

Feb 8th, 9:00 AM - 10:15 AM

## Racism, Prejudice, and Democratization: The Westernization of Japan Under U.S. Occupation, 1945-52

Jasmine Mitchell  
*Oberlin College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/africana\\_studies\\_conf](https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/africana_studies_conf)



Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#)

---

Mitchell, Jasmine, "Racism, Prejudice, and Democratization: The Westernization of Japan Under U.S. Occupation, 1945-52" (2019). *Africana Studies Student Research Conference*. 3.  
[https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/africana\\_studies\\_conf/2019/001/3](https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/africana_studies_conf/2019/001/3)

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences and Events at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Africana Studies Student Research Conference by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

## **Racism, Prejudice, and Democratization: The Westernization of Japan Under U.S. Occupation, 1945-52**

### **Abstract:**

Following the unconditional surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945, the Allied forces set out to establish a military occupation in Japan to instill democratic ideals upon the nation and rid Japan of its militarist and fascist sentiments. In facilitating Japan's transformation into a democratic nation with values of freedom, liberty, and equality, there was also an influx of cultural exchanges between the American occupation forces and Japanese citizens. In fact, the issue of race revealed itself as a major component of American democracy that created a strain on the interactions and relationships between African American GIs, white GIs and the citizens of Japan. In this paper, I will examine the encounters of African-American soldiers with Japanese citizens during the occupation and compare them to the African American-Japanese relationship during the trans-war period. In doing so, I will argue that the impact of the occupation reinforced American racial hierarchical structures in Japan and in turn negatively affected the African American-Japanese relationship.

### **INTRODUCTION**

World War II, the eventual defeat of Japan, and the implications of the allied occupation reflect a more complex distinction between the U.S. and Japan relationship than victor and vanquished. The interplay of race, ethnicity, national identity, and democracy during the trans-war period revealed to be driving factors in the approaches and outcomes of the war. Tensions surrounding national identity and race were amplified in the interactions between Japan and the west during this period and subsequently unearthed mass racially charged propaganda, rhetoric, and prejudice. The influx of these sentiments stratified the sides of the war beyond the distinction between democracy and fascism. Race and national identity operated in tandem, as a tool to mobilize the populace against a foreign "other". The way in which race was ingrained as a unifying force for the nation complicated any hopes for international collaboration. The eventual

defeat of Japan proved that the consciousness of national identity held during the war would dramatically shape the vision for contemporary Japan. The racialization of WWII did not end when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan September 1945, nor were they resolved when Japan surrendered shortly thereafter.

General Douglas MacArthur, appointed Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in late August 1945, enacted widespread military, political, economic, and social reforms to instill democratic values among the surrendered population. The mission of democratization was portrayed to be both in the best interests of Japan, and instrumental in maintaining international peace. While the allied forces appeared to be ambitious in its goals for world peace, many Japanese wondered the true extent and purpose of the occupation after a ruthless war that was plagued by mutual hatred. Japan, a defeated nation, was subjected to drastic structural reforms that SCAP deemed a threat to the preservation of world peace. The purge of fascism and promotion of democratic ideals was of the top priority of the allied forces. Although, race, as an embedded feature of governance and national identity, revealed to be an unavoidable mechanism to disperse American ideals. Thus, the transfer of Americanism included far more than establishing liberal institutions with race operating as an implicit feature of democratization and governance by allied forces.<sup>1</sup> The tensions around race in the neo-colonial occupation raised concerns as to whether the allied occupation's mission of democratization was merely a ploy to maintain the power of western hegemony and the Eurocentric notions of racial superiority in the international stage.

The influence of many white G.I. racial perspectives when governing Japanese citizens shaped their perspectives of people of the African Diaspora. As a result, black G.I.s in occupied

---

<sup>1</sup> Americanism refers the cultural and societal aspects that are distinct to the United States. This also includes the nations patriotic values that are aimed at creating a collective American identity.

Japan faced frequent discrimination by fellow military personnel and also by Japanese citizens who adopted the Eurocentric ideologies of racial hierarchy. The explicit and implicit racially motivated practices from white G.I.s in occupied Japan created a narrative of racial inferiority of black soldiers which was internalized by Japanese civilians. Vilified images and stereotyped propaganda of blacks served as the most effective form of racial stratification between white and black G.I.s within military relations and in African American-Japanese encounters.

