-Kai Man of Action," July 6, 1912.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Spence, *The New Republic: In Search for Modern China*, 254-255.



“Yuan Shi-Kai Man of Action,” *Chicago Defender*, July 6, 1912.

Li Yuanhong was the second most important leader. To the *Defender*, Hung was “the real hero of the Revolution.” The article does not explain why Li Yuanhong was elevated to such status, failing to mention his actions during the revolution. Still, Li Yuanhong is described as the number two man because he is “thorough, painstaking and conscientious in all his work.” Such strength as a leader should give the Chinese people hope, for “any reactionary movement would find in Li Yuanhong a rock against which it would hurl itself in vain.”

The description of Yuan Shikai and Li Yuanhong as strong, indomitable figures reveals the *Defender’s* desire to see similar leadership in the African American community. This desire is underscored by examining the article’s description of Sun Yat-Sen. Both the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Defender* were in agreement that it was Dr. Sun “who did so much to make the Chinese Republic possible.”<sup>55</sup> However, although Sun “originated and planned the revolution,” the *Defender* marginalized the pioneer. Though unfamiliar with the specific actions of Yuan Shikai and Li Yuanhong, the *Defender* was aware of Sun Yat-Sen’s educational background. The

---

<sup>55</sup> *The Pittsburgh Courier*, “Afro-American Cullings,” November 1, 1911.



*Defender* described Sun as the third most important leader, not only because he lacked strong characteristics, but also because he was “more of a foreigner than a Chinese.” Sun was one of many Chinese leaders who had studied revolutionary ideas not in China, but in Hawaii and Japan. Moreover, he discovered news of the Wuchang uprising, a pivotal moment leading up to the Revolution, in a Denver newspaper while traveling to Kansas City.<sup>56</sup> As “a dreamer and an idealist,” the *Defender* saw Sun Yat-Sen as the author of “utopian and perhaps unrecognizable” dreams. Though the *Defender* devalued “idealists,” the newspaper understood the importance of individuals such as Sun, seeing them as responsible for generating visions “useful in teaching the Chinese to turn their thoughts to the future instead of to the past.”

By emphasizing China’s “rocklike” leadership, the *Defender* offered its own conception of African American leadership. The *Defender* wanted leaders who would be “men of action,” not just those who primarily stressed economic gains and condemned political agitation. Even though “idealists” and “dreamers” remained important for proposing new solutions and visions for the future, according to the *Defender*, the African American community needed leaders who understood “the capacities as well as the needs of his people.” Only individuals who had spent time in the black community could acquire this kind of knowledge. Most importantly, the *Defender* believed that the African American community, like the Chinese, needed valiant, collective leadership.

Even after the rise of new leadership, the *Defender* did not completely abandon common stereotypes of the Chinese. According to journalist Clyde Whitmer, following the 1911 Revolution, China was still plagued by superstitious beliefs. “In spite of the sprinkle of education and advances made during the last decade by occidental commerce and missionary efforts,” observed Whitmer, China was still full of “ignorant natives.” Whitmer saw Chinese belief “that

---

<sup>56</sup> Spence, 266.

the innumerable evil spirits of the dead are real and terrible demons” as especially preposterous. This positive conception of missionary activity in China would dramatically shift during the 1920s, with the *Defender* criticizing white Christianity as the first line of defense for imperialist nations. During the early coverage of China however, Whitmer painted China as a backward, superstitious nation. As of 1915, the new leaders of the Republic had not succeeded in eradicating ignorance among the Chinese masses.<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusion**

World War I and the emergence of new black leaders provided a more nuanced critique of China, which ultimately broke free from Orientalist conceptions of China. In its stead, many black leaders and newspapers employed nineteenth century color typology to cast China, along with Japan, as part of a “rising tide of color.” Different strands of black internationalism emerged based largely on social class, regional activity as well as the combinations of various political philosophies and ideologies. These factors influenced how African Americans understood China’s struggle for stability in the face of Japanese and foreign aggression.

---

<sup>57</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Keep Up Unrest in China,” February 20, 1915.

## World War I: The Emergence of Different Strands of Black Internationalism

### Chapter Outline

The political climate between 1910 and 1919 nourished the emergence of different strands of black internationalism. The southern winds brought with them the Great Migration of blacks from the rural south and West Indies to northern cities.<sup>1</sup> Many of these new voices drew upon the plethora of ideological weapons, using them to both challenge existing black leadership, and articulate their own vision for black liberation. Although the exclusion of more radical elements from the Paris Peace Conference revealed the growing fragmentation between black leaders, Japan's proposal of the racial equality clause strengthened its status among many African Americans as the "Champion of the Darker Races." During the 1920s black leaders and the black press routinely referred to the "rising tide of color," defined as the global unification of non-white peoples against white world rule. Still, the vague grouping of the "darker races" obscured existing tensions between non-white nations. In their analyses of China between WWI and 1924, the *Chicago Defender*, among others, echoed the sentiments of W.E.B. Du Bois, believing that Japan would tutor China on the methods and strategies to defeat imperialism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chicago was one of many northern cities that witnessed a dramatic shift in demographic, simultaneously ushering in radical ideas and new leadership. Between 1910 and 1920 the black population in Chicago rose from 44,103 to 109,458. See James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black southerners, and the Great Migration*.

## **New Voices, New Tensions**

The massive flood of immigrants from the West Indies to urban centers brought into being the strong leadership espoused by the *Chicago Defender*. Afro-Caribbeans such as Marcus Garvey, Hubert H. Harrison, and W.A. Domingo, brought their own unique experience as colonial subjects with them to northern cities.<sup>2</sup> What is more, black Americans had new weapons at their disposal. The astonishing proliferation of radical ideas during this period gave these new leaders different grounds for criticizing American society, imperialism, and each other. Indeed, all had to contend with and/or had at their behest “ideologies of colonial unrest, migrations, nationalism, socialism, communism, socialism, racism, reformism, and all forms of radicalism and federal repression.”<sup>3</sup> During the turbulent period of World War I, black Americans, influenced by socialism, nationalism, and anti-imperialism, articulated different strands of black internationalism.

To be sure, the advent of World War I revealed ideological and ethnic differences within organizations. There emerged a great split within the Socialist Party in the United States over whether or not to support the war. Suddenly, within the alleged pacifist party, different ethnic groups expressed solidarity not with industrial workers, but with their respective home countries.<sup>4</sup> Black leaders were divided in their views of the causes and implications of the war. The vitriolic attacks by black leaders against one another during the war make the preceding debates between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington look like childish insults. There were two reasons for the conflict. First, how should African Americans interpret World War I? Should the war be seen as a noble effort to secure worldwide freedom or as divine punishment for the atrocities committed by white nations? What is more, would the aftermath of the Great

---

<sup>2</sup> Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 213.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 126.

<sup>4</sup> Theodore Draper, *Roots of American Communism*. Cited in Robinson, 211.

War allow the “darker races” to flourish? The Paris Peace Conference and questions over black leadership further exacerbated this conflict over the interpretation of World War I.

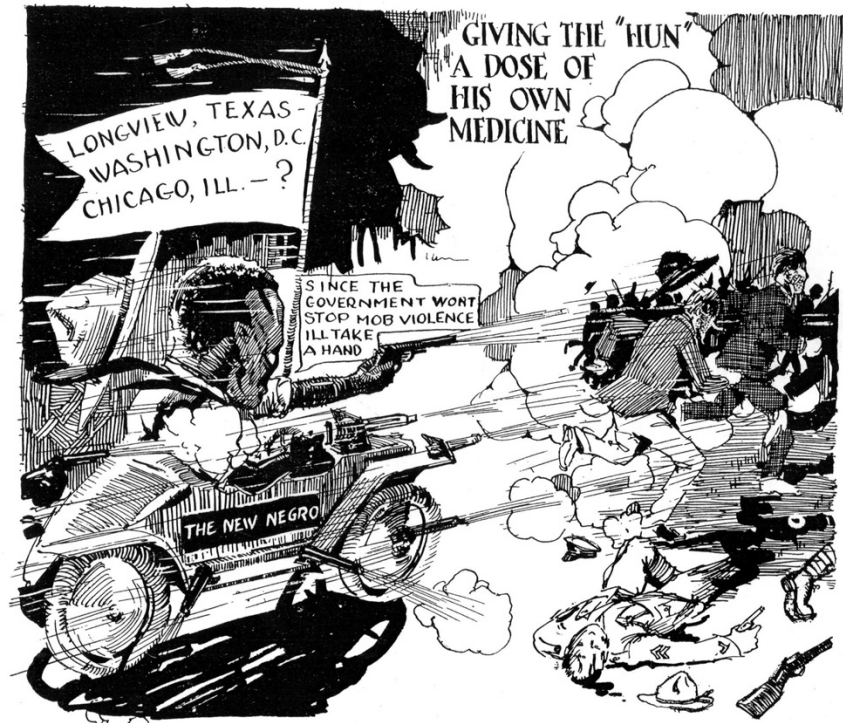
When Du Bois urged African Americans to “forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens,” there were many voices in northern cities ready to denounce him.<sup>5</sup> Hubert Harrison was one such voice. The Harlem radical by way of St. Croix directly criticized Du Bois, arguing that with his call for blacks to “close ranks,” the longstanding leader had become like “a knight in the middle ages who had had his armor stripped from him.” According to Harrison, Du Bois had betrayed the community that he was sworn to protect and forfeited his role as its leader.<sup>6</sup> Du Bois’s position during World War I marked a significant split between the new, more militant Negro and the older leadership.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Close Ranks,” *The Crisis*, Vol. 16, July 1918.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*, 388.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, 6.



THE "NEW CROWD NEGRO" MAKING AMERICA SAFE FOR HIMSELF

The "Old Crowd" versus the "New Crowd Negro," *The Messenger*, September 1919

Du Bois and Harrison also disagreed on the colonial question: should black Americans, as citizens-in-waiting, cast their lot with the United States, or were blacks best served by allying with the disenfranchised non-white peoples of the world? Writing for *The Voice*, which clearly articulated the New Negro Spirit, Harrison wrote, “as a representative of one of the races constituting the colored majority of the world...we find consolation in the hope that when this white world shall have been washed clean by its baptism of blood, the white race will be less able to thrust the strong hand of its sovereign will down the throats of the other races.”<sup>8</sup> Harrison believed that the millions of lives lost in the war would weaken imperial rule over the colored world.

The early traces of the New Negro spirit can be located in the *Defender*'s coverage of international affairs. Like Harrison, the *Chicago Defender* welcomed the Great War, seeing it as precursor to the end of white world supremacy. The early stages of the conflict taught white civilization, China and Japan valuable lessons. In an article titled “Foresight,” the *Defender* commented that “every now and then can be found in our leading publications a warning to the white brother to prepare, for the time is coming when his supremacy will be questioned.” For the *Defender* that moment had arrived. World War I taught China and Japan “that might in this day and time, means right,” adding that both countries recognized “that they must fight and die for their rights.”

For the *Defender*, black Americans could learn from China and Japan's foresight. If African Americans recognized that “the white man is no little God to be looked up to and worshipped” and employed direct action, they too would end their own oppression. With a militant, more aggressive, New Negro spirit, the *Defender* provided a call to arms for African Americans, emphatically declaring, “in this land of the free there is destined to be an awful

---

<sup>8</sup> Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, 203.

upheaval unless conditions are rapidly changed.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, if African Americans realized that the twentieth century was an age of imperialism and that only force led to racial justice, the darker races of the world would be an even more formidable force.

A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen echoed a similar sentiment from a socialist perspective. With a keen awareness of the economic destructiveness of imperialism, both were well equipped to explore the implications of World War I for the world’s “darker races.” As editors of the socialist newspaper, the *Messenger*, Randolph and Owen argued that “the real bone of contention in this war is darker peoples for cheap labor and darker people’s rich lands.” With surplus labor and the abundance of minerals and resources in Africa, China, and India, the capitalist nations of the world sought to exploit these “cheap lands and cheap labor,” even at the expense of global war.<sup>10</sup> Randolph and Owen urged black Americans to see the “economic greed and national imperialism [which] has been masquerading behind the philanthropic veil of carrying civilization to the benighted lands of the darker races” as the root of the war.<sup>11</sup>

## **The Paris Peace Conference**

The ceasefire announced on November 11, 1918 brought an end to four years of destruction. With this announcement, the citizens of the world turned their attention towards a new future; a future which, if consistent with Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points, would allow for “a more peaceful and inclusive international order.”<sup>12</sup> For the delegates from around the world, this new vision of international order would emerge from the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. With

---

<sup>9</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Foresight,” June 26, 1915.

<sup>10</sup> A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen, “Letter to Miss Lela Faye Secor,” *The Messenger*, Vol. I, No. II, November 1917, 10.

<sup>11</sup> *The Messenger*, “Negroes to be at Peace Conference in Europe,” Vol. II, No. I, January 1918, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Erez Manela, “Imagining Woodrow Wilson in Asia: Dreams of East-West Harmony and the Revolt against Empire, 1919,” *American Historical Review* 111, (2006), 5.



representatives from over 30 countries and countless more serving as unofficial delegates, participants arrived in search of their own self-determination.

Historians have duly noted the impact of Woodrow Wilson on the international scene. Indeed, leading up to the Paris Peace Conference, millions of onlookers saw Wilson as a “messiah;” the leader of a country which “could lead international society away from imperialism and toward the brotherhood of humanity.”<sup>13</sup> By the end of the Conference however, onlookers and participants discovered the large gap between rhetoric and action. Though Wilson called for “a free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims,” the principle of self-determination was meant only for those European territories emerging from empire.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the Egyptians, Irish, Chinese, among many, were left high and dry, exempt from “the exercise of these indefensible rights.”<sup>15</sup>

Other groups traveled to Paris skeptical of Wilson’s talk of self-determination. Long before Wilson issued his Fourteen Points, the southern Democrat had disillusioned African Americans. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter were initially attracted to President Wilson. From 1912 to 1916, Du Bois wrote several open letters to Wilson, begging him to actively combat American racism. Responding to the question of why African Americans supported the Democratic politician with ties to “all the negro-hating, disenfranchising and lynching South,” Du Bois stated that black Americans “faced disparate alternatives, and because, secondly, Mr. Wilson’s personality gives us hope that reactionary Southern sentiment will not control him.”<sup>16</sup> In September 1913, Du Bois wrote another open letter to President Wilson stating, “Sir, you have now been President of the United States for six months and what is the result? It is no

---

<sup>13</sup> Manela, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *Fourteen Points*, No. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Emile Joseph Dillon, *The Inside Story of the Paris Peace Conference*, 187.

<sup>16</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Election,” *The Crisis* 5 (December 1912). *Selections from the Crisis, 1911-1925*, Vol. I, edited by Herbert Aptheker, 46.

exaggeration to say that every enemy of the Negro race is greatly encouraged.”<sup>17</sup> By 1918 Du Bois saw Wilson as an outright hypocrite who neglected African American appeals for an end to violence and oppression.<sup>18</sup> Trotter pledged his support of Wilson during the 1911 Presidential campaign. However, after multiple discussions with the president on the subject of racial reform, Trotter believed that Wilson’s messiah like image and Fourteen Points were merely global charades.<sup>19</sup>

The Paris Peace Conference was a watershed moment for black internationalism. The Conference gave black Americans the chance to articulate the injustices of American life on a world stage and present their own vision to a world in shambles. Leading up to the Conference, groups such as the Pan-African Association, the National Equal Rights League, and the UNIA, among others, “began discussing the postwar settlement before hostilities ended” and attempted to send delegates to Paris.<sup>20</sup> In January 1918, A. Phillip Randolph spearheaded a campaign “to send men who are acquainted with the problems which the peace delegates will be called upon to settle.”<sup>21</sup>

The emphasis placed on selecting delegates who were most familiar with issues related to race and class highlights the crisis over leadership and the factors influencing Randolph’s international perspective. In the January 1918 issue of the *Messenger*, Chandler Owen included a critique of the two leaders who they saw as least familiar with the plight of black Americans. In the recurring *Who’s Who* section, W.E.B. Du Bois and Robert Russa Moton were highlighted and described as “a discredit to negroes and the laughing stock among whites.” Again, it was Du

---

<sup>17</sup> Du Bois, “Another Open Letter to Woodrow Wilson,” *The Crisis* 6 (September 1913). *Selections from the Crisis, 1911-1925*, Vol. I, ed. Herbert Aptheker, 64.

