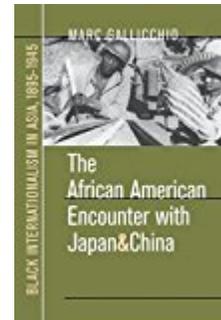


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Black Internationalism and Colored Imperialism

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On February 9, 1904, the Japanese navy boldly and successfully attacked the Russian Pacific fleet during nighttime raids at Chemulpo and Port Arthur. At stake was what country would dominate China and extract its vast mineral wealth in the Liaotung Peninsula and Manchuria. There were a series of battles in which both sides grew weary, but Japan clearly gained the upper hand. After a 156-day siege and bombardment, Port Arthur was surrendered by Russia in January of 1905. And then in May the biggest blow came with the defeat of Russia's Baltic fleet (eight battleships, three cruisers, five minelayers, and four other ships destroyed) in the Tsushima Straits that separate Japan and Korea. Excluding the successes of Tartars/Mongols of a bygone era, Tsar Nicholas II is the first European ruler to lose a war against Asians.[1] Even so, the Russo-Japanese War is not the first time white supremacy was discredited on the field of battle.[2]

Although Japan won a tremendous victory, the details are typically blurred. Japan was fortunate Theodore Roosevelt intervened and encouraged both parties to negotiate a peace settlement. If the war had continued, Japan most likely would have faced eventual defeat because its resources were being stretched too thin. (Over

half of Japan's annual revenue went into the war effort.) Russia, although slow and plodding, was capable of indefinitely adding to its reinforcements in the Far East. Many commentators do not emphasize enough the advantages Japan had in waging a war in its own backyard. For Russia, this conflict was on the extreme periphery of a vast empire. (From Moscow to Vladivostok the distance is 5,500 miles or 8,800 kilometers.) Not coincidentally, Japan initiated its attack in wintertime, when it would be most difficult for Russia to execute an effective response. After all was said and done, Russia did indeed have to relinquish territory but at the same time it was hardly driven out of the area. The Tsar kept his Pacific port at Vladivostock. After the peace settlement, riots broke out in Japan, so bitter and disappointed were its people who after so much sacrifice had gained so little.

In Marc Gallicchio's book, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China*, the Russo-Japanese War is a starting point for exploring the rise of "black internationalism" in the African-American community. The "Negro reaction" to Japan's defeat of Russia was one of amazement and hope. Since the Japanese were regarded as people of color, their wartime exploits had racial implications.[3] If Japan could defeat Russia, then there was hope for the rest of the non-white world. If Japan could defeat a European imperialist power, then there

was hope that people of color everywhere, including in the United States, might some day overpower white oppression. Black activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey came to regard Japan as a potential leader of a worldwide liberation movement for colored people. After Japan's victory, certain blacks in the United States were "happily dreaming of color" (p. 32) and predicting "goodbye to white domination on both sides of the salt pond" (p. 34).

Consequently, during the 1920s African Americans looked to Japan for assistance. Not only was Japan seen as a symbol of that which destroyed the myth of white power, but it was also regarded as an advocate at the international level for promoting the rights of blacks and other victims of discrimination. Gallicchio adds, "Even if Japan did not directly champion their cause, black internationalists believed that at the very least Japan's power would force the American government to alter its racial policies or face a future race war in the Pacific" (p. 31).

Except for the additional focus on China, Gallicchio covers much of the same ground as Reginald Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* [4] Both of these works fill in the gap between Willard B. Gatewood, Jr's *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden 1898-1903* and Penny M. Von Eschen's *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism 1937-1957*. Gatewood and Von Eschen, it should be noted, do not address the African-American perception of Japan and China. Gallicchio resumes where Gatewood leaves off at the Spanish-American War, while adding information that precedes the beginning point of Von Eschen's study. Von Eschen thinks in the narrower terms of Pan-Africanism or African-American anticolonialism, but her usage of the designator "colonial international" seems to be an antecedent of Gallicchio's "black internationalism." [5]

In analyzing how black Americans felt after the Spanish-American War, Gatewood writes, "Convinced that color prejudice had accompanied the American flag to Cuba, the Philippines, and other islands, Negroes preferred to fight their battles in the familiar environment of their birth..." Deeds based on uplift ideology were needed at home for a people who after the U.S. Civil War had been denied their forty acres and a mule. "By 1903 Negroes Americans might still sympathize with Filipino aspirations for independence and freedom, but they were convinced that the first obligation of the American government was to its own colored minority," continues Gatewood. "The nation's saving hand was needed in tak-

ing up the black man's burden at home, rather than looking across the sea for more 'little brown brothers.'" [6]