<sup>18</sup> Du Bois, “Our President.” *The Crisis* 15 (March 1918). *Selections from the Crisis, 1911-1925*, Vol. I, ed. Aptheker, 156.

<sup>19</sup> Ann Hagedorn, *Savage Peace: Hope and Fear in America 1919*, 107-109.

<sup>20</sup> Plummer, 15.

<sup>21</sup> *The Messenger*, “Negroes to be at Peace Conference in Europe,” Vol. II, No. I, January 1918, 6.

Bois' call for African Americans to "close ranks" that made him the target of criticism. For Owen, Du Bois' "superlative sureness of how the Negroes' participation in this war will remove race prejudice" was nonsensical, arguing that black participation in previous war efforts did not result in dramatic improvement for black Americans.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the *Messenger* remarked, Moton "has neither the courage, education, nor the opportunity to do anything fundamental in the interest of the negro."<sup>23</sup> Further frustration mounted after the efforts of different African American groups to send delegates to the Paris Peace Conference were prevented by the U.S. Government. Instead it was W.E.B. Du Bois, Eliezer Cadet, William Monroe Trotter, R.R. Wright, Reverend William H. Jernagin, and Robert Russa Moton who traveled to Paris.<sup>24</sup>

The exclusion from the Paris Peace Conference of more "militant" black leaders by the U.S. government further exacerbated tensions between African Americans. Understood to be a stage for peace, the Conference instead further intensified ideological conflict among black leaders and opinion makers. Indeed, Marcus Garvey even went so far as to suggest that Du Bois "was never elected by any one except by the Capitalist class" to attend the Peace Conference. What is more, Garvey asserted that Du Bois was the greatest obstacle to the appeals made by UNIA delegate, Eliezer Cadet, on behalf of the black Americans.<sup>25</sup>

When he was not criticizing Du Bois, Garvey commented on the inevitability of a race war. For Garvey, the news of Japan "coaching China how to enter the Peace Conference" suggested "the immediate preparation by the yellow man of Asia for the new war that is to be waged- the war of the races." The suggestion of Japan "coaching" China is farfetched at best,

---

<sup>22</sup> *The Messenger*, "Negroes to be at Peace Conference in Europe," Vol. II, No. I, January 1918, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Randolph and Owen, "Who's Who," *The Messenger*, Vol. II, No. 7, July 1918, 27-28.

<sup>24</sup> While historians have documented the journeys of the six delegates traveling to Paris in 1919, an in depth examination of the activities has yet to be written. For a basic overview, see Plummer, Gallicchio, and Hagedorn.

<sup>25</sup> Marcus Garvey, "Address Denouncing W.E.B. Du Bois," *Negro World*, April 5, 1919. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. 1, edited by Robert Hill, 392.

considering the animosity between the two nations after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895. Still, in the aftermath of World War I, the idea of a race war seemed plausible. Garvey believed it essential for black Americans to “concentrate on his leadership, casting all his strength there, so that whenever the world again becomes disrupted he can be led into the affray under the leadership which will lead him on to real democracy.”<sup>26</sup>

The theme of leadership was central to the divide between Du Bois and Garvey. Garvey’s allegations and characterization of Du Bois as a “reactionary leader” revealed the great tension leading up to the Paris Peace Conference. Outrage over the inability of the six delegates to secure radical racial reform served as a major divide among black leaders. Indeed, the question of whose vision would receive an international audience led to the irony of black leaders calling for solidarity with the “darker races,” while also eliminating any possibility for solidarity within the black race itself.

Black Americans were delighted to hear news that Japan had proposed that a racial equality clause be inserted into the League of Nations Covenant. The clause initially called for all members of the League of Nations to receive “equal and just treatment in every respect making no distinction, either in law or in fact, on account of their race or nationality.”<sup>27</sup> Though the racial equality proposal would be rejected even after its original form was subverted, Japan’s proposal found its way into black newspapers and the conversations of black Americans.<sup>28</sup> Thereafter, Japan’s image as the “Champion of the Darker Races” gained more traction.

## **Japan’s Racial Equality Clause**

---

<sup>26</sup> Marcus Garvey, “Race Discrimination Must Go,” *Negro World*, November 30, 1918. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. 1, ed. Hill, 304.

<sup>27</sup> Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and Equality the Racial Equality Proposal of 1919*, 192.

<sup>28</sup> Gallicchio, 24.

Leading up to the Paris Peace Conference, Japan emphasized the role of race in determining world affairs. Japan repeatedly called for solidarity between the “colored races of Asia” in order to “compete with the culturally advanced white races.” Many Japanese leaders defined WWI as part of a global trend towards “racial rivalry.”<sup>29</sup> The Japanese self-definition as “colored” underscored the common tendency among whites and non-white peoples to use racial categories to describe the world. Moreover, this description of Asians as being “colored” gave the impression among non-white peoples that the balance of power was shifting away from the white world. Although Japan called for solidarity, they also saw themselves as being the leader of the “darker races” of Asia. Indeed, Japanese leaders saw their “protection” of China as being their own version of an Asian Monroe Doctrine.

Japan asserted its claims to the Shandong province, which, much to the chagrin of the Chinese, it had seized from Germany during WWI, and also demanded the passage of the racial equality clause.<sup>30</sup> However, the United States under the leadership of Wilson “had no intention of accommodating Japanese interests.”<sup>31</sup> Considering his ties to the South and the fact that President Wilson never challenged racial inequalities in the United States, it makes sense that Wilson would vehemently oppose the racial equality clause. Interestingly enough, although China, Romania, Brazil, and Czechoslovakia supported the racial equality clause, it was Japan which was seen by African Americans as the only nation willing to stand up to the white world and demand racial reform.<sup>32</sup>

Some historians have argued, “in making their proposal that racial discrimination should be renounced formally, the Japanese government may have been ahead of the times.” But the

---

<sup>29</sup> Noriko Kawamura, “Wilsonian Idealism and Japanese claims at the Paris Peace Conference,” *Pacific Historical Review* (November 1997), 506.

<sup>30</sup> Manela, 178.

<sup>31</sup> Kawamura, 508.

<sup>32</sup> Shimazu, 21.

Japanese proposal was far more complex than a simple attempt to secure equality for “the treatment of subject or backward communities or nations.”<sup>33</sup> Instead, historian Naoko Shimazu has shown how during the negotiations, the proposal took on radically different meanings. Ultimately, he concludes, “neither [Baron] Makino nor the Foreign Ministry were driven by altruism to fight for universal racial equality or universal abolition of racial discrimination.” In short, many participating nations interpreted the racial equality clause as an attempt to improve the treatment of *Japanese* immigrants throughout Europe and the United States.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, Japan’s proposal gave credence to the idea among African Americans that Japan was fighting for the “darker races.”<sup>35</sup>

By 1919, many black Americans lost what little faith they had in the United States and began to look outside the country for allies in the struggle against racism. Marcus Garvey was certain that any reliance on the United States to enact effective racial reform was foolish. Instead Garvey believed that the “future of the Negro...outside of Africa, spells ruin and disaster.”<sup>36</sup> Garvey applauded the efforts of the “darker races” to organize and assert themselves against the white race. Japan was seen as but one example of this global trend. However, Garvey was not simply a “Japanophile” as one historian has suggested.<sup>37</sup> Although he applauded Japan’s attempt to “make their demands on Occidental civilization,” he was more concerned with black Americans looking at Japan as being a model for their own advancement.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Sydney Giffard, *Japan Among the Powers 1880-1990*, 57.

<sup>34</sup> Shimazu, 84-85.

<sup>35</sup> Gallicchio, 55-6.

<sup>36</sup> Marcus Garvey, “The True Solution of the Negro Problem-1922,” cited in *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, edited by Amy Jacques-Garvey, 52.

<sup>37</sup> Gallicchio, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Marcus Garvey, “Race Discrimination Must Go,” *Negro World*, November 30, 1918. Vol. I ed. Hill 304.

Garvey stressed the idea that black Americans had become “the balance of power between the white men of Europe and yellow man of Asia.”<sup>39</sup> Even after Japan’s actions at the Paris Peace Conference, Garvey stated that black Americans “are prepared for the next war, but not to fight for the white or yellow man.” Instead, “we shall be ready to go to war to fight for the negro, to free and redeem Africa.”<sup>40</sup> Garvey’s international perspective was influenced by his colonial experience under British rule, and the dream of a black empire made up of the African native, African Americans and West Indians.<sup>41</sup> Thus, even though he deplored white civilization, he urged black Americans to “take inspiration from the white man’s achievement in America and Europe” as well as “the achievement of the great yellow man in Japan.”<sup>42</sup> Garvey was dreaming of an African Empire reserved for black people. While Garvey wanted black Americans to emulate Japan’s aim of empire, he not only criticized Japanese militarism, but also saw black Americans as being different from Japan. Although both were representatives of the darker race, only black Americans were capable of leading the world to a place of peace and justice.<sup>43</sup>

A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen were two of the earliest critics of Japan. Both were aware that many African Americans saw Japan as the “Champion of the Darker Races.” To dispel this affinity, Randolph emphasized the economics roots of the war. Randolph cautioned “the negroes not to be appealed to on the ground of color.” Highlighting the lack of equality in Japan, black Americans must realize that “Japan oppresses shamefully her own Japanese people and she would oppress you likewise.”<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> *Negro World*, “Meeting of the Baltimore Branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League,” December 18, 1918, Vol. 1, ed. Hill, 331-335.

<sup>40</sup> *Negro World*, “Bureau of Investigation Report-Chicago, Illinois, October 3, 1919” Vol. 2, cited in Robert Hill, 46.

<sup>41</sup> Marcus Garvey, “Dream of a Negro Empire,” *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, Vol. I and II, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Garvey, “The Japanese Empire,” *Negro World*, June 5, 1922, Vol. 4, ed. Hill, 663.

<sup>43</sup> Garvey, “Must Not Lose Hope,” *Negro World*, January 1, 1922, Vol. 4, ed. Hill, 326.

<sup>44</sup> Randolph and Owen. “Japan and the Far East,” *The Messenger*, Vol. II, No. 7, July 1918, 22-23.

African Americans looking to Japan as their champion argued, “racial affinity would eventually overcome artificial Japanese and Chinese differences.”<sup>45</sup> Randolph and Owen saw past race. Both acutely described the turbulent relations between China and Japan by stating, “color is no issue unless it is *yellow gold*.”<sup>46</sup> Even after Japan proposed the racial equality clause, Randolph and Owen did not waver in their critique. Although both were “glad...Japan exposed the hypocrisy of America” at the Paris Peace Conference, they warned African Americans that “the Japanese statesmen are not in the least concerned about race.” Instead, the Japanese delegates proposed the racial equality clause to divert attention from the fact that “she wants China for Japan’s aggrandizement and not for the interests of China.”<sup>47</sup>

To be sure, as socialists, Randolph and Owen’s unabashed critique of Japan had more to do with Japan’s opposition to the Bolshevik regime in the Soviet Union than altruistic support of China in her protest against Japanese imperialism.<sup>48</sup> Still, socialism allowed Randolph and Owen as well the readers of the *Messenger* to become early critics of Japanese imperialism.

Nevertheless, many African Americans saw Japan as the country best equipped to lead the “rising tide of color.” Indeed, the image of Japan tutoring China was a common theme among even the most radical and acute black internationalists. Due to the prevalence of African American support for Japan, some historians have mistakenly painted the Paris Peace Conference and the Shandong controversy as the moment of decision; a period in which, “forced to choose between China and Japan, most African Americans sided with Japan.”<sup>49</sup> This reading fails to acknowledge that in the 1920s black Americans were rarely forced to choose sides. In

---

<sup>45</sup> Gallicchio, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Randolph and Owen. “China’s President Rejects Tokio Demand.” *The Messenger*, Vol. II, No. 7, March 1919, 19.

<sup>47</sup> *The Messenger*, “Japan and the Race Issue,” Vol. II, No. 7, May-June, 1919, 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> *The Messenger*, “Report Japan will Fight Reds,” Vol. II, No. 7, March 1919, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Gallicchio, 25.



fact, both China and Japan were included in the “rising tide of color.” With some exceptions, it was quite common for black Americans to group all non-white peoples together.

### **The “Rising Tide of Color”**

During the 1920s African American leaders and periodicals routinely referred to the “rising tide of color” as the unification of non-white peoples against racism and imperialism.<sup>50</sup> Racist texts by Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard fueled the belief that the twentieth century would see the rise of the “darker races.” Published in 1920, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* built on the alarmist texts and debates lingering from the late nineteenth century. Though Stoddard spoke to the fears of European and American statesmen, he also had a substantial following among African Americans during this period. Indeed, numerous articles appearing in black newspapers not only reviewed Stoddard’s book, but also considered the ramifications of the rise of non-white peoples. To be sure, each newspaper expressed different opinions. For example, shortly after Stoddard published his work, the *Baltimore-Afro American* proposed solutions for avoiding the rise of the “Yellow or Black Perils.” To the *Afro-American*, a race war was to be avoided at all costs.<sup>51</sup> The *Pittsburgh Courier*’s George Schulyer attacked Stoddard’s argument by highlighting his faulty anthropological and ethnological findings.<sup>52</sup>

The *Chicago Defender* promoted the progress of black Americans against the vitriolic attacks made by Stoddard. In assessing the five “primary races,” Stoddard argued, “black peoples have no historic pasts. Never having evolved civilizations of their own, they are practically devoid of that accumulated mass of beliefs, thoughts and experiences” intrinsic to all

---

<sup>50</sup> Though the discussion of the rise of the darker races surfaced as early as the Russo Japanese war of 1905, it was not until World War I and the Paris Peace Conference that the idea of a “rising tide of color” was explicitly mentioned in African American newspapers.

<sup>51</sup> *Baltimore Afro-American*, “The Way Out,” August 13, 1920.

<sup>52</sup> George Schulyer, “Thrusts and Lunges,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 12, 1925.

civilizations. Adding insult to injury, Stoddard stated that even within the inferior “darker races,” “the black man is, indeed, sharply differentiated from the other branches of mankind,” further adding that his most “outstanding quality is superabundant animal vitality.”<sup>53</sup> In 1922, the *Defender* challenged the notion of black inferiority. The *Defender* described Stoddard as being wholly “influenced in what he writes more by narrow-minded racial antipathy than by a desire to give the public a fair and impartial view of the subject at hand.” The column examined African American progress since the abolition of slavery and end of Reconstruction. Following the Great Migration, “the accumulation of wealth [and] the acquisition of knowledge has been so great as to bring the two groups practically upon the same level.”<sup>54</sup>

Many black Americans were more inspired than offended by Stoddard’s work. According to the *Defender*, Stoddard’s text served as further confirmation that “the newly awakened spirit of the colored races throughout the world...is an awakening [that] cannot be denied.”<sup>55</sup> By examining international events, blacks became aware of the similarities between colonial subjugation and U.S. racism. This awareness allowed black Americans to critically engage with U.S. domestic and international policy. Moreover, by recognizing the common struggle against economic and racial oppression, African Americans saw themselves as participants in the “rising tide of color” and were able to express solidarity with colonized subjects.

The *Defender* observed the global expansion of U.S. racism. Considering that African Americans were treated as a “shunned, despised [and] condemned object,” the *Defender* could sympathize with the world’s darker races because of the observation that “the American thinks, eats, and sleeps in terms of color.” Indeed, the “American is nothing if not a missionary,” taking with him “his color madness to all parts of the world.” In nearly every corner of the globe, white

---

<sup>53</sup> Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy*, 90-91.

<sup>54</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “The Rising Tide of Color,” May 22, 1920.

<sup>55</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “The Rising Tide of Color,” May 22, 1920.

Americans carried their hatred of non-white peoples and impressed this antipathy upon the colonial world.<sup>56</sup> By highlighting the missionary character of American racism, the *Defender* recognized that the exportation of American racism could engender solidarity between African Americans and the world's "darker races" fighting against color madness.