But after Japan's victory against Russia, some of the brothers across the sea grew in stature, shows Gallicchio (p. 14). For African Americans, the Russo-Japanese War increased the awareness of the interconnectivity between white imperialism abroad and the denial of civil rights at home (p. 2). The white man's burden was once again exposed as a justification for imposing racist policies on people of color. Many black Americans felt that liberation was not going to be achieved in ordinary ways. But if all people of color would unite (75 percent of the world), then change could be demanded and new freedom won. If Japan was able to defeat white imperialism, then people of color everywhere could arise and assert their power. Japan was now viewed as a potential savior. This coincided with white reactionaries who sounded the alarm over a "Rising Tide of Color" (p. 57).

Traditionally, the dominant culture in American society has viewed the "Orient" as Other, the opposite of its own superiority. Whereas China, for example, stressed traditionalism, permanency, equilibrium, and the static, the West regarded itself as dynamic, innovative, progressive, and in a state of creative flux. Consequently, the United States, in its relationship to East Asia, has long seen itself as a "redeemer nation." [7] But for many black Americans, the Russo-Japanese War discredited such stereotypes. Suddenly Japan was cast as the "redeemer nation" for people of color worldwide. Moreover, this was a country that could bring inspiration because from the beginning it had avoided "colonial servitude." [8]

World War I, Gallicchio points out, strengthened the cause of "black internationalism" (pp. 18, 31-33). People of color contributed significantly to the Allied victory. The British armed forces included 1.2 million Indian troops. France utilized 175,000 Africans at the front-line, while over 200,000 Chinese and Indochinese served in its labor battalions. The United States military called up 367,000 blacks, of which 50,000 were deployed to France. Japan, by patrolling the Pacific, enabled the United States to divert its naval power to the Atlantic. Consequently, black Americans felt that the war experience proved that people of color are indispensable. Moreover, black Americans came to realize more than ever that whites were less than invincible. "In aiding the Allies they [people of color] had witnessed the Europeans at their most vulnerable," Gallicchio writes. "The myth of white supremacy, weakened at the turn of the century by Japan's victory over Russia, suffered a mortal wound on the fields of

Flanders” (p. 33).

After the war, African Americans expected to experience positive social change at home, especially in light of the Wilsonian pledges of self-determination and the rights of free people everywhere. This new liberalism, they argued, was not to be applied only to white people. Japan strengthened its status in the eyes of black Americans when it requested a racial equality clause in the charter of the League of Nations. In fact, prior to the gathering at Versailles, African-American leaders (namely A. Philip Randolph, Ida Wells-Barnett, C. J. Walker, and William Monroe Trotter) had lobbied Japanese officials to raise the issue of racial discrimination. The representatives from Britain and the United States opposed the equality clause and prevailed in blocking its adoption, even though a majority of the conference delegates had voted for its approval (pp. 3, 20-21, 42, 55-56).[9]

But the hopes black Americans had for social gains were soon dashed by a conservative backlash following the war, as seen by the marked increase in lynching (pp. 34-35). In retrospect, it was too much to expect that President Woodrow Wilson would usher in a new era of human rights. The extent of Wilson’s racism is noted by his segregating the federal government. His white superiority complex was further exhibited by his intervening in Latin America more than any other American president, sending troops to Mexico (eleven times), Haiti, Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Panama. A permanent force was kept in Nicaragua. He also sent an expeditionary force to Russia during the civil war following the Bolshevik takeover of power, but this force actually worked with the Japanese military that was also on the scene. America’s first Red Scare (the Palmer raids of 1919-1920), which culminated with a roundup and deportation of foreign-born, was a capstone of Wilson’s political career. He is the same who snubbed Ho Chi Minh at Versailles after being asked to support Vietnamese independence. Wilson, the former president of Princeton University (the only major northern university at the time that refused to admit blacks) and a Southerner by birth, is prominently quoted as an authority on the “victimization” of whites during Reconstruction in the racist film *Birth of a Nation* (1914). And it was also Wilson who said, “Any man who carries a hyphen about him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this republic whenever he gets ready.”[10]