The *Defender* saw the rising tide of color as synonymous with upheaval and redemption. Through solidarity, the darker races could launch a rebellion against white rule. With a tone of millenarian zeal, the *Defender* observed that in "South America, in Mexico, China, and Japan, in every land where dark blood prevails, the tide is rising in mighty protest against the overwhelming arrogance of assumed superiority."<sup>57</sup> To be sure, discussion of the "rising tide of color" rarely pointed to specific events to substantiate the claim that the colonized subjects were in fact rebelling against white rule. Still, the significance of this discussion lies in the fact that the *Defender* was not interested in seeing African Americans emulate the destructiveness waged by imperialist nations. Instead, colonized nations rose in protest to "reclaim its heritage- to redeem that portion of the earth's surface to which it is rightfully entitled."<sup>58</sup>

While a few newspapers predicted a great upheaval of the "darker races," other African Americans hoped for a radically different alternative. George E. Hayes, professor of Social Science at Fisk University, detested the "rising tide of color." In a lecture delivered in 1918, Hayes observed, "those people whom Kipling has condescended to call the 'lesser breeds without the law,' are awakening." Warfare in France served as the alarm clock for the darker races. Influenced by the Tuskegeeian idea of racial harmony and the Christian principle of brotherhood, Hayes stressed the necessity of racial adjustments the world over. To prevent the "rising tide of color," it was up to "negroes and Caucasians to demonstrate that race adjustments

---

<sup>56</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "The Rising Tide of Color," May 22, 1920.

<sup>57</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "The Rising Tide of Color," May 22, 1920.

<sup>58</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "The Rising Tide of Color," July 2, 1927.

can be made on the basis of brotherhood instead of on the basis of brutal force.” In this strand of black internationalism, African Americans stressing interracial cooperation dreaded the possible outcome of a race war.<sup>59</sup>

Although the *Pittsburgh Courier* embraced the idea of the “rising tide of color,” the newspaper was not in favor of a race war. The *Courier* concluded that “color is the rock on which this country will, one day, split into seething, fighting units, unless some intelligent agency save it from the present day color frenzy.” Still, the low birth rates and catastrophic losses of white nations during WWI was not enough to convince the *Courier* that the “colored races” would be victorious through bloodshed. The *Courier* concluded that the logical conclusion of global race hatred was a color war that would ultimately lead to the destruction of human civilization.<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, the *New York Amsterdam News* abhorred the prospect of a global race war. Columnist William Pickens expressed this sentiment in 1927 through his commentary on unrest in China. Pickens, who was also involved with the N.A.A.C.P., urged African Americans not to believe American propaganda calling for “rage against the Chinese.” The campaign was ignited by British interests in an attempt to force the United States into a “White and Yellow war.” If such a war broke out, argued Pickens, each side would undoubtedly have its allies and would turn into a full scale “color war.” Aware of imperialist nations’ insatiable appetite for economic resources, Pickens concluded by asking, “will our American people allow either British interests or Standard Oil to lead them like sheep into the worst horror of all these horrible ages- a color war?”<sup>61</sup> For the *Courier* and the *Amsterdam News*, the threat of a race war served as a catalyst

---

<sup>59</sup> George E. Hayes, “What the Negro Can Contribute to Race Adjustment,” in *Race Relations*, Lectures at Fisk University 1918, 50. University of Minnesota Kautz YMCA Family Archives.

<sup>60</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, “That Yielding Color Fear,” March 8, 1924.

<sup>61</sup> William Pickens, “The War Makers,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 13, 1927.

for both periodicals to express their support for racial integration and brotherhood instead of global bloodshed.

### **“The Far Eastern Question”**

African American discussion of the “rising tide of color” obscured the considerable hostility between China and Japan. African Americans romanticizing the “rising tide of color” saw Sino-Japanese hostility as temporary. According to many, China and Japan were like two fighting cousins. Moreover, even black Americans aware of the hostility between Japan and China, reconciled the tension by positioning Japan as best equipped to help China in her struggle against white exploitation.

Until 1924, the *Chicago Defender* saw Japan as the logical leader of the “rising tide of color.” “The Japanese are colored,” declared the *Defender*. Considering that “they have the ear of the world” following their military defeat of Russia and aggressive stance taken at the Paris Peace Conference, Japan was best fit to lead the darker nations. With this commitment to Japan, African Americans were forced to concoct an image of Japan as the paternalist, benevolent force that would help China fight against white imperialism. Indeed, “under the tutelage of Japan,” wrote the *Defender*, China is “soon to be as intelligent and aggressive as the Japanese.”<sup>62</sup> The depiction of Japan as having superior knowledge and as an aggressive nation reveals African American thinking about China shortly after WWI. Though possessing great potential as a “darker nation,” the current level of intelligence and relative docility made China vulnerable to foreign domination. Once again, “omincompetent definitions” shaped African American views

---

<sup>62</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “The Survival of the Fittest,” December 10, 1921.

towards the Far East. With Japanese tutelage, “not many years will roll around before China must be recognized as one of the big powers, if not the biggest power.”<sup>63</sup>

The *Defender* reiterated the defense of imperialism. Imperialist nations often stressed the idea that white tutelage was required for civilizing and preparing the uneducated and unprepared “darker races.” Perhaps infatuated with the possibility of global solidarity, many 1920s black internationalists “claimed to perceive a qualitative difference between imperialism practiced by whites against Asians and imperialism practiced by Asians against Asians.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the *Defender* was not alone in its ignorance of Sino-Japanese relations.

W.E.B. Du Bois remained deeply committed to the idea that differences between China and Japan were artificial. The startling truth is that Du Bois was an apologist for Japan until 1945 and did not support China until the communist revolution four years later. How could someone familiar with the consequences of imperialism during and after World War I turn a blind eye to Japanese imperialism in China?

Du Bois’s views toward Japan and China have led scholars Bill Mullen and Cathryn Watson to conclude that Du Bois “made the most profound political misjudgment of his career in his delinquent tolerance for Japanese imperialism.” They argue that Du Bois’s support for Japan is best explained by the post war rise of the authoritarian state. With the emergence of totalitarian states, Du Bois believed that “a colored nation’s ascent- even into authoritarianism- was necessary to stay and contain the effects of western colonialism and imperialism.”<sup>65</sup> While this explanation is useful, especially for examining Du Bois’s international views during the calamitous 1930s, it fails to take into account Du Bois’s status as an elite intellectual and ignores

---

<sup>63</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “The Survival of the Fittest,” December 10 1921.

<sup>64</sup> Gallicchio, 25.

<sup>65</sup> Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson, *W.E.B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*, xv-xvii.

his preexisting views towards British imperialism. His social position and exposure to German Romanticism provided the intellectual foundation for his domestic and international views.

Du Bois discussed the issue of foreign domination in China in the January 1922 issue of *The Crisis*. Du Bois rhetorically asked, “Who are the aggressors upon China?” While he acknowledged that Japan set up spheres of influence in China, among France, Japan and Great Britain, “the *greatest*, and most *persistent* aggressor has been Great Britain.”<sup>66</sup> Du Bois was certainly correct to describe Britain as the most relentless foreign exploiter. Indeed, Britain exploited China since the first Opium War of 1839. However, by ranking the exploiters of China, Du Bois diminished Japanese imperialism. Just as British uplift of India was a “vast improvement” from “Dutch brutality,” Du Bois’ saw Japan as engaging in a mission of protective uplift. Du Bois reduced Japan’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931 to a quarrel between two family members. Although he regretted Japanese domination of China, he asked African Americans to understand Japan’s precarious position: a weakened China made Japan more susceptible to European invasion. Du Bois placed himself in Japan’s shoes, believing that “she still fears, and with right, that China does not understand the politics of European aggression.”

According to Du Bois, Japan was “the only strong leader of the Yellow people.” As such, only she could help China break free from its regrettable characteristics.<sup>67</sup> In a long laundry list, Du Bois stated that “the Chinese are utterly deceived as to white opinion of the yellow race...do not know Europe...have no idea of color prejudice,” and are without an integrated national opinion. Japan, on the other hand, “thinks and acts as one vast unit.” Praising Japanese government, Du Bois concluded, “the ruling unifying caste is clear-headed and clear sighted.” This final description of the ruling elite in Japan is a clear example of Du Bois extending his

---

<sup>66</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The World and Us,” *The Crisis* 32, January 1922. ed. Aptheker, 328.

<sup>67</sup> Du Bois, “China and Japan,” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 21, 1931.

talented tenth philosophy to the global sphere. Japan was best prepared to lead the Asian masses not only because of its military ability, but also because of strong, unified leadership among the ruling elite.<sup>68</sup> In an age of expansion, argued Du Bois, imperialism was necessary because of Japan's need for "coal and iron and space for expansion." With more resources and a permanent presence in Manchuria, Du Bois concluded, Japan would become the "dominant leader of the majority of mankind and the end of white rule in Asia is not simply in sight, it is accomplished."<sup>69</sup>

## **Conclusion**

World War I and its aftermath generated different strands of black internationalism. Socialists such as A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen emphasized class over race, allowing them to become some of the earliest critics of Japanese imperialism. While W.E.B Du Bois called for African Americans to "close ranks," others such as Hubert Harrison believed that World War I would strengthen the "darker races." The suggestion of a "rising tide of color" allowed African Americans to identify a common struggle between themselves and colonized subjects. By and large, however, immediately following WWI, the different strands of black internationalism provided vague evaluations of colonized nations and obscured genuine hostility between Japan and China.

Domestic court cases and discriminatory legislation forced many African Americans to reevaluate Japan. The *Defender* gave advice to Japan following the passage of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act. According to the *Defender*, "the Japs, like some of us, have been too busy courting the favor of the White man when he should have been winning the confidence of the rest of the

---

<sup>68</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Program of Peace in Manchuria," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 18, 1931.

<sup>69</sup> Du Bois, "China and Japan," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 21, 1931.



Asiatic and African world.” By identifying Japan as a non-white nation, the *Defender* expected Japanese Americans to fully embrace their “dark skinned relatives.”<sup>70</sup>

The *Defender* continued to take Japanese Americans to task for currying the favor of white Americans. In June 1924, Yosio Nishimura wrote a letter to Robert Abbott appealing to African Americans for their support of Japan. Mr. Nishimura pointed out that “the Japanese in California, like colored people in the south...are denied human rights.” Nishimura argued that Japan’s awareness of the role of race in world affairs would bring forward a day in which “the brighter sun will shine on Africa and Asia.”

The *Defender* remained unconvinced. The 1922 Supreme Court Case of *Takao Ozawa V. United States*, in which Takao Ozawa filed for U.S. citizenship under the 1906 Naturalization Act on the basis that the Japanese be classified as White, was a watershed moment for the *Defender*.<sup>71</sup> In 1924, the *Defender* declared, “the sympathy of Americans of color for Japan...was universal until Japan made her great blunder.” When Ozawa stood in front of the Supreme Court “begging to be classed not as a yellow people, but as a branch of the Aryan tree, she served notice that her yearnings were beyond her blood.”<sup>72</sup> The actions of Japanese Americans combined with the examples of white prejudice against Chinese Americans students fostered the notion of a common struggle between Chinese and African Americans.<sup>73</sup>

During China’s protest against imperialism and Christianity, columnists writing for the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News* supported the movement, seeing in the struggle a global fight against the destruction generated by “white Christianity.” Indeed, African Americans critical of

---

<sup>70</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Exclusion Bill Should Teach Japanese lesson,” May 31, 1924.

<sup>71</sup> *Takao Ozawa v. United States*, 260 U.S. 178 (1922).

<sup>72</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Japan rises to a point,” June 21, 1924.

<sup>73</sup> The *Amsterdam News* and *Chicago Defender* commented on the expulsion of Joe Tin Lun, a Chinese student in Dublin, Mississippi, from an all white school. For more information on the case, see Robert W. O’Brien’s “Status of Chinese in the Mississippi Delta,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (March 1941). For the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News*’ reaction, see “Mississippi Supreme Court Bars Chinese,” *Chicago Defender*, October 22, 1927 and Kelly Miller’s “Chinese in Negro Schools,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 7, 1927.

*World War I: The Emergence of Different Strands of Black Internationalism*

Christianity and imperialism saw conditions in China as akin to their own, thereby lending their support to China in their protest against foreign domination.

African American and Chinese Critique of White Christianity

“O heathen minds on heathen strand,  
What think you of a Christian land,  
Where men and boys and women  
    Turn,  
From Prayer, to lynch, to rob and  
    Burn.  
And oft their drowsy minds refresh  
Thru sport in burning human flesh?  
Yet none dare tell who led the  
    band;  
And this was in a Christian land.”

*(The Messenger, “The Mob Victim,” July 1919)*

## Chapter Outline

During the 1920s black Americans looked with great interest at the anti-Christianity and anti-imperialist movement in China, many coming to regard China as a sympathetic anticolonial figure. The *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Amsterdam News* routinely covered the protest and lent its support to China's attempt to rid itself of foreign domination. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, on the other hand, remained indifferent to the protests.<sup>1</sup> To the *Defender*, African Americans could learn from China's series of successful boycotts against the United States, Japan, and Britain. The *Amsterdam News* used its coverage of the protests in China to scrutinize the interconnectedness of racism, Christianity, and imperialism.

In their support of the Chinese protests, the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News* were joined unexpectedly by African American Christian students. Through conversations with Chinese Christian students and participation in global Christian conferences, African American student members of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), and World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), condemned U.S. imperialism and supported China's protests through their own monthly publication, *The Student Association Newsletter*. However, with China's "acceptance of White Christianity" toward the end of the 1920s and early 1930s, African Americans writing for the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News* wavered in their support of China and began to look to Japan as the only nation that could fight off the destructive forces of Christianity.

---

<sup>1</sup> The absence of coverage of the Chinese protests in the *Pittsburgh Courier* is somewhat peculiar considering founder Rober L. Vann's views towards religion. According to his biographer, Andrew Bunie, Vann "regarded most black ministers as semiliterate zealots given to emotional excesses." Perhaps one reason the *Courier* did not devote much attention to the protests can be attributed to Vann's relationship to the YMCA, which became a target of Chinese protests. In 1912, Vann acted as the chairman of a fundraising drive to build a new branch of the YMCA. Moreover, this YMCA branch was in close proximity to the *Courier*'s headquarters. For more information on Vann's feelings towards religion and relationship to the YMCA, see Andrew Bunie's *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier*, particularly chapter four: "The *Courier* as a Social Force."

## **African American Critique of White Christianity**

To be sure, African American criticism of “white Christianity” antedated black interest in the China question. Nineteenth century black nationalism- itself steeped in Christian practice and worldview- emerged as the most forceful critique of the link between white Christianity and black oppression in the formers biblical justifications of slavery. Black anti-imperialist and nationalist leader Bishop Henry McNeal Turner is a classic example. So, too, was Rev. Thomas Gould Steward, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1888 Steward announced that Western Christianity had fallen to “militaristic and racist corruption” and hence had “nothing more to offer its believers” until it could be restored to a state “undefiled by Anglo-Saxon prejudice.”<sup>2</sup>

Religious views among African Americans in northern cities took on a radical edge following World War I and the Red Summer of 1919. Following the mob violence against black Americans in cities like Chicago, many questioned the black church’s tenet of gradualism and pacifism. Still, while black radicals such as Hubert Harrison and A. Phillip Randolph called for direct confrontation, most Christian black Americans “drew back from the hard line, self defense position” of the New Negro movement.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, during the 1920s and especially after the Great Depression, African Americans continued to be active in the Black church, even though conventional Christianity reinforced practices of pacifism in the face of violence.

Commitment to the black church did not, however, stop African Americans from criticizing “white Christianity.” Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, various black leaders and newspapers frequently commented on the relationship between white Christianity

---

<sup>2</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, “Ehtiopia Shall Soon Stretch Forth Her Hands: Black Destiny in Nineteenth-Century America.” Cited in *African American Religious Thought: Anthology*. Cornell West and Eddie S. Glaude Jr., 410.

<sup>3</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 195.

and racism in the United States. By examining international events they also discovered a similar destructive relationship between Christianity and imperialism. Always alert to the global dimensions of European and American aggression, Hubert Harrison remarked in 1918, “the centers of ‘White Christianity’ are the centers of organized bloodshed and permanent preparation for perpetual war.” Harrison pointed to the centuries of religious warfare as well as the imperialism propagated by many of these same nations. In the name of Christ, Harrison argued, “the fair feet of civilized slayers have woven across the fair faces of the earth a crimson mesh of murder and rapine.”<sup>4</sup> Harrison was not alone in his critique. The *Defender* and *Amsterdam News* argued that in many ways, unrest in China and racism against African Americans were products of the same source: white Christianity.

During the 1920s, the *Amsterdam News* and *Chicago Defender* criticized religion in subtle, yet radically different ways. The *Amsterdam News* consistently distinguished Christianity from “white Christianity.” This allowed the New York weekly to criticize the connection between “white Christianity” and imperialism, while also preventing friction between itself and the influential black church. On the other hand, the *Defender* was the most vocal critic of Christianity. Their critique left no stone unturned, highlighting the elitism and bourgeoisie nature of the African American church, the hypocrisy of U.S. missionaries abroad, and the destruction unleashed upon the world by “white Christianity.”

While examining the anti-Christianity movement in China, *Defender* columnist E.J. Moore found “that there is a dearth of the genuine Christianlike spirit” the world over. He grounded his critique by first examining Christianity in the United States. His awareness of the class dynamics within the metropolitan church, and the economic privileges it garnered, allowed

---

<sup>4</sup> Hubert H. Harrison, “Goodwill Toward Men,” *The Voice*, 1918. Cited in Jeffrey Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, 158.

him to deem the “whole system [of Christianity] to be dominated by commercialism.” Instead of universal brotherhood, the church was the bastion of bourgeois elitism. Moore observed that a person could only gain admission if he “stands high in society and happens to be well fixed financially.” Without these prerequisites, the unfortunate city dweller “will usually meet such a cold reception that he goes away with a feeling that the church is no place for him.” Within his analyses of Christianity is a critique of the divide between the lower and middle classes in urban areas. The metropolitan church exacerbated the gap between lower class African Americans and upper class members of the church. The absence of a welcoming environment led the individual without status or money to “a more congenial atmosphere in some pool room or club.”<sup>5</sup>

Moore also criticized the uplift ideology, prevalent among the black elite. According to Kevin K. Gaines, “black elites made uplift the basis for a racialized elite identity claiming Negro improvement through class stratification as race progress, which entailed an attenuated conception of bourgeois qualifications for rights and citizenship.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, these elites remained steadfast in their preoccupation with outward appearances. As a result, members of the black middle class often condemn the “immoral” behavior of lower class African Americans.<sup>7</sup>

While Moore did not directly implicate the black church, his colleague did. Commenting on the connection between “white Christianity” and the African American church, *Defender* columnist L.W. Collins remarked, “every negro minister is unconsciously a propagandist for the ideal of the White man- white supremacy.” For Collins, Christianity, whether preached by black

---

<sup>5</sup> E.J. Moore, “Christianity on the Wane,” *Chicago Defender*, May 14, 1927.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, xv.

<sup>7</sup> Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 235.

or white ministers, was incompatible with, and indeed hindered the African American struggle for equality.<sup>8</sup>

The entire staff of the *Defender* excoriated “white Christianity” and the suggestion of benevolent U.S. missionary activity abroad. Indeed, founder and editor Robert Abbott expressed his position towards U.S. missionaries abroad in 1934 by declaring, “a country that carries prejudice this far has no business sending missionaries to China.” Although the anti-Christianity movement had grown dormant during the early 1930s, Abbott supported Chinese protest against Christianity and believed, “China...has a right to resent the presence of such hypocrisies.”<sup>9</sup> In the eyes of E.J. Moore, “the real Christian spirit is as foreign to some of our churches as chalk is to cheese.” Thus, missionary activity abroad brought about violence instead of brotherhood.<sup>10</sup>

The *Defender* and the *Amsterdam News* remained skeptical of missionary activity abroad because of the long history of racism and prejudice among southern white Christians. During the 1920s it was quite common for both newspapers to sensationalize the horrors of white Christianity. After surveying the history of Christianity in places like Oklahoma and Kansas City, the *Defender* found that “most of those who take part in lynchings in the south are devout Christians.”<sup>11</sup> Not only had southern white Christians lynched African Americans, but missionaries also ignored their plight. According to Abbott, “the South can use all the missionaries that America has scattered all over the world.”<sup>12</sup> Instead of trying to convert souls abroad, the *Defender* believed that American missionaries should turn their attention to preventing discrimination against African Americans in the South. This preexisting skepticism of

---

<sup>8</sup> L.W. Collins, “White Christianity,” *Chicago Defender*, October 12, 1929.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Abbott, “Great Conspiracy Against Race was Formed in 1840,” *Chicago Defender*, December 12, 1934.

<sup>10</sup> E.J. Moore, “Christianity on the Wane,” *Chicago Defender*, May 14, 1927.

<sup>11</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “In the Name of Christ,” June 9, 1928.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Abbott, “Great Conspiracy Against Race was Formed in 1840,” *Chicago Defender*, December 22, 1934.



Christianity allowed the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News* to support the anti-Christianity movement in China.

### **The Anti-Christianity Movement in China**

Many of the reformers within China shared Orientalist notions of China as a decadent civilization in need of dynamic change. Following the First Opium War, reformers in the Qing Dynastic court began to adopt techniques and structures from the West to both combat foreign aggression and solidify China's place in the international arena.<sup>13</sup> Christianity flourished within this context due to Chinese questioning of longstanding traditions and values. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Christian organizations such as the YMCA and SVM became popular because of "the growing interest in modern, western style education...after China's humiliating defeat at the hands of Japan in 1895."<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the loosely affiliated organizations such as the YMCA, SVM, Student Christian Movement (SCM), and WSCF developed a growing interest in China during the late nineteenth century. This point is underscored when one examines the expansion of missionary activity during this period. Between 1895 and 1922, the YMCA and YWCA established a combined 273 branches in China with over 30,000 members.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in its first thirty years of existence, the SVM sent 29% of its 2953 student volunteers to China.<sup>16</sup> Still, the era of prosperity for these Christian organizations was short lived. Following the Paris Peace Conference, Chinese protesters targeted Christian organizations.

---

<sup>13</sup> In 1861, Qing dynastic officials established the Zongli Yamen, a political body governing international relations, based largely on European models of international order.

<sup>14</sup> Clifton Phillips, "The Student Volunteer Movement and Its Role in China Missions, 1886-1920," Cited in John K. Fairbank, *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, 92.

<sup>15</sup> Kiang Wen Han, "The Ideological Background of the Chinese Student Movement," *Manuscript, 1947*, 100. YMCA Kautz Family Archives, University of Minnesota.

<sup>16</sup> Phillips, 105.

Once optimistic Chinese onlookers discovered that, like African Americans, they too would be denied self-determination. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919, Chinese intellectuals and student groups took to the streets to protest the decision to hand over the Shangdong province to Japan.<sup>17</sup> However, what began as a protest against Japan soon became a “national movement for cultural and political awakening.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, one can argue that President Wilson’s hypocrisy served as a catalyst in pushing hopeful citizens away from the West and toward more radical alternatives. The Bolshevik revolution certainly gave the world another option from the Wilsonian model of democracy and capitalism.

The Anti-Christianity movement was the outgrowth of the May Fourth Movement. Chinese intellectuals previously criticized Christianity and religion more broadly, believing that science, not religion, was the foundation for progress.<sup>19</sup> With a popular movement in place, protestors began to link religion to imperialism. To be sure, Christian organizations improved literacy rates and provided famine relief and public health services in China.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Christianity, argued Chinese reformers, was a form of cultural imperialism.

In discussing theories of imperialism and the detrimental impact of American Protestant missionary activity abroad, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. defines cultural imperialism as “purposeful aggression by one culture against the ideas and values of another.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Christian missionaries in China carried with them their biases, whether consciously or unconsciously,

---

<sup>17</sup> Shangdong Province had been under German control since 1897 and Chinese demonstrators believed that China’s right to self-determination began with the return of the naval city. Moreover, Chinese protestors argued that China’s participation in the war by sending 175,000 Chinese laborers to France to form labor corps secured its right to the territory. For more information see Kiang Wen Han’s “The Ideological Background of the Chinese Student Movement,” *Manuscript*, 1947, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Jessie Gregory Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions-The Anti-Christian Movements of 1920-28*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Fairbank, “Introduction: The Many Faces of Protestant Missions in China and the United States,” cited in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “The Missionary Enterprise and Theories of Imperialism,” cited in John K. Fairbank, *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*, 363.

regarding Western religion, science, and technology. Schlesinger argues that Christian cultural imperialism “maintained that one set of values was better than another, and this was far more demoralizing” than political or economic forms of imperialism. This point has some merit when one considers that in many areas, Christianity supplanted the revered religious and philosophical system of Confucianism in China.<sup>22</sup>

Political and economic imperialism abetted cultural Imperialism in China. The lasting impact of so-called Christian nations carving China into spheres of influence following the Boxer Rebellion reinforced the idea that Christianity and imperialism went hand in hand. Thus, during the summer of 1922, Chinese protesters “came to view Chinese missions as a deterrent to national strength and unity.”<sup>23</sup>

Christian organizations did not help their own cause in China. The YMCA lost major influence among students with its neutral stance towards the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement and the subsequent boycott of Japanese goods.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, with a growing interest in labor problems, Chinese protesters attacked the YMCA for ignoring the plight of workers. The result was that, by 1922, leaders “condemned the YMCA for creating ‘running dogs’ of the Capitalist class.”<sup>25</sup> When the WSCF announced that it was holding its 1922 Federation Conference at Qinghua University, Chinese students formed anti-Christian organizations to protest the “cultural arm of imperialism.”<sup>26</sup>

The *Chicago Defender* contained a brief description of the protests surrounding the WSCF conference. Beijing, wrote the *Defender*, was “divided into two factions, Christians and

---

<sup>22</sup> Schlesinger Jr., 365-366.

<sup>23</sup> Lutz, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Shirley S. Garrett, *Social Reformers in Urban China- The Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895-1926*, 165.

<sup>25</sup> Lutz, 55.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel D. Ling, “The Other May Fourth Movement: The Chinese ‘Christian Renaissance,’” 1919-1937. Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1981, 2.

Anti-Christians,” with those protesting the religion in the majority.<sup>27</sup> A few months later, the *Defender* continued its coverage of the anti-Christianity movement in an article titled, “China Frowns on White Man’s Christianity.” The *Defender* identified the locus of the protest and its key leaders. To be sure, the title of the article alone is significant. In using the words “white man’s Christianity,” the *Defender* struck a familiar chord with its readership, suggesting that there was in fact a universal struggle against white Christianity.<sup>28</sup> The coverage of the protests surrounding the 1922 WSCF conference reinforced the idea that China was a global ally against white oppression. Nevertheless, it was not until the May 30<sup>th</sup> incident of 1925 and its aftermath that black American newspapers identified the link between Christianity and imperialism.

### **May 30<sup>th</sup> Incident**

Much like the May 4<sup>th</sup> movement, what began as a protest against the killing of a Chinese worker at a Japanese factory, was transformed into a nationalist movement against foreign domination. A coalition of students, workers, and communist organizers led the protests, utilizing the boycott and strikes to attack British, Japanese, and American imperialism. By 1926, the repression against protesters “had become the occasion for a nationwide anti-imperialist movement.”<sup>29</sup> Critical of imperialism, the *Amsterdam News* and *Defender* covered the May 30<sup>th</sup> incident, believing that black Americans could learn from China’s struggle for self-determination.

The *Amsterdam News* reprinted a letter from the Chinese consul general detailing the killing of innocent students and laborers. The letter identified the British as culprits. Following Chinese protests, “the firing of rifles and machine guns continued by the British-controlled

---

<sup>27</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Chinese Launch Attack on Christian Theories,” April 15, 1922.

<sup>28</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “China Frowns on White Man’s Christianity,” July 8, 1922.

<sup>29</sup> Lutz, 160.

police” took the lives of hundreds. Moreover, Japanese foreman and the Japanese militia attacked Chinese mill workers on strike. The grouping of Britain and Japan as aggressors forced African Americans to confront the imperialist tendencies of their “Champion of the Darker Races.” To combat the attacks, “all classes of the Chinese people” launched strikes against British and Japanese factories.<sup>30</sup> Nearly 200,000 Chinese workers launched strikes in cities like Shanghai.<sup>31</sup>

Chinese protesters also used the boycott to attack British and Japanese goods. The influential Italian Socialist Antonio Gramsci identified the boycott as “a form of war of position...that demands enormous sacrifices by infinite masses of people.”<sup>32</sup> As second class citizens within their own country, victims of repression, and shackled by unequal treaties, the Chinese “saw the anti-imperialist boycott as a way to attack the pockets of imperialist nations while also strengthening the growing sense of nationalism” by solely purchasing Chinese produced goods. China’s usage of the boycott was not new. Between 1900 and 1931, protesters in China initiated nine coordinated boycotts against imperialist nations.<sup>33</sup> Although the participants, centers of protest, and techniques changed with each of these boycotts, the Chinese used the tactic to combat foreign domination.

African Americans writing for the *Amsterdam News* and the *Defender* were particularly interested in using the boycott as a strategy to fight against unequal employment opportunities. “Every race on the globe,” observed the *Defender*, “is attempting to strike back at its oppressors by means that are within the law.” The *Defender* included the testimony of Dr. Ping Wen Kuo of Columbia University, who told the American public “that the boycott is more civilized than

---

<sup>30</sup> *New York Amsterdam News*, “British are Blamed for Recent Chinese Trouble,” June 24, 1925.

<sup>31</sup> Kiang Wen Han, 167-172.

<sup>32</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 238.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation*, 125.

warfare.” The “weak races,” wrote the *Defender*, “have long learned that rebellion against constituted authority spells annihilation.” In short, the boycott was not only a “civilized” form of protest, but was the only form of warfare the oppressed classes could employ.<sup>34</sup>

After the escalation of violence during the 1920s in the north and south, the *Defender* came to regard direct confrontation as sure extermination and accordingly tempered its New Negro militancy in favor of coordinated economic strategy. Black Americans may not have been under Japanese militia assault, but many were caught in the economic pincers of job discrimination and labor union exclusion. The *Defender* pointedly asked, “what would a certain group of business men in your community think if you would suddenly learn what the Chinese have and decide to fight back without guns?” Perhaps presaging the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work Campaigns” of the 1930s, the *Defender* advised, “you could adopt China’s latest ‘civilized warfare’ and get bank clerks where you once had bank janitors; grocery clerks were you once had delivery boys.”<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the *Amsterdam News* continued its coverage of the Chinese protests against Christianity and imperialism. In a tense environment between Chinese and foreigners, the Chinese protesters reignited their attack against Christians and Christian schools on the grounds that “Christian missionaries joined capitalists and militarists as the minions of imperialists.”<sup>36</sup> Although the YMCA openly endorsed the protests surrounding the May 30<sup>th</sup> incident, the Anti-Christian Student Federation of Shanghai and the Great Anti-Religion Federation of Beijing intensified their attack against the organization.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “The Week: Learn From China,” May 8, 1926.

<sup>35</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “The Week: Learn From China,” May 8, 1926.

<sup>36</sup> Lutz, 166-167.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Andrew Keller, “Making Model Citizens: The Chinese YMCA, Social Activism, and Internationalism in Republican China, 1919-1937.” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1996, 80.

In February 1927, the *Amsterdam News* included a piece of propaganda “pressed into service by Young China in the promotion of an anti-Christian campaign.” The “greeting cards,” as they were dubbed, listed eight declarations attacking Christianity. Christianity, argued the “Young China Rebels,” “helps to subject the weak nation into slavery” through the imposition of norms that were at odds with Chinese religion and traditional values. Moreover, Chinese protesters argued that missionaries exploited the system of extraterritoriality first established in China following the First Opium War. As a result, the Christian missionary often stood above Chinese law. Moreover, imperialist nations used alleged violence against Christian missionaries as a pretense for military attacks and the extraction of harsh financial reparations.<sup>38</sup>

The *Amsterdam News* made its support for the movement in China clear when it published two bitter critiques of the hypocritical notion of U.S. and British missionaries preaching brotherhood in China. *Amsterdam News* columnist William Pickens urged his readers to see through the veil of alleged U.S. and British missionary activity. Both nations sought China’s resources. Pickens criticized American and British bombardment of “the peaceful, non-combatant and innocent people” of Nanking, arguing that the killing of an American missionary was no excuse for taking the lives of thousands.