The multicultural intolerance of the United States during the 1920s was also directed toward Asians with

the passing of the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 (p. 123). Here Gallicchio could have been more thorough as black internationalism proved to be weak in this instance. This is the conclusion reached by David J. Hellwig. On one hand, blacks sympathized with Japanese as “fellow victims of racism.” Yet, there was also the occasional black resentment toward prosperous Japanese living in America. When stricter immigration laws were promulgated, blacks turned a blind eye to the discrimination it imposed on Japanese. “While it would be wrong for the [black] race to add to the misery of the Japanese, they reasoned, blacks should be prepared to take advantage of the economic vacuum created by white hatred of Asians,” explains Hellwig. “Expediency, then, led all but a few blacks to acquiesce in the provision of the 1924 law which prevented almost all nonwhites except the Negro from entering the nation.”[11] Although Gallicchio acknowledges some of Hellwig’s earlier research (p. 55), he fails to apply this information in the context of the period when black admiration for the Japanese was supposed to be at or near its height.

Perhaps one reason for this slant has to do with Gallicchio’s overall approach. A major weakness of the book is its almost exclusive focus on the views of black elites. Many black newspapers, for example, are repeatedly cited for fleshing out the viewpoint of African Americans. It is problematic, for example, to know how representative an editorial written by W. E. B. Du Bois is of black Americans as a whole. Unlike Du Bois who was the first African American to earn a Ph.D from Harvard, most black Americans were not college educated. What Gallicchio labels as “black internationalism” should be amended to read “black *intellectual* internationalism.”

This is not to suggest that Gallicchio has avoided the realities of a messy narrative. To the contrary, he does an excellent job showing the contradictions (in one place he remarks about “the malleability of the ideology of black internationalism” [p. 57]) and variant voices of black internationalism. For example, while certain blacks found American intervention in East Asia as abhorrent, they were quick to rationalize Japan’s invasion of China. But A. Philip Randolph was one black leader who did call into question the attitude that would denounce imperialism only if it was done by the opposite color (p. 42). Also, Du Bois eventually condemned Japan’s Asiatic caste system (pp. 204-205), even though he had earlier defended an Asian [Japanese] Monroe Doctrine (p. 124). As with the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924, some blacks were hypocritical when colonialism seemed to serve some advantage to people of color at home.

But there are voices not to be found in Gallicchio's work, which had they been added would have subjected the author's thesis to a more thorough testing. For example, take Hugh Mulzac, who was from the West Indies but became an American citizen in 1918. As a merchant seaman he traveled much of the world and had his own mind about international affairs. In his autobiography, telling of sailing around the world during the 1930s, he offered negative commentary about Japan. He wrote that Korea had been "enslaved" by Japan since 1905 and had by that time already "occupied large parts of China." The seamen and West Coast longshoremen in America had been wise, he added, to declare in 1939 "their own strict embargo" of iron and scrap metal to Japan, "while the rest of the world was blithely trading with the aggressor." Consequently, "The bombs that rained over Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, were, in a very real way, our own steel chickens coming home to roost." Mulzac was not indifferent to American imperialism (he denounced America's exploitation of Cuba), but neither was he able to see Japan as an inspiration to people of color.[12] On the other hand, Mulzac's negativity toward Japan harmonizes with the Double V campaign (victory over fascism abroad and racism at home) that was proclaimed by African Americans shortly after Pearl Harbor (p. 116).

Although Gallicchio shows that Japan was once an infatuation of the black internationalists, it can also be noted that not all blacks were troubled by white imperialism. The same year Japan attacked the Russian fleet at Port Arthur, T. G. Steward published *The Colored Regulars in the United States Army*, a work glorifying the war record of blacks in the American armed forces. Half of Steward's book is devoted to the Cuban campaign of the Spanish-American War. Steward, a black man who was himself a chaplain in the 25th U.S. Infantry, did not seem to mind the imperialistic implications of that war.[13] Steward no doubt had already finished, or nearly finished, his manuscript by the time the Russo-Japanese War broke out. But obviously there was no initial reverberation that caused Steward to question the focus of his research project.