The anti-Christianity movement in China revealed for Pickens the relationship between imperialism and Christianity. “If these missionaries were really Christian brothers to the Chinese,” they would leave China, instead of “furnishing an excuse to their barbarous gunboat commanders for slaughtering Chinese people.” Pickens, like the Chinese protesters, saw Christian missionaries as the first line of imperial defense. According to this logic, missionaries were used as a means for imperialist nations to penetrate China whenever “a single white man

---

<sup>38</sup> Fairbank, 2-3.

gets hit.” This pretense allowed British and American war ships to protect their own economic interests.<sup>39</sup>

Pickens warned his readership not to be fooled by “militarists and capitalists” using newspaper coverage to galvanize public opinion. War hawk propaganda would only leave Americans “frothing at the mouth hating Chinese and prating about Chinese atrocities.”<sup>40</sup> That Pickens highlighted British and American imperialism but turned a blind eye to Japanese expansion in China represented one strand of thought among black internationalists which refused to see Japan as another imperialist power.<sup>41</sup>

*Amsterdam News* journalist C. Rhodes Howard reinforced the similarities between the plight of African Americans and Chinese. Howard was most explicit, comparing the forms of segregation in China to that of the American South, while also applauding the Chinese fight against Christianity and imperialism. A few years earlier, the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) movement had popularized the slogan of “Africa for the Africans.” However, after being deported in 1927, Marcus Garvey was back in his native Jamaica and the UNIA movement was in disarray. Nevertheless, many black Americans still stressed the importance of self-determination. Without a popular movement to push for a return to Africa, black Americans supported other colonized peoples fighting for self-determination. In Garveyite terms, Howard declared, “Chinese want China for the Chinese.” Just as black Americans called for an end to imperialist presence in Africa, the Chinese attempted to rid themselves of foreign domination.

---

<sup>39</sup> William Pickens, “Our China War,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 6, 1927.

<sup>40</sup> William Pickens, “Our China War,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 6, 1927.

<sup>41</sup> By 1931, even *Amsterdam News* columnist William Pickens expressed a pro-Japanese perspective vis-à-vis its relationship to China.



Howard recognized that the plight of African Americans was not an American phenomenon. Following the intrusion of “greedy Nordics from Europe and America” into China, these imperialist nations established “Jim Crow practices similar to those of the South.” The exclusionary measures enacted by imperialist nations throughout China placed the “Chinese in a semi-state of slavery.” Black Americans could obviously relate to such exclusionary measures. Although more overt in the South, African Americans living in northern cities faced *de facto* segregation through their exclusion from equal employment and education, and were confined to substandard housing. By using the familiar description of Jim Crow to describe conditions in China, the *Amsterdam News* provided its readership with the assurance that they were not alone in the global struggle against white prejudice.

Black Americans could relate to the terror generated by white Christians who were either directly involved with lynchings or did not act to prevent such brutality. Howard noted, “the thought of an American teaching anyone how to live is a joke; a delectable joke.” How could the white Christian, who delights in the sport of sticking “red-hot irons into the flesh of pregnant negro women,” possibly know anything about harmony and brotherhood? Howard wondered where the Christian missionaries were when blacks were denied freedom in the South. With the Chinese facing seemingly endless violence and African Americans suffering in a Christian land, Howard concluded, “blessed be the Chinese in their fight for the most prized possession-liberty.” According to Howard, African Americans could learn from China. Black Americans, like the Chinese, must recognize that history was replete with examples of nations using violence to secure their freedom. Without bloodshed, blacks would “die as slaves.”<sup>42</sup>

### **An Unsuspected Group of Supporters**

---

<sup>42</sup> C. Rhodes Howard, “China,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 20, 1927.

It is ironic that the anti-Christianity movement in China vehemently attacked the YMCA, considering that the nexus of Christian organizations, conferences and publications served as a conduit through which otherwise unreachable populations of the world gained insight into China's struggle against foreign domination. African American Christian students were one such group. College educated black Americans represented a small segment during the 1920s as members of the relatively well-to-do black middle class.<sup>43</sup> Still, their class standing did not preclude them from assuming a radical stance towards race and imperialism. Many of the members of the Student Division of the Colored YMCA at black colleges and universities protested the Jim Crow segregation within the YMCA and the United States writ large. Moreover, their participation in local and global Christian conferences combined with their interaction with fellow Christian Chinese students and Chinese leaders gave African American students insight into the impact of U.S. imperialism on China's quest for self-determination. As a result, these students used their resources to support Chinese student protests during the 1920s.

Jim Crow policies transcended the Christian principle of universal brotherhood within the YMCA. As a result, the YMCA required African Americans to establish separate branches.<sup>44</sup> Even after the fear of militancy among African Americans following WWI and the YMCAs passage of a new constitution in 1923, the organization maintained its policy of segregation. Through the formation of the Colored Work Department, African American leaders such as Robert Russa Moton and Channing Tobias were able to preserve their autonomy as leaders of a "separate, but equal" division of the YMCA.<sup>45</sup> Despite, or perhaps because of these restrictions, African American membership in the segregated division of the YMCA continued to grow throughout the early twentieth century. From 1900 to 1930, membership in African American

---

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*, 72.

<sup>44</sup> Nina Mjagki, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*, 104.

<sup>45</sup> Mjagki, 109-110.

YMCAs jumped from 5,100 to 33,924.<sup>46</sup> The increase in membership had much to do with the YMCA's appeal to African American college students. By 1925, the YMCA had over 125 branches at black colleges and universities such as Hampton and Lincoln University. Between the appearance of college YMCA branches in 1870 and the height of its membership in 1925, approximately 12,000 African American students joined the association's college branches.<sup>47</sup>

These students "were more daring than the older members of the Colored Work Department."<sup>48</sup> They attempted to break through the barriers that separated black and white Christian students and openly discussed global inequalities. Local and international conferences organized by the YMCA, SVM, and WSCF, made dialogue possible between students. However, these conferences were not merely devoted to Christian zeal. Indeed, it was quite common for students to discuss racial prejudice, economic inequality, and political unrest in the United States.<sup>49</sup> As representatives at these conferences, African American Christian students became aware of the mass political protests in China. Although they did not explicitly address the anti-Christianity movement, these students supported China's protest against U.S. imperialism.

During the first few months of 1927, the Student Division of the Colored YMCA used its monthly publication to examine "Pan-Pacific Problems." The *Student Association Newsletter* (SAN) included articles written by college students detailing the discussions and content of local and international conferences. Moreover, the publication updated its membership on events organized across college branches of the Student Division.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Mjagki, 138.

<sup>47</sup> Mjagki, 134.

<sup>48</sup> Mjagki, 111.

<sup>49</sup> Mjagki, 112.

<sup>50</sup> It is unclear when the Student Association News-Letter began circulation. According to the YMCA Family Archives at the University of Minnesota, holdings begin with V. 3 #24 January 1926. The *Student Association News-Letter* is superseded by *The Intercollegian News-Letter* in October 1928.

African American college graduates such as John Dillingham, Frank T. Wilson, and Max Yergen were among the more noteworthy delegates to the WSCF conferences held in Denmark, England, Finland, and India. These leaders later became secretaries within the Colored Work Department.<sup>51</sup> While delegates stressed “world-wide brotherhood among the nations of the earth,” these international minded students also commented on political affairs, specifically the detrimental impact of imperialism on the spread of Christianity.<sup>52</sup> In 1927, the *SAN* was delighted to report that Frank T. Wilson and Juanita Sadler, graduates of Lincoln and Fisk University respectively, were “chosen to represent the students of the United States in the Pan-Pacific student conference” scheduled for August, 1927 at Yancheng University in Beijing. To celebrate, the *SAN* included a photo of Wilson on its front page.



Delegate Frank T. Wilson on bottom right.  
*The Intercollegian News-Letter*, March-April, 1928.  
(Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota)

---

<sup>51</sup> Mjagki, 136.

<sup>52</sup> *Student Association Newsletter*, Vol. 4. No. 30, November 1926, 4.

In addition to discussing the “social and religious problems of youth in the Pacific area,” the conference would attempt to tackle “international-political imperialism,” and “racial discrimination between races in one national unit and between various national units.” By grouping the destructiveness of imperialism with racial discrimination, the *SAN*, much like the *Chicago Defender* and *Amsterdam News*, reinforced the belief in a common struggle between African Americans and Chinese. Both groups were oppressed by a nation that put profit and prejudice over humanity.<sup>53</sup>

The *SAN* served to educate African American students by exposing them to political and economic issues around the globe. The monthly did so by facilitating the discussion of Pan-Pacific problems by including a list of books and pamphlets that might illuminate “the big questions of the Pacific basin.” The *SAN* encouraged students to read “Christian Principles and the Problems of the Pacific” as well as “Our Far Eastern Assignment” written by religious philosopher Felix Morley.<sup>54</sup>

The publication also operated as an information network within the Student Division of the Colored YMCA. Although only two African Americans were elected as representatives to travel to China, the *SAN* urged its members to “organize and promote a Pan-Pacific study group” at college campuses. By reading literature and discussing affairs in China, African American students could provide Wilson with a better understanding of the political climate in China. The *SAN* urged that all “findings or conclusions” be sent to delegate Wilson before his departure.<sup>55</sup>

In April 1927, the *SAN* showcased its radicalism by directly criticizing U.S. imperialism in China. In the “What’s Happening throughout the Field” section, it reported on a provocative

---

<sup>53</sup> *Student Association Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 34, March 1927.

<sup>54</sup> *Student Association Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 34, March 1927, 2. The “Books and Pamphlets” section appeared in each issue of the *SAN* educating its readership on various topics.

<sup>55</sup> *Student Association Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 34, March 1927, 2.

conference composed of approximately “200 white and colored students” held at Vanderbilt University. In preparation for the Pan-Pacific Conference, Christian students “discussed the present political situation in China, and denounced in strong terms the imperialistic policies of the United States” towards China.<sup>56</sup> The *Chicago Defender* also picked up on the Vanderbilt conference, identifying Trinidadian Malcolm Nurse as the “only member of our race” to address the conference. It was Nurse who “delivered a scholarly resume of the Chinese situation.”<sup>57</sup>

African American college students were highly alarmed by the United State’s decision to increase the presence of soldiers and marines in China. In 1927, the U.S. deployed five thousand troops in order to avert the growing prospect of anti-foreign attacks.<sup>58</sup> The SAN’s support for China raises the following questions: Were African American students aware of the anti-Christian protests in China? If so, how did they reconcile their support for a Chinese movement that targeted many of the Christian organizations of which African Americans students were members?

African Americans launched their support by presenting and unanimously adopting resolutions against potential U.S. aggression in China. The first resolution demanded the participating “group of students in the colleges and universities of Nashville, Tennessee, go on record as opposing any militaristic or imperialistic policy of the United States.” These delegates did not merely condemn the United States, however. Students crafted a petition to “the government of the United States to withdraw its military forces in China” and wired a copy of the resolutions to U.S. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg. In an expression of solidarity, these students sent the following message to the Student Christian Associations of China:

---

<sup>56</sup> *Student Association Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 35, April, 1927, 1-4.

<sup>57</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Students Protest U.S. Rule in China,” April 9, 1927.

<sup>58</sup> John C. Whiteclay II, “U.S. Military involvement in China.” *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O126-ChinaUSMilitaryInvolvmntn.html>.

“We sympathize with Chinese students in their aspirations for national unity and sovereignty,”  
(signed) One hundred and Fifty American Students in seven Nashville, Tennessee, Colleges.<sup>59</sup>

That Christian students identified the protesters in China, not as Chinese *Christian* Students, but as *Chinese Students*, and expressed their support for Chinese protests against imperialism reveals that these students were not unabashed supporters of Christianity. Even though the Chinese attacked the YMCA and Christianity, these students still recognized that Christianity in China at times operated as a form of cultural imperialism. They called for reform among Christian missionaries, believing that hypocrisy among preachers of Christ hindered genuine missionary activity. African American Christian students reached a consensus: reforms were “necessary at home if missionaries were to be welcomed” abroad. According to these students, the YMCA lost its credibility by proclaiming universal brotherhood, yet maintaining the practice of Jim Crow. Student Paul N. Guthrie underscored this point while summarizing the views of Chinese protesters towards the West. Guthrie, a representative at a 1927 convention in Detroit, put himself in the shoes of the Chinese:

We do not want the paganism of the West transported to the East, whether it be in the form of business or of western ‘copyrighted Christianity.’ In other words, every phase of your civilization has a responsibility for the living of the philosophy which you try to preach to us, and we hold you responsible for what happens in your own household.<sup>60</sup>

### **T.Z. Koo mobilizes his Audience**

African Americans Christian students gained insight into China’s struggle against imperialism through the outreach efforts of Chinese leader T.Z. Koo. During the 1920s, Koo

---

<sup>59</sup> *Student Association Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 35, April 1927, 1-4.

<sup>60</sup> *Student Association Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 41, February 1928, 6.

served as an Associate in the General Secretaryship [*sic*] of the National Committee of YMCAs in China. Between 1925 and 1927, Koo was also heavily involved in organizing conferences operated under the direction of the WSCF. In many ways, Koo acted as a link to the West. Ruth Rouse, historian of the WSCF, credited Koo with interpreting “the East to the West, and vice versa, and has, as an Oriental, given a positive presentation of the claims of Jesus Christ to East and West alike.”<sup>61</sup>

Still, Koo was not simply an unabashed supporter of Christian missionary activity in China. He also supported the burgeoning Chinese nationalist movement. Indeed, his own nationalism led him to use the YMCA and the WSCF as a platform to denounce foreign aggression in China. As a liaison, Koo influenced African American opinion by reporting the details of the Chinese protest against foreign domination.<sup>62</sup>

African American college students of the Colored YMCA were one of Koo’s target audiences. The *SAN* profiled Koo in its March 1927 issue. African American Christian students were already familiar with Koo, crediting him “for his rich contributions to our thought[s] and actions” towards Christianity and world affairs. Koo had previously provided leadership among African American representatives to the Nashville Conference of College Students.<sup>63</sup> Koo also participated in the 1925 Kings Mountain summer conference, the North Carolina site for summer events attended by African American Christian students.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Ruth Rouse, *The World's Student Christian Federation, A History of the First Thirty Years*, 236.

<sup>62</sup> African American newspapers followed Koo’s activities. Although the *Defender* incorrectly identified the Chinese liaison as “Dr. Kee,” Koo provided insight into the Manchurian crisis. In a February 6, 1932 article titled “Dr. Kee Tells College Men of War Cause,” the *Defender* reported that Koo delivered “first hand information concerning the Chinese-Japanese” conflict to the students of Virginia State College. By including a description of Koo’s address, the *Defender* also provided its readership with insight into the reasons for Japan’s 1931 invasion.

<sup>63</sup> *Student Association Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 34, March 1927, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Until 1926, African American students were restricted from attending the YMCA Training School at Blue Ridge, North Carolina. Thus, Kings Mountain became the sight for summer conferences. See Nina Mjagki, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*, 112.



Although the speeches and records of conversations between Koo and these students do not survive, his outside commentary on China during the anti-Christianity and anti-imperialist movement can provide insight into their encounters. One month after the *SAN* highlighted Koo, the *New York Amsterdam News* reported on a presentation he delivered at the Bordentown Manual Training School in New Jersey. Standing before an audience of students, teachers, and “white and colored townspeople,” Koo remarked, “the present situation in China should inspire the American Negro and oppressed groups the world over.” That Koo would use the word “inspire” to describe a movement that targeted Christian organizations and imperialism indicates that he also shared in the nationalist spirit taking hold in China. Still, while he supported the nationalist movement in China, he also reassured his audience that Chinese protesters were not against all foreigners. On this point he emphatically declared, “there is no anti-foreign feeling in China...but merely a desire on the part of its people to redeem those rights...which have been stolen by the powers of the world.” By framing the Chinese protest as a movement to secure natural rights, Koo evoked an image of a universal struggle, of which African Americans were a part. Indeed, African Americans, such as *Amsterdam News* writer C. Rhodes Howard, were able to support China precisely because they were also fighting to claim the rights “which are theirs by every moral law.”<sup>65</sup>

According to Koo, China’s protest provided lessons for African Americans. Just as Dr. Ping Wen Kuo recommended that African Americans “learn from China” by adopting the boycott, Koo specifically addressed his black audience, declaring, “I think it should be an inspiration to your own people, the Negroes of this country, to follow the success of the Chinese group and to note their confident hope in spite of the difficulties that assail them.”<sup>66</sup> Although

---

<sup>65</sup> *New York Amsterdam News*, “Chinese Leader in Bordentown Talk,” April 4, 1927.