Indeed, some African Americans were accepting of the ideology of the white man's burden. Frederick Douglass once noted how China and Japan, long before Europe, were aware of certain farm techniques, such as deep plowing and draining. But this was presented not as the superiority of people of color, but simply to point out that Asians are also intelligent and part of the human race. Earlier, in 1869, Douglass defended the right of Chinese and Japanese to immigrate to the United States,

but this was a benevolent position he was taking. "We shall spread the network of our science and our civilization over all who seek their shelter, whether from Asia, Africa, or the Isles of the Sea," he continued, sounding somewhat Whitmanesque. Douglass added, "We shall mould them all, each after his kind, into Americans." [14]

Ralph Bunche, the future African-American scholar and diplomat, was born in Detroit in that fateful year of 1904. But black internationalism was apparently not imbibed in his mother's milk. While at Harvard, in fact, he wrote a pamphlet criticizing the concept. He attacked the Pan-Africanists, specifically Du Bois, for reducing socio-economic complexities to the color of skin pigmentation. Being exploited by a member of one's own race would not make exploitation any more pleasant, he noted (p. 72).[15] For Bunche, who later helped Gunnar Myrdal with the research for *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy* (1944), the issue was the working class versus the owning class. For twenty-two years he served as a board member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, so he was not indifferent to black causes. During World War II he served in the Office of Strategic Services.[16]

Gallicchio could have delved deeper on how Japanese over the years have perceived people of African descent. Although black intellectuals were quick to open their circle and designate Asians as people of color, the same cannot be said the other way around. If the "Yamato race" regarded itself as being superior to Koreans, Chinese, and other Asians, which it did, then it is fair to conclude that Japanese did not feel any genuine kinship with blacks. Although Gallicchio does note that Japanese, as well as Chinese, were at times unwilling to mix with African Americans (pp. 54-56), he does not provide much detail.

Kearney shows that antiblack rhetoric is sometimes a part of contemporary Japanese public discourse.[17] Interestingly, Hiroshi Wagatsuma notes that during the 1920s (when black internationalism was supposed to be strong) Japanese culture emphasized an importance of white skin complexion. In fact, it was during the Meiji period, when Japan was undergoing industrialization and adopting some Western concepts, that Japanese culture started to favorably view the white skin of Westerners, especially for women. According to Wagatsuma, writing in 1967, "Up to the present, the color of Negroid skin and other physical features find little favor in Japanese aesthetics." But it is about more than aesthetics when "undesirable" physical features and complexion are equated with the primitive, childish, and simple-minded.[18] In

his perceptive essay “The Yellow Negro,” Joe Wood analyzes “jiggers” (Japanese blackfacers) and concludes that they are simply middle-class youth rebelling against conformity (not unlike Beats in America during the 1950s), as they attempt to transcend their whiteness while remaining in their comfortable Western culture. In other words, black is Other in Japan. The fact that Japanese animation has traditionally depicted characters as white and not as colored is also revealing.[19]

Japanese racism toward blacks is perceived to be a lingering reality.[20] And although the leaders of Japan like to recall their nation’s effort to introduce an equality clause way back when, the position it later took on the issue of apartheid in South Africa was one in which economic interests prevailed over concerns about institutionalized racism.[21] After World War II, any cultural empathy Japan had toward blacks was less than apparent by the social rejection experienced by black *konketsuji* [mixed-blood child(ren)]. Half-white *konketsuji* were not treated as harshly, so the negative experiences of black *konketsuji* cannot be completely attributed to the fact that they had been fathered by American GIs—both have a paternal lineage that can be traced to the U.S. military occupation.[22]

Of course, an in-depth examination of Japanese attitudes towards blacks would go beyond Gallicchio’s scope of inquiry. However, in the same way that an honest assessment of Japan’s victory over Russia would make that victory seem less exceptional, a little more attention to the realities of racism in Japan, both past and present, would more clearly show how black internationalism was based on false illusions. Some African Americans, so desirous of finding a counter to the racism they experienced at home, blindly romanticized the Japanese nation. They fled from Jim Crow only to embrace colored imperialism.

After World War II brought discredit to Japan, some black internationalists looked toward China. Earlier they had favored Japan’s invasion of China, as it undid white imperialism in that area (pp.3-4). In fact, China was viewed as the equivalent of an Asian “Uncle Tom” because it had capitulated to the demands of white colonists. But with Japan now the enemy of the United States, African Americans hoped that Chiang Kai-shek would be the new advocate of people of color. Gallicchio argues that Pearl Buck, the white American novelist who was raised in China by missionary parents, helped African Americans to see China as a compatriot (pp. 159-162). In the final analysis, however, there never devel-

oped in the African-American community the kind of affinity toward China it once had for Japan. This section of Gallicchio’s book is less formulated.

Marc Gallicchio’s *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* is a worthy contribution to the fields of African-American studies, Asian studies, American culture studies, and postcolonial studies. There is no doubt that this book will long be in use as a scholarly reference tool. However, it is unlikely to be the last word on the subject of black internationalism and Asia because there are many other primary sources to be culled. As already alluded to, a comprehensive Asian viewpoint has yet to be told. (Gallicchio, by the way, uses very few Japanese sources.) Although this work is recommended reading for the appropriate graduate-level course, it would be less useful in the undergraduate classroom because of its advanced reading style and the level of prior knowledge the author expects of the reader.

Notes

[1]. A definitive source on this topic is R. M. Connaughton, *The War of the Rising Sun and Tumbling Bear: A Military History of the Russo-Japanese War 1905-5* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988). Also, see W. Bruce Lincoln, *Romanovs: Autocrats of All the Russias* (New York and London: Anchor Books, 1981), 636-644.

[2]. In 1896 white supremacy was discredited by the defeat of the Italian invasion force at Adowa, Ethiopia, marking the first modern military defeat of Europeans by people of color—see Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 20.

[3]. For an interesting argument that Africa and Asia have past connections, see Runoko Rashidi, *The Global African Community: The African Presence in Asia, Australia, and the South Pacific* (Washington, DC: Institute for Independent Education, 1993).

[4]. Reginald Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998). Strangely, although Gallicchio acknowledges Kearney’s dissertation—“African American Views of Japanese, 1900-1945” (Ph.D, Kent State University, 1991)—there is no mention of the subsequent book, which suggests either updates were not made in the course of research or an unwillingness to acknowledge a colleague’s similar work that actually preceded his own. Furthermore, the existence of Kearney’s

work makes somewhat hyperbolic Akira Iriye's blurb on the back cover of Gallicchio's volume: "Gallicchio is the first historian who has successfully and persuasively integrated African American history into the history of U.S.-East Asian relations." (Kearney is also the author of *Reconcilable Differences: Issues in African American-Japanese Relations* [New York: Japan Society and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 1992].)

[5]. Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism 1937-1957* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[6]. Willard B. Gatewood, Jr, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden 1898-1903* (Urbana and London: University of Illinois Press, 1975). 323-324.

[7]. See Akira Iriye, *Western Perceptions and Asian Realities* (Colorado Springs: United States Air Force Academy, 1981), 1-4.

[8]. Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 20.

[9]. *Ibid.*, 17, 20, 69.

[10]. James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 13-21.

[11]. David L. Hellwig, "Black Leaders and United States Immigration Policy, 1917-1929," *Journal of Negro History* 66 (Summer 1981): 110-127. The quote is on page 118.

[12]. Hugh Mulzac, *A Star to Steer By* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), excerpted in *Always Elsewhere: Travels of the Black Atlantic*, Alastair Pettinger (ed.) (London and New York: Cassell, 1998), 181.

[13]. T. G. Steward, *The Colored Regulars in the United States Army* (1904; reprint, New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969).

[14]. *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, vol. 4 (1864-1880), John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan (eds.) (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 257, 382.

[15]. Ralph J. Bunche, *A World View of Race* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1938).

[16]. Charles P. Henry, *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999).

[17]. For example, in remarks said in September 1986, Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone attributed the decline in "American intelligence levels" to the presence of African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans. See Kearney, *African American Views of Japanese*, 128-148.

[18]. Wagatsuma Hiroshi, "The Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan," *Daedalus* 96 (Spring 1967): 407-443. The specific references are found on pages 415, 417, 431, and 435.

[19]. Joe Wood, "The Yellow Negro," *Transition*, issue 73 (1997): 40-66.

[20]. See Sayoko Okada Yamashita, "Ethnographic Report of an African American Student in Japan," *Journal of Black Studies* 26, 6 (July 1969): 735-747.

[21]. See the chapter "Voting for Economic Security: Japan and the Apartheid Debate at UNGA" in Kewku Ampiah, *The Dynamics of Japan's Relations with Africa: South, Africa, Tanzania and Nigeria* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 140-170.

[22]. William R. Burkhardt, "Institutional Barriers, Marginality, and Adaptation Among the American-Japanese Mixed Bloods in Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 42 (May 1983): 519-544. For an account of the racism experienced by a woman growing up half-black in Japan, see Keiko Ozeki, *Nipponjin Keiko: Aru Konketsu Shojo no Shuki* [Keiko, a Japanese: The Notes of a Mixed-Blood Girl] (Tokyo: Buka Hosho Shuppanbu, 1967).

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