<sup>66</sup> *New York Amsterdam News*, “Chinese Leader in Bordentown Talk,” April 4, 1927.

the Chinese confronted U.S. naval and marine forces, the Chinese continued to protest foreign rule. In China, a shared confidence among a national collective was the key to repelling foreign attacks. Koo argued that nationalism could allow black Americans to fight U.S. racism. Indeed, his discussion of U.S. imperialism and Chinese protests combined with a radical atmosphere across black campuses during the 1920s helps explain how and why African American Christian students came to critique U.S. imperialism and issue resolutions supporting Chinese protests.<sup>67</sup>

## **Conclusion**

From 1922 to 1932, Chinese protests against Christianity as a form of cultural imperialism and against political and economic imperialism earned them friends among African Americans. Indeed, by examining responses to the anti-Christianity movement, we discover support for China and a radical critique of Christianity, imperialism, and of the growing stratification between the black elite and the black lower classes of in northern cities.

Nevertheless, during the early 1930s, the *Defender* began to reconsider its position towards China. The *Defender* was not critical of China because it was “forced to choose sides between China and Japan” following the Manchurian crisis, as one historian has suggested.<sup>68</sup> Instead, the *Defender* sympathized with “poor China” because it “fell hard for White Christianity, a doctrine that has enslaved every dark nation that has accepted it.” As a result, “the influence of white missionaries, white flattery, and white loans” left China even more susceptible to foreign domination.<sup>69</sup>

There was some truth to the *Defender*’s belief in China’s acceptance of “white Christianity.” In an attempt to solidify its grip on power, the Kuomintang, led by Chiang Kai-

---

<sup>67</sup> There is, of course, a glaring paradox. While Koo himself espoused Chinese nationalism and used his role as liaison to encourage African American Christian students to support China, the *SAN* considered nationalism one of the “age-long evils.” (*Student Association Newsletter*, Vol.4, No. 41, February 1928, 7.)

<sup>68</sup> Gallicchio, 25.

<sup>69</sup> S. Davis, “Japan and China,” *Chicago Defender*, March 26, 1932.

Shek, cracked down on student political associations and labor organizations, both major players during the anti-Christianity and anti-imperialist movement. In 1927, Chiang “admonished students to return to their studies and stop wasting time demonstrating in the streets.”<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, Chiang’s “public espousal of Christianity in 1930,” reiterated during the Manchurian crisis of 1931, significantly dampened the anti-Christian and anti-western movement in China.<sup>71</sup>

As one historian has noted, that during the 1930s, the anti-Christian movement was “virtually lifeless.”<sup>72</sup>

China’s own repression against protesters and the government’s espousal of Christianity forced the *Defender* to reevaluate its own stance towards China and Japan. By 1933, the *Defender* saw Japan as the only nation fully aware of the destructiveness of Christianity. While Christian missionaries were “delivering unsuspecting Chinese to the merciless exploitation of American capitalists,” the “Japanese knew that in attacking this mission they were attacking a veritable hot bed of deceit and hypocrisy.” The shift in tone is significant. Although the *Defender* criticized Japanese imperialism, Japan’s attack on American missions was necessary to help China defeat “religious pretenders.”<sup>73</sup> As in the early twentieth century, the *Defender* presented China as too immature to lead itself against foreign domination.<sup>74</sup>

Although the *Defender* cast China as a child in need of Japanese guidance, with reports of Japan’s alliance with Italy during the Italo-Ethiopian crisis and renewed aggression in China, the *Defender* once again launched its support for China.

---

<sup>70</sup> Jessie G. Lutz, *Chinese Politics and Christian Missions-The Anti-Christian Movements of 1920-28*, 158 and 257.

<sup>71</sup> Lutz, 277.

<sup>72</sup> John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China, 1927-1937*, 93.

<sup>73</sup> A.B. Wimberley, “What the People Say,” *Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1933.

<sup>74</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Not China vs. Japan but Japan vs. Anybody,” February 6, 1932.

Conflicting Reports:  
The Role of Foreign Correspondents in Shaping Coverage of Wartime China



“Don’t be a China,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 18, 1937.

### Chapter Outline

On September 18, 1937, the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* presented two radically different interpretations of the Second Sino-Japanese War.<sup>1</sup> The *Courier*’s political cartoon and caption depicted the invasion of China by Japan’s “death DEALING” aerial and ground attacks on Chinese streets and countryside, “wrecking fair cities, [and] KILLING

<sup>1</sup> The Second Sino-Japanese War began on July 7, 1937 and lasted until September 9, 1945. From this point on, the war will be referred to as the 1937 Sino-Japanese war or simply, the Sino-Japanese War.

indiscriminately.” However, to the *Courier*, China brought about its own destruction. The message to black Americans was clear: “Don’t be a China.”

Using Orientalist rhetoric to depict the war, the *Courier* argued that while China “started out with good HEALTH, ample opportunities, boundless hope and ambition,” the country “stopped progressing, became stagnant and dormant, hoping to coast into success on the momentum of previous performance.” The *Courier* used the Sino-Japanese war to articulate the uplift ideology, urging African Americans to break free from the path of mediocrity blazed by China. As the 1930s came to a close, African Americans, argued the *Courier*, must not neglect their “natural ASSETS nor let opportunities slip by into eternity.” Indeed, China served as a great case study. The *Courier* called on its readership to “read China’s history, and perhaps LEARN something ABOUT yourself.”<sup>2</sup>

To the *Chicago Defender*, however, the Sino-Japanese war revealed “determined Chinese resistance” to the invading Japanese. The *Defender* reported that in north and south China, “Chinese troops are not only holding their own against combined attacks led by the Japanese army, navy, and air force, but have penetrated the Japanese lines in several places.” In short, the *Defender* presented China as a model of resistance, not a stagnant country.<sup>3</sup>

The extreme discrepancy in coverage of the Sino-Japanese war was the culmination of existing philosophical and ideological differences between the *Courier* and *Defender*. As we have seen, the *Defender* became one of the earliest supporters of China’s quest for self-determination. The radicalization of the *Defender* during the 1930s abetted its favorable coverage of China. Writing from the Soviet Union, communist columnist “Chatwood Hall” provided readers with the image of a determined China, fighting against Japanese militarists. For

---

<sup>2</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, “Don’t Be a China,” September 18, 1937.

<sup>3</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Jap Generals Slain by own men in China,” September 18, 1937.

the *Courier*, W.E.B. Du Bois provided his expertise on the conflict. His well established pro-Japanese sentiments led the *Courier* to present Japan as engaging in a mission of uplift.

To be sure, during the 1930s, African Americans became increasingly more aware of international affairs. The Manchurian crisis of 1931, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, and Japanese attack on China in 1937 further stimulated the existing critique of imperialism. Seen as a pivotal moment in the development of black internationalism, the Ethiopian crisis also served as a window through which to examine Japanese imperialism in China. According to the *Defender*, Japan was to China, what Italy was to Ethiopia.

### **The Power of the Columnist**

The *Pittsburgh Courier* recognized the growing interest among African Americans in world affairs as well as the necessity of direct reporting from foreign correspondents stationed abroad. In 1927, the *Courier* became one of the first black newspapers to use a foreign correspondent by sending Joel Rogers to Europe and Africa. Seeking to show the impact of black peoples, the self-educated historian reported on the influence of Ethiopia and Egypt on “Nordic civilization” and the Roman Empire.<sup>4</sup> Four years later, the *Courier* sent journalist and social commentator George Schulyer to Africa. As a foreign correspondent, Schulyer wrote about daily conditions in African nations and the sustained practice of slavery in Liberia and Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup>

After an early debacle with its use of a foreign reporter in France during WWI, the *Defender* shied away from using foreign correspondents.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the *Defender* culled foreign news from American sources, which were then interpreted and embellished by staff members with their own political commentary. By the 1930s, numerous articles in the *Defender* openly

---

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Bunie, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black Journalism*, 141.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence D. Hogan, *A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1919-1945*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Hogan, 114.

espoused communism and provided a bitter critique of capitalism. The *Defender's* usage of articles written by world travelers and foreign correspondents assisted this radicalization.

The frequent publication of articles written by the communist foreign correspondent “Chatwood Hall” increased African American exposure to communism and helped dispel the notion that Japan was a “friend of all colored races.”<sup>7</sup> Homer Smith adopted the penname “Chatwood Hall” as a student in the School of Journalism at the University of Minnesota during the late 1920s.<sup>8</sup> “Disillusioned with the status of the negro in the United States during the depression years,” Smith lived in the Soviet Union from 1932 to 1946.<sup>9</sup> Smith quickly saw the potential of his insider status and began writing articles for the *Crisis Magazine*, *Baltimore Afro-American* and *Chicago Defender*.<sup>10</sup> The Associated Negro Press distributed his articles to the African American press more generally.<sup>11</sup>

Smith continued the socialist critique of world affairs put forward by A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen during the late 1910s and 1920s. In one of his earliest articles for the *Defender*, Smith used a socialist framework to discuss Japanese imperialism. Smith initiated his critique by first exploring the absence of racism in the Soviet Union. After the performance of “a tall dark-brown woman,” the Soviet audience gave a standing ovation. In just his second year in Moscow, Smith concluded, “most of the audience knew her as their own, so long as she lived in Moscow and Russia.” With increased tension between Moscow and Japan, Smith began his column with a narrative of racial harmony to convince African Americans that it was the Soviet Union, not Japan, who was a friend to black Americans. This vantage point permitted Smith to

---

<sup>7</sup> Chatwood Hall, “A Column from Moscow,” *Chicago Defender*, April 28, 1934

<sup>8</sup> While researching at the Kautz Family YMCA Archives, I tried to locate Homer Smith’s personal papers and student records. However, it appears as if Smith did not graduate. Student yearbooks from 1925-1932 contain references to a Homer Smith, but Smith either spent at least seven years in school, or there were multiple students by the name of Homer Smith at the University of Minnesota.

<sup>9</sup> Homer Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia, A Memoir by Homer Smith*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, 67.

<sup>11</sup> Pride, *History of the Black Press*, 165.

condemn Japanese imperialism. Smith argued that it was foolish for African Americans to believe Japan was a global ally, declaring, “Japan is an imperialist nation and no imperialist nation is a friend of the negro.”<sup>12</sup>

To be sure, Smith’s columns were monitored by the Soviet Union. In his memoir, Smith describes the “unbreachable news *cardon sanitarie*,” adding that all reading material of the foreign news was “regulated and controlled, inasmuch as nothing could be cabled ‘out’ to the foreign press except what had been approved.”<sup>13</sup> The strict censorship of both incoming and outgoing news necessarily forces us to remain skeptical of Smith’s coverage of the Sino-Japanese war.

Regardless of Soviet censorship and the subjectivity of his columns, during the 1930s Homer Smith had a significant impact on the *Defender*’s coverage of foreign affairs.<sup>14</sup> Still, it is incorrect to assume that Smith was single-handedly responsible for raising awareness around Japanese imperialism. Indeed, Smith was one of many writers for the *Defender* who saw Japan as nothing more than an imperialist nation. The *Defender*’s foreign editor, Metz T.P. Lochard further exposed Japan’s imperial ambitions and alliance with Fascist Italy.

Lochard was not afraid to challenge existing norms and was viewed as a radical in various circles. Lochard joined the *Defender* in the 1930s after spending time as a professor at Howard University. In 1925, he was dismissed from Howard for sympathizing with student resistance to compulsory ROTC.<sup>15</sup> As a citizen of France, by way of Haiti, who received degrees from the University of Paris and Oxford University, Lochard considered himself a global citizen

---

<sup>12</sup> Chatwood Hall, “A Column From Moscow,” *Chicago Defender*, April 28, 1934.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, 90-91.

<sup>14</sup> To be sure, Smith wrote articles for other black newspapers. However, the existing climate of radicalism expressed in the *Chicago Defender* allowed Smith to become a leading figure on international affairs in the Chicago newspaper.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*, 107.



and was strongly committed to covering international affairs.<sup>16</sup> His column, “Panorama of World News,” exposed the contradictions of imperialism in various nations in an attempt to show black Americans that they had a stake in the colonial uprisings against foreign rule.

Lochard was one of many black Americans interested in the Italo-Ethiopian crisis. Historians have duly noted longstanding African American interest in Ethiopia as well as black American mobilization during the Italo-Ethiopian crisis. William R. Scott has traced African American identification with Ethiopia following the American Revolution. One group identified with the African nation based on Christian principles and the image of “global black redemption” initiated by Ethiopia.<sup>17</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Ethiopia’s status was elevated among African Americans following Emperor Menilek II’s defeat of Italian troops in 1896.<sup>18</sup> During WWI, Ethiopia became a symbol of victory. With a longstanding interest in Ethiopia, many black Americans formed organizations such as the Friends of Ethiopia in America and United Aid for Ethiopia when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in October 1935.<sup>19</sup>

The simultaneous struggle of China and Ethiopia against imperialist Japan and Italy allowed the *Defender* to stress the “counterpart of Ethiopia in China.” Both nations were fighting “against marauding imperialism” to secure their existence.<sup>20</sup> If there were still African Americans who believed Japan was fighting for the “darker races,” this image was shattered in December 1936, when it was revealed that Japan would recognize Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in exchange for Italy’s recognition of Japan’s puppet state in Manchuria. The *Defender* attributed the revelation to Chinese sources, which also “commented that, contrary to the expectations of

---

<sup>16</sup> “Who’s Who among Black Americans,” 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1981.

<sup>17</sup> William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941*, 11-13.

<sup>18</sup> Scott, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Scott, 116.

<sup>20</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “See Counterpart of Ethiopia in China,” March 8, 1936.

American blacks, Japan made not the slightest protest against Italy's invasion of Ethiopia."<sup>21</sup>

One month later, the news of Japan's alliance with Italy reached New York. The aforementioned United Aid for Ethiopia charged Japan with the "undermining of the non-recognition principle" of illegal territorial claims. These "champions of Ethiopian independence" portrayed Japan's agreement with Italy as "a stab in the back of the negro peoples."

Japan's earlier image as the "Champion of the Darker Races" became a historical relic by the early 1930s. Indeed, Japan's invasion of "Manchuria in 1931 and growing aggression in China seemed to make Tokyo an unlikely ally in the worldwide liberation struggle of oppressed colored peoples." The suggestion that Japan's image remained intact until the early stages of WWII, and that it was the fear of being charged with sedition for supporting Japan that led African Americans to the "rediscovery of China" is a serious misjudgment.<sup>22</sup> It not only groups the majority of African Americans with "the most radical and anti-white black nationalists," but also ignores the reality that efforts of Japanese propagandists during the Great Depression "had not made significant inroads into negro American communities."<sup>23</sup> Although many African Americans stressed the role of race in international affairs, they were not so naïve to believe that Japan was fighting for the so-called colored races.

With Japan's renewed aggression in China, Metz T.P. Lochard and Homer Smith underscored the similarity between China and Ethiopia and presented China as effectively resisting Japanese attacks. Between August and October of 1937, Lochard wrote three articles exploring the connection between China and Ethiopia for his column, "Panorama of World News." Lochard pointed out three similarities between the two nations. Both countries could

---

<sup>21</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "Japan to recognize Italian Conquest," December 5, 1936.

<sup>22</sup> Gallicchio, 132-136.

<sup>23</sup> Scott, 144.

point to a rich and long history, were the victims of imperialism, and might emerge from the conflict as a more unified nation.

Lochard observed that the first thirty years of the twentieth century were replete with examples of imperialist conquests. Despite the age of imperialist expansion, China and Ethiopia had “refused to modernize and unify herself” against encroaching nations. According to Lochard, both countries “were so intent on preserving intact their antiquity that they gave no thought to the greed and evolution of their neighbors.” While Lochard praised China and Ethiopia for their continuous history, he also appropriated Orientalist rhetoric to argue that the antiquity of both societies was responsible for social and economic inequalities. Since ancient times, argued Lochard, both China and Ethiopia had “kept their masses in serfdom and in a virtual state of mendicancy.” While Ethiopian princes resided in “baronial homes...the masses go barefoot.” Similarly, Chinese rulers lived luxuriously. By holding on to anachronistic titles and hoarding wealth, the leaders of China and Ethiopia had failed to provide for its citizens. Thus, the malnourished and dejected citizens of both nations were ill equipped to fight off imperialism.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, China and Ethiopia were the victims of a global trend of imperialist exploitation. While it is true that by 1933, the *Chicago Defender* entertained the idea that Japan could uplift China, renewed Japanese attacks reaffirmed what the *Defender* had observed some ten years earlier: “Japan has no altruistic motive in her invasion of China.” In the context of African American outrage over Italy’s invasion, Lochard observed that Japan was only concerned with expanding its territory and increasing its economic prosperity. Mussolini, “likewise, doesn’t give a damn about the Ethiopians.”<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Metz T.P. Lochard, “Panorama of World News,” *Chicago Defender*, August 28, 1937.

<sup>25</sup> Lochard, “Panorama of World News,” *Chicago Defender*, August 28, 1937.

Still, Italy and Japan were just two of many countries that used armed force to acquire resources. Lochard judged the entire international system complicit in the attacks against China and Ethiopia. According to Lochard, the first wrong committed was the neglect of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which called for the “renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy.”<sup>26</sup> Lochard argued, “had America, England, and France upheld without quivering the moral principles of the League of Nations” following the Manchurian crisis and during Italy’s attack on Ethiopia, “we should be enjoying an era of universal peace and prosperity.” By ignoring the plight of China and Ethiopia, numerous member countries of the League in effect endorsed the right of imperialist conquest and helped pave the way for the proliferation of fascist regimes.<sup>27</sup>

Despite China and Ethiopia’s travails, Lochard found hope in their respective struggles. Lochard argued that unity must be a key ingredient if China and Ethiopia were to emerge as stronger nations. Because of economic stratification, there existed “no unity, no organization, no central force, and no cohesion” in China. Lochard believed there to be a similar absence of unity in Ethiopia as well. However, he hoped that collective Ethiopian resistance might force Italians out and perhaps result in “Ethiopia’s sovereignty and unconditional autonomy.”<sup>28</sup>

Just two months after he stressed the need for unity in China, Lochard pointed to communist resistance against Japan as a sign that “a new China is being recreated.” Lochard reported that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was responsible for organizing the “collaboration of all political parties and organizations.” If successful, the “new China” would be characterized by unification and its emancipation from Japanese aggression. As he hoped for in Ethiopia, foreign aggression brought together competing groups who allied themselves for the preservation of the nation. Lochard admired the ability of the communist party to transform “the

---

<sup>26</sup> Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928.

<sup>27</sup> Metz T.P. Lochard, “Panorama of World News,” *Chicago Defender*, October 16, 1937.

<sup>28</sup> Lochard, “Panorama of World News,” *Chicago Defender*, August 28, 1937.

whole of the Chinese people” into political agents. As politically empowered citizens in a newly unified nation, the Chinese entered “with self-confidence and determination into the great historical fight against Japanese imperialism.”<sup>29</sup>

Lochard’s commentary on Chinese resistance during the Sino-Japanese war demonstrates the radicalization of the *Chicago Defender*. Although Americans became more receptive to communism during the Popular Front, it was still highly vilified. Lochard used his position as foreign editor to argue that communist organization could lead to unity. He praised the CCP “as the true pupils of the great leaders of the working class...and true sons and daughters of the Chinese people.” That Lochard would use Marxist rhetoric and refer to Marx, Engels, and Lenin throughout his commentary indicates both his own radical perspective as well as the *Defender*’s receptiveness to the merits of communism.<sup>30</sup>

### **The release of a “veritable nest of almond eyed hornets”<sup>31</sup>**

Homer Smith used the *Chicago Defender* as a vehicle to emphasize Japanese imperialism and to depict China as a newly unified country successfully resisting Japanese attacks. During the early stages of the Sino-Japanese war, Japan attempted to exploit the disputes among different political factions in China. According to Smith however, “Japanese militarists miscalculated.” Competing groups and segments of the Chinese population with disparate interests “welded themselves together into one united nation to defend their national independence.”<sup>32</sup>

Although Smith provided his coverage of the war from inside the Soviet Union, he correctly observed the partial unification of China. During the 1920s, Chinese Christian students

---

<sup>29</sup> Lochard, “Panorama of World News,” *Chicago Defender*, October 30, 1937.

<sup>30</sup> Lochard, “Panorama of World News,” *Chicago Defender*, October 30, 1937.

<sup>31</sup> Chatwood Hall, “Jap invaders face Defeat in N. China,” *Chicago Defender*, May 14, 1938.

<sup>32</sup> Hall, “Chinese Form United Front Against Japs,” *Chicago Defender*, February 19, 1932.

found themselves detached from the broader nationalist protests against Christianity and imperialism. However, with Japan's invasion of China in 1937, the Chinese Student Christian Movement "came out with its readiness to accept the call of the 'united Front.'"<sup>33</sup> To be sure, China suffered great casualties. However, Smith concluded his column with the hope that the pervasive scene of destruction could "raise to a still higher level the determination of the Chinese people to resist the enemy still more."<sup>34</sup>

In May 1938, Smith reported that Chinese resistance had translated into military success. Continuing his coverage of the Sino-Japanese war, Smith's Subheading reported "600 Tokio [sic] soldiers buried in one Grave; 20,000 lie unburied." Once again, the Japanese army had miscalculated. According to Smith, Chinese forces were having success in northern China, in the highly contested Shangdong region. This province witnessed Japanese troops "on the run and furiously yelling to the rear for reinforcements." Smith pointed to the irony of Japan's justification for invading China. Even if Japan attacked China "merely to make her have a backbone and standup like a man," an explanation Smith rejected, the Japanese military had their expectations fulfilled. Numerous cities and provinces witnessed the "boomerang" effect, with scenes of Chinese forces launching successful coordinated attacks. China's strengthened backbone resulted in high death tolls for the Japanese military and the fleet of many of its remaining soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

One discovers a similar position in the *Defender's* overall coverage of the war. The *Defender* employed many of the terms coined by Smith and similar accounts of Chinese victory. In April 1938 the newspaper noted the determined Chinese resistance in South Shangdong. In this region, the collective stance of Chinese troops resulted in a high number of Japanese

---

<sup>33</sup> Kiang Wen Han, "The Ideological Background of the Chinese Student Movement," *Manuscript*, 1947, 265.

<sup>34</sup> Chatwood Hall, "Chinese Form United Front Against Japs," *Chicago Defender*, February 19, 1932.

<sup>35</sup> Chatwood Hall, "Jap Invaders face Defeat in N. China," *Chicago Defender*, May 14, 1938.

casualties and a “series of humiliating defeats” for Japan. Combining accounts from secondary sources with its own support for China, the *Defender* described the battle scene. Following Japanese aerial attacks along the Tientsin-Pukow railway, the Chinese used guerilla warfare to destroy Japanese communication networks and sever the methods used to transport food and ammunition to troops.<sup>36</sup>

The *Defender* provided a visual to complement Smith’s description of the “boomerang” effect in China. A May 1938 political cartoon depicted a Japanese soldier being bombarded with swords in one of China’s remote provinces. The image and caption echoes the theme of a “united Chinese people” rising up “to defend their national existence and independence from Japanese aggression and plunder.”<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Japan Stung by Reversals in Shantung,” April 30, 1938. It is unclear which columnist wrote the April 30, 1938 article. We can rule out Homer Smith considering his habit of signing all articles under his penname, “Chatwood Hall.” All signs seem to point to foreign editor Metz T.P. Lochard. As we have seen, Lochard was supportive of China’s during the Sino-Japanese war. It is likely that Lochard combined Hall’s February coverage of the war with recent updates from secondary sources to produce a narrative of Chinese “smashing attacks” against Japan.

<sup>37</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “China Rises up against Japs,” May 14, 1938.

## CHINA RISES UP AGAINST JAPS



“China Rises Up Against Japs,” *Chicago Defender*, May 14, 1938

The *Defender* presented the Sino-Japanese war as China’s attempt to avoid annihilation. Although the nation was once divided between nationalists and communists, Christians and the secular, and plagued by warlord’s, the *Defender* believed that warfare brought these seemingly disparate elements together, with Chinese nationalism the underpinning of solidarity. Indeed, the conflict revealed the correlation between unity and emancipation. The *Defender* observed this relationship some twenty-five years earlier in its first political commentary on China following the 1911 revolution. Just as it took collective, indomitable leadership to end the dynastic system and embrace modern, democratic forms of government, the Sino-Japanese war taught China that only unity could lead to liberation. In this way, the *Defender* believed that China served as a model that African Americans could emulate.



It is clear, that the *Defender's* coverage of the war provided its readers with a portrayal of Japanese imperialism and a story of successful resistance of a weaker nation against a militarily superior world power. To be sure, the *Defender* embraced Marxist and socialist ideas. Ultimately, however, many of its writers supported China not merely because that nation was struggling against a capitalist invader, but also because in many ways, China's situation mirrored that of African Americans. Segregation in Shanghai, a longstanding absence of unification, and the struggle for self-determination, allowed these African Americans to conclude, "Whoever helps China, helps humanity, freedom, and democracy."<sup>38</sup>

### **The Colonial Collective**

The *Defender* used its coverage of the Sino-Japanese war to show its readers that those who supported China were a part of the colonial collective. This coalition consisted of colonized peoples and those under some form of oppression. Support for the Chinese boycott against Japanese goods was one of the prerequisites for inclusion. In October 1937, the *Defender* reported on a London Conference organized by "a large delegation of colonial students from West Africa, India, Egypt, Ceylon, Siam, and Burma." Familiar with their own experiences under colonial rule, these students supported China's fight "for existence against another militaristic nation which is intoxicated with imperialism and militarism."<sup>39</sup>

One week later, the *Defender* provided the details of the global boycott against Japan and specified the participants. Organized by the Chinese Campaign Committee, a collection of Chinese students, intellectuals, and activists living in Britain, the conference called for the "cessation of supplies to Japan and a boycott of all Japanese goods." Aside from the references

---

<sup>38</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "The Japanese Blockade," June 8, 1939.

<sup>39</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "London Colonial Students Support China's Struggle," October 16, 1937.

to Japanese “madness” in China, the *Defender* further emphasized the connection between China and Ethiopia. According to one delegate, “if there had been no Manchuria in 1931, there would have been no Abyssinia.”<sup>40</sup>

Another event organized by the Friends of India in London witnessed India’s future Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru declare, “a boycott of Japan is justifiable.”<sup>41</sup> By 1938, the *Defender* reported that Mexican labor unions “decided to carry out a complete boycott on Japanese goods.” Citing Japan’s invasion of China as a violation of international law, various unions throughout Mexico refused to “load or unload cargoes for shipments to Japan.”<sup>42</sup> To show that African Americans also participated in the protest against Japan, the *Defender* included a short description of the nearly 28,000 African American members of the New England Conference of Negro Youth who “enthusiastically endorsed resolutions supporting...a boycott of Japanese goods.” By leading off the heading with the action word “support,” the *Defender* urged its readers to participate in the global movement against Japan.<sup>43</sup>

The boycott against Japan transformed into a global movement. Participants familiar with their own oppression and in search of their own quest for self-determination supported China’s struggle against Japan. It is unclear if staff members of the *Defender* themselves boycotted Japanese goods. Nevertheless, as a political agent, the Chicago newspaper used its pages to connect those African Americans supporting China to a global protest against Japanese imperialism and all nations violating the right to self-determination.

---

<sup>40</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Africans Join Move in Boycott of Japan,” October 23, 1937.

<sup>41</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “India Goes to Support of Chinese,” October 23, 1937.

<sup>42</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Mexican workers boycott Jap Goods,” February 12, 1938.

<sup>43</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “Support anti-Japan Boycott,” May 14, 1938.

### **Which narrative prevails?**

On Monday November 1, 1937, the editor of the *Defender*, Robert Abbott, received a pamphlet denouncing the *Defender*'s coverage of the Sino-Japanese war. The *Defender*'s critique of Japanese imperialism as well as its support for China's struggle for national existence caught the attention of Japanese businessmen. The pamphlet declared, "Japan is not waging an aggressive war." To the contrary, the pamphlet asserted, the cause of the conflict was "whether Japan and China can live together as next door neighbors and secure the stability and prosperity of the Far East" through cooperation. That Japanese businessmen would send a pamphlet from Kyoto to Chicago underscores concern in Japan over the *Defender*'s favorable coverage towards China.<sup>44</sup> It also highlights the competition between Japan and China for African American support. As scholars have shown, various Chinese and Japanese liaisons, frauds, and political groups attempted to influence African American support for their respective cause.<sup>45</sup>

This competition forces us to address the reasons for the conflicting interpretations of the Sino-Japanese war. How does one account for the *Courier*'s indifference towards China and support for Japan during that nation's imperialist invasion in 1937? The answer can be found by examining W.E.B. Du Bois's position as a columnist for the *Courier* during the late 1930s.

Although it had been nearly forty years since Du Bois stressed the importance of Great Britain uplifting colonial subjects, the elder statesmen maintained his ranking system to evaluate the actions of imperialist nations. If a nation engaged in uplift, Du Bois ignored the consequences and saw destruction as necessary for the greater good of the "backward" population. Du Bois's trip to China and Japan in late 1936 reaffirmed his admiration for Japan and ambivalence towards China.

---

<sup>44</sup> *Chicago Defender*, "Japanese Businessmen contact Robert S. Abbott," November 6, 1937.

<sup>45</sup> Gallicchio, 60. See also Ernest Allen Jr. "When Japan Was the 'Champion of the Darker Races,' 28-29.

Du Bois's position explains why the *Courier* urged its readers to avoid being "a miniature China."<sup>46</sup> After resigning as editor of the *Crisis* in 1934, Du Bois began writing for the *Courier* in June 1936. Armed with a press pass, Du Bois traveled to Europe and his much beloved Germany as Robert L. Vann's distinguished columnist. Du Bois shared his thoughts in his column, "A Forum of Fact and Opinion," although it would be quite difficult to ascertain what was fact and what was opinion. Du Bois aimed to provide a thorough analysis of international affairs in the non-white world in order to "prevent American blacks from considering themselves in isolation."<sup>47</sup> Of course, a great number of black internationalists had looked to the affairs of non-white nations since World War I. However, Du Bois's role as a foreign correspondent provided African Americans with a firsthand account of these affairs.

Du Bois refused to believe that Japan was primarily concerned with imperial expansion in Asia. Based on his conversations with Japanese business and civic leaders, Du Bois reiterated the point that Japan *needed* land and resources to continue its development. As he did in 1931, Du Bois argued that Japan's seizure of Manchuria was necessary to prevent European nations from invading the territory. Du Bois placed himself in Japan's shoes, a perspective which led him to "brush aside as immaterial the question as to whether Manchuokuo is an independent state or a colony of Japan." Instead, Du Bois was more concerned with Japan's actions in trying to uplift the precarious territory. As the "talented tenth" among non-white nations, Japan prevented racial discrimination, enacted impartial legal codes, and provided employment, educational, and health opportunities for the natives of Manchuria.<sup>48</sup> Japan's rise as an advanced non-white nation made it well suited to provide peace and stability to the highly contested region. By refashioning his

---

<sup>46</sup> *Pittsburgh Courier*, "Don't Be a China," September 18, 1937.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Bunie, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black Journalism*, 261.

<sup>48</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 13, 1937.

ranking system, Du Bois was once again able to reconcile the tension between the Japan's blatant imperialist conquests with his admiration for Japan.

According to Du Bois, Japan was China's saving grace. A few months before the Second Sino-Japanese war, his tour of Asia took him to Shanghai, the "epitome of the racial strife, economic struggle, [and] the human paradox of modern life."<sup>49</sup> To be sure, 1930s Shanghai possessed many of the characteristics of urban life: luxurious homes in the face of impoverished lower classes.<sup>50</sup> While in Shanghai, Du Bois was reminded of Mississippi. Administrative sectors policed by white officers. Ports operated by white businessmen. Political institutions controlled by white elected officials. The meekness of Chinese men during their encounters with white children. Du Bois found these scenes depressingly similar to conditions in the American South.<sup>51</sup> In 1927, *Amsterdam News* columnist C. Rhodes Howard discussed the similarity between the American South and China. However, Howard did so with a tone of sympathy and compassion. On the contrary, Du Bois was less compassionate toward those suffering from racial segregation in Shanghai. There were other problems that plagued all of China. According to Du Bois, "three things attract white Europe to China: cheap women; cheap child-labor; cheap men." Du Bois was concerned with the low status of women whose primary role in society was the rearing of children. Moreover, millions of Chinese children were forced into the work place, thereby forfeiting their chance at a decent education.<sup>52</sup>

Du Bois undoubtedly carried his elitist leanings to Asia. His bourgeoisie preoccupations are underscored when one juxtaposes his descriptions of Chinese daily life with that of Japan.

"Above all," declared Du Bois, "the Japanese are courteous, neat, prompt, and marvelously

---

<sup>49</sup> Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 13, 1937.

<sup>50</sup> Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937*, 50.

<sup>51</sup> Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 13, 1937.

<sup>52</sup> Du Bois, "Forum of Fact and Opinion," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 6, 1937.

efficient.” He provided a description of a Japanese home, one in which “no dust or dirty feet ever penetrates.” Du Bois was mortified by the idea that after removing his shoes upon entering a Japanese home, his socks might be full of holes. Most importantly, Du Bois’s observation of Japanese efficiency points to his image of Japan as the “talented tenth” among non-white nations. Du Bois observed that because of their awareness of time, the Japanese “get things done, and done right.” Their determined work ethic made them most fit to challenge white world rule.<sup>53</sup>

Writing shortly after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, Du Bois used his column to convince African Americans that the conflict was Japan’s attempt to defend itself from white imperialist nations and to secure the development of Japan and China. Du Bois still believed that there existed racial affinity between Japan and China. While describing the Sino-Japanese war, Du Bois routinely employed anachronistic terms such as dark “blood” and used color to refer to the two nations. Du Bois ignored deep-rooted hostilities between the “little brown nation”(Japan) and “her own cousin”(China). While African Americans writing for the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News* greatly reduced the usage of “color” in their political lexicon during the late 1920s and 1930s, Du Bois still saw Japan as dedicated to the defense and organization of the world’s “colored nations.” Even after Japan acknowledged Italy’s conquest of Ethiopia and renewed aggression in China, Du Bois remained committed to the idea that “the future of the colored people is bound up with” Japan. If Japan was an imperialist nation, argued Du Bois, this was so because the U.S. and Europe forced Japan to invade China when it “clamped down on manufacture in Japan.”<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 20, 1937.

<sup>54</sup> Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 25, 1937.

The *Pittsburgh Courier* always included a disclaimer in each of Du Bois's articles in an attempt to distinguish Du Bois's opinion from the paper's editorial opinions. Still, Du Bois's columns had a substantial impact on the *Courier*'s coverage of the war. Du Bois's description of Chinese meekness and Japanese efficiency undoubtedly resonated with founder Robert L. Vann. For much of his life, Vann remained committed to the belief that "hard work would elevate oneself and one's race."<sup>55</sup> Although the *Courier* maintained an independent stance vis-à-vis international affairs, in 1937, the "*Courier* abandoned its aloofness to applaud Japan's humbling of the West in China."<sup>56</sup> By 1939, the *Courier*'s executive editor P.L. Prattis completely ignored "Japan's attack on China."<sup>57</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The 1930s witnessed the surge of imperialist, fascist regimes. Within this context, many African Americans recognized the similarities between the struggles of China and Ethiopia and the imperialist aims of Japan and Italy. However, not all African Americans advanced their critique of imperialism during the Second Sino-Japanese War. While the *Defender* equated China's protest against imperialism with the African American struggle for equality, the *Courier* depicted China as bringing about its own destruction. The ideological differences between the *Courier* and *Defender* as well as the disparity in their degree of commitment to capitalism allowed for the *Defender* to see China as an ally and the *Courier* to depict the nation as a model African Americans should avoid.

---

<sup>55</sup> Bunie, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Gallicchio, 79.

<sup>57</sup> Gallicchio, 87.

Aware of the League of Nations' inability to enforce the Kellogg-Briand Pact on Japan and Italy, African Americans were unsurprised by the inception of WWII. In many ways, WWII resurrected many of the same questions and disappointments raised during the first Great War. Should blacks Americans support the war effort, or cast their fate with colonized subjects? Not surprisingly, the *Pittsburgh Courier* provided the answer by spearheading the Double-V Campaign, calling for victory over fascism abroad and racism at home.

Immediately following WWII and into the Cold War era, African Americans were deeply committed to using diplomatic channels to call for substantial racial reform. However, many became disenchanted by these methods of protest. Despite expectations of post war prosperity, black Americans in northern cities continued to experience economic inequalities, decadent housing conditions, and racial exclusion. In the context of decolonization, many African Americans began to launch their own rebellion, looking to the colonial world for models of development.

The 1949 Communist Revolution in China was of supreme significance. As Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch have demonstrated, during the 1960s and early 1970s, black radicals such as Robert F. Williams and Huey P. Newton saw "China as the beacon of the third world



## *Conclusion*

revolution.” These black Americans looked to communist China because of the CCP’s ability to successfully refashion Marxism to fit China’s specific political realities.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this adaptation inspired Amiri Baraka to found the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) with the hope that the RCL would be able to amend Marxism to the conditions of the urban north.<sup>2</sup>

According to Harold Cruse, these conditions exemplified America’s “domestic colonialism.”<sup>3</sup> With deindustrialization further stratifying economic inequalities in places like Chicago, Detroit, and Harlem, many parts of black America resembled third world colonies. China’s rise as a former victim of imperialism gave hope to Black Maoists that they too could defeat racial and economic exploitation.

Still, neither the relocation of industrial sectors to the ‘Rust Belt’ nor decolonization movements were necessary for African Americans to develop a critique of capitalism and imperialism. During the 1920s and 1930s, political agents such as the *Chicago Defender*, *New York Amsterdam News*, and *Student Association Newsletter*, as well as black leaders like Hubert Harrison and A. Phillip Randolph criticized imperialist nations and endorsed those striving for collective resistance against foreign domination. Indeed, African American appeal to the “darker races” and their inclusion in the “rising tide of color” following WWI was a precursor to the 1960s Revolutionary Action Movement’s (RAM) analyses that “saw Afro-America as a *de facto* member of the non-aligned nations.”<sup>4</sup>

Although the specific movements changed, the strength of African American international perspectives remained continuous throughout the twentieth century. Many of the themes also remained the same. During the black press’ coverage of the 1911 Revolution in

---

<sup>1</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, “Black Like Mao,” *Souls* Vol.1, No.4, 1999, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Kelley and Esch, “Black Like Mao,” 12.

<sup>3</sup> Kelley and Esch, “Black Like Mao,” 12.

<sup>4</sup> Kelley and Esch, “Black Like Mao,” 18.

## *Conclusion*

China and the 1937 Second Sino-Japanese War, many African Americans called for unity among black peoples and strong, collective leadership. Thus, by examining African American perceptions of international events, we simultaneously illuminate critiques of domestic affairs.

We may also unearth tensions and contradictions. While the *Defender* called for equality through racial reform, it did not permit African American women from securing their own equal standing with men. Commenting on the unification of wartime China, the *Defender* believed that African American women should “learn from Chinese women” by devoting their efforts to the unification of the race and not to their special grievances. In September 1937, the *Defender* remarked that prominent Chinese women such as Madame Sun Yat-Sen and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek led the efforts to weld “China’s four hundred million people into an indivisible unit.”<sup>5</sup>

Gender tensions are revealed with the *Defender*’s suggestion that “our aggressive women with their strong organizations” should “set aside personal ambitions, meaningless social aspirations, and direct their aggressiveness into constructive channels.” The newspaper argued that although both Chinese and African Americans were unorganized and without social cohesion, the difference between the two groups was that Chinese women did not pursue their own agenda for equal political and economic rights. As a result, China was in the process of transforming itself from a disparate collection of disconnected citizens, into a unified nation state.<sup>6</sup> When we flash forward into the 1960s, we see this same tension between African American men and women. During the struggle for black liberation, the Black Panther Party (BPP) was just one of many groups to articulate a masculine image of the rebirth of black America.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “We Can Learn from Chinese Women,” September 4, 1937.

<sup>6</sup> *Chicago Defender*, “We Can Learn from Chinese Women,” September 4, 1937.

## *Conclusion*

To be sure, there were great differences between 1900 and 1939. Following the Great Migration, black Americans became increasingly attentive of economic exploitation. African Americans looking abroad abetted this awareness. By analyzing the affairs of colonized, non-white peoples, black Americans recognized that imperialist nations exploited others both because of a racist perspective and because of a demand for resources. In short, the African American encounter with China allowed many to see the linkage between the assorted elements of exploitation.

## **Bibliography**

### **Primary Sources**

#### **Archival Collections:**

*Columbia University, Butler Memorial Library, New York, New York*  
Hubert H. Harrison Papers

*Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Elmer L. Andersen Library, Minneapolis, Minnesota*

Colored Work Department Records, Collection#: Y.U.S.A.1, Box 5, 13

International Work in China, Collection#: Y.U.S.A.9-2-4, Box 103

Student Work Records, Collection#: Y.U.S.A.36, Box 191

*Princeton University, Firestone Library, Princeton, New Jersey*  
Woodrow Wilson Papers

*Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, New York*  
*The Messenger*

#### **Memoirs:**

Delany, Martin. *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of The Colored People of the United States*. New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968.

Dillon, Emile Joseph. *The Inside Story of the Paris Peace Conference*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1920.

Hayes, George E. "What the Negro Can Contribute to Race Adjustment," in *Race Relations*, Lectures at Fisk University 1918.

Pearson, Charles Henry. *National Life and Character: a Forecast*. London and New York: Macmillan and co, 1894.

Smith, Homer. *Black Man in Red Russia, A Memoir by Homer Smith*. Johnson Publishing Company, Chicago 1964.

Stoddard, Lothrop. *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920.

Washington, Booker T. *The Booker T. Washington Papers*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972-1989.

**Periodicals:**

*Chicago Defender*  
*New York Amsterdam News*  
*Pittsburgh Courier*  
*Student Association Newsletter*  
*The Messenger*  
*The Negro World*

**Secondary Sources**

- Allen, Ernest, Jr. "When Japan Was the 'Champion of the Darker Races': Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism." *Black Scholar* 24 (1994).
- Baldwin, Kate. *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters Between Black and Red, 1932-1963*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, Volume One*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987.
- Broderick, Francis L. "German Influence on the Scholarship of W.E.B. Du Bois." *The Phylon Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1958).
- Bunie, Andrew. *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black journalism*. Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974.
- Chan, Sucheng. *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.
- Chandler, Nahum D. "The Figure of W.E.B. Du Bois as a Problem for Thought." *The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2007).
- Choy, Phillip P. et al. *Coming Man: 19<sup>th</sup> century American Perceptions of the Chinese*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995.
- Connaughton, R. M. *Rising Sun and Tumbling Bear: Russia's war with Japan*. London: Cassell, 2003.
- Cruse, Harold. *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. New York, Morrow, 1967.
- Detweiler, Frederick German. *The Negro Press in the United States*. College Park, Md: McGrath Pub. Co., 1968.

## *Bibliography*

- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*. Edited By David Levering Lewis. New York: H. Holt, 2000.
- *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*. Edited by David Levering Lewis. New York: Henry Holt, 1995.
  - *W.E.B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*. Edited by Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005.
  - *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*. Edited by Eric J. Sundquist. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
  - *W.E.B. Du Bois, race, and the city: The Philadelphia Negro and its Legacy*. Edited by Michael B. Katz and Thomas Sugrue. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.
  - *Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois*. Vol. 1, 1877-1934. Edited by Herbert Aptheker. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973
- Edwards, Barrington S. "W.E.B. Du Bois Between Worlds: Berlin, Empirical Social Research, and the Race Question." Cambridge University Press, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2006).
- Fairbank, John K. *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Ferguson, Karen. *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Gaines, Kevin K. *Uplifting the Race: Black leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Gallicchio, Marc. *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Garrett, Shirley S. *Social Reformers in Urban China; The Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895-1926*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Garvey, Marcus. *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, Vol. I and II*. Edited by Amy Jacques-Garvey. New York: Atheneum, 1969.
- Geiss, Imanuel. *The Pan-African Movement; A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa*. Translated by Ann Keep. New York: Africana Pub. Co., 1974.

## *Bibliography*

- Gerth, Karl. *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Giffard, Sydney. *Japan Among the Powers 1880-1990*. New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992
- Grossman, James R. *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black southerners, and the Great Migration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Hagedorn, Ann. *Savage Peace: Hope and Fear in America, 1919*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.
- Harrison, Hubert H. *A Hubert Harrison Reader*. Edited by Jeffrey B. Perry. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2001.
- Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*. Edited by Jeffrey B. Perry. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Hogan, Lawrence D. *A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1919-1945*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1984.
- Hsueh, Chun-Tu. *The Chinese Revolution of 1911: New Perspectives*. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co, 1986.
- Immerwahr, Daniel. "Caste or Colony?: Indianizing Race in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 4 (2007).
- Irvine, Keith. *The Rise of the Colored Races*. New York: Norton, 1970.
- Israel, John. *Student Nationalism in China, 1927-1937*. California: Stanford University Press, 1966.
- Jung, Moon-Kie. *Reworking Race: The Making of Hawaii's Interracial Labor Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Kawamura, Noriko. "Wilsonian Idealism and Japanese Claims at the Paris Peace Conference," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (1997).
- Keller, Charles Andrew. "Making Model Citizens: The Chinese YMCA, Social Activism, and Internationalism in Republican China, 1919-1937." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1996.

## **Bibliography**

- Kelley, Robin D.G. and Esch, Betsy. "Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution," *Souls*, Vol. I, No. 4 (1999).
- Kowner, Rotem. *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Kramer, Paul A. *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Lake, Marilyn. "The White Man Under Siege," *History Workshop Journal*, 58 (2004).
- Ling, Samuel D. "The Other May Fourth Movement: The Chinese "Christian Renaissance," 1919-1937. Ph.D dissertation, Temple University, 1981.
- Lutz, G. Jessie. *Chinese politics and Christian Missions: The anti-Christian Movements of 1920-28*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Cross Cultural Publications, Cross Roads Books, 1988.
- Lemke, Sieglinde. "Berlin and Boundaries: Sollen versus Geschehen." *Boundary 2*, Vol. 27, No. 3, (2007).
- Manela, Erez. "Imagining Woodrow Wilson in Asia: Dreams of East-West Harmony and the Revolt against Empire, 1919," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 5 (2006).
- *The Wilsonian Moment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Miller, Stuart Creighton. *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969.
- Mjagki, Nina. *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994.
- Onishi, Yuichiro. "The New Negro of the Pacific: How African Americans Forged Cross Racial Solidarity with Japan, 1917-1922." *Journal of African American History*, Vol. 92, No. 2, (2007).
- Pedersen, Susan. *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Plummer, Brenda Gayle. *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.



## **Bibliography**

- Rouse, Ruth. *The World's Student Christian Federation: a History of the First Thirty Years*. London: S. C. M. Press, 1948.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Schiffirin, Harold Z. *Sun Yat-Sen and the Origins of the Chinese Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
- The 1911 Revolution in China: Interpretive Essays: International Conference in Commemoration of the Seventieth Anniversary of the 1911 Revolution*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1984.
- Schwarcz, Vera. *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth movement of 1919*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Scott, William R. *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Shimazu, Naoko. *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Spence, Jonathan. *The New Republic: In Search for Modern China*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.
- Wallace, Aurora. *Newspapers and the Making of Modern America*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005.
- West, Cornel, Glaude Jr., Eddie S. *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.
- Wilmore, Gayraud S. *Black religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998.
- Wolters, Raymond. *The new Negro on Campus: Black college Rebellions of the 1920s*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975.
- Zhen, Zhang. *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.