This analysis is built on the impact of western ideologies on Japanese perception of race, and in turn how Japan acceptance of western racial hierarchy has shaped the African American military experiences in post-war Japan. In doing so, much of analysis will draw from historiography of the relationship between Japanese and the west, and how these Eurocentric cultural exchanges shaped the African American-Japanese encounters. The use of government documents, prominent black newspapers, and personal accounts from Japanese citizens and black GIs in this study point the implicit and explicit practices by American GIs in occupied Japan to manipulate contemporary Japan to American like-ness in all facets of social, political, and ideological underpinnings of Japanese identity.<sup>2</sup>

## **HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN-JAPANESE RELATIONSHIP**

The impact of westernized racial hierarchical structures dispersed to non-white nations can be seen in Japan as early as the Bakumatsu Period. As a result, Japanese negative views of people from the African diaspora have modeled caricatures and prejudices exposed to them and derived from Western ethnocentrism and cultural hegemony. The historical background of European superiority, imposed on Japan speaks to susceptibility to embrace white-ness, idealize

---

<sup>2</sup> In the eyes of the Japanese, the term “American” was used exclusively with white-ness, so in this paper I will adhere to this same model in all references to American culture and identity as well.

European culture, and therefore hold greater acceptance for racist ideology. Some scholars assert that since the Japanese had traditionally discriminated against other racial groups within Asia, the transition to anti-black racism was an accustomed feeling of racial superiority.<sup>3</sup> While others suggest that Japan, a defeated nation, looked to the Occupied forces as saviors, and thus blindly followed the imposed American culture, and its embedded racism, to appear more western and democratic.

The engagement of Europeans and Americans has historically been the most detrimental impact regarding Japanese perceptions of African Americans. Drawing back to as early as the Bakumatsu Period (1850-1868), Japan became exposed to the associations of black people for comic jester and entertainment.

In fact, during Commodore Matthew Perry's port in Edo Bay in 1854 to negotiate the opening of Japan to the West in the Convention of Kanagawa, Commodore Perry treated the



*This Japanese print depicts the antics of the "Corps of Ethiopians belonging to the Powhatan." A playbill distributed to the audience promised "songs and dances of the plantation blacks of the South."*

Japanese negotiators to an "Ethiopian-style" minstrel show, performed by white crew members in blackface.<sup>4</sup> Minstrel shows encouraged negative representation African peoples and associated them with characteristics such as primitivism, bestiality, criminalization, and psychological weakness. This disturbing form of entertainment presented to Japan reveals the historical rooting

---

<sup>3</sup> Yasuhiro, Okada, "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers' Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951." *The Journal of African American History*, vol.96, no.2, 2011, pp.179-203

<sup>4</sup> Russell, John. "Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1991, pp. 10.

of racialized cultural exchanges between the west and Japan that negatively represented people of the African Diaspora.

Beyond these initial encounters, the “Opening of Japan” allowed for widespread western influence on the Japanese. The 1854 Treaty of Kanagawa between the United States and Japan allowed trade at two ports in Japan, and the 1858 commerce treaty, opened more ports and designated cities in which foreigners could reside. The “Opening of Japan”, I would argue, reflected more than an economic exchange between the two nations. In addition to trade and commodity exchanges, Eurocentric cultural norms were embraced as well. This resulted in an acceptance of Western popular discourse on racial differences, and the dehumanization of people of African descent. The influx of foreigners as a result of these treaties, especially those from European nations, heightened Japan’s interest in western culture, perhaps going so far as adopting the Eurocentric discourse of racial hierarchies as a way to appear more aligned with western culture, beyond dress, arts, and popular culture.

Japan itself fell victim to Eurocentric ideals of racial superiority, as seen through the unequal treaties imposed upon them by the west. In the eyes of the west, Japan was primitive and barbarous. Thus, it can be argued that Japan’s acceptance of negative images of the people from the African Diaspora and other ideology surround racial supremacy were a result the angst of Japan’s racial positionality in the eyes of the west. In the strive for modernity, Japan applied a shift to its cultural identity and affixed its cultural norms with western, Anglo-Saxon ideals. Thus, negative views of people of African descent were adopted, as well as many other western cultural and social norms, in an attempt for the Japanese to appear western and represent itself a contender and equal part of the Western-dominated international stage.<sup>5</sup> Japanese government

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp. 13

officials believed the future success of the nation dependent on its ability to present itself in coherence with western ideologies, placing Japan and its Asian neighbors between the racial categorization drawn by the west of the lofty “European Culture and Civilization” and the “African Barbarity and Savagery”. Japan’s recognition, and exploitation of racial hierarchies in the international system can be seen in prominent 17th century author Fukuzawa Yukichi’s book entitled Outline of Civilization (1875), where he upholds an idealized view of the West as the apex of "civilization" (*bunmei*), deems Japan and its Asian neighbors as "semi-civilized" (*hankai*), and positions those of African descent below, as a land of naked "savages" (*yabanjin*) mired in barbarity.<sup>6</sup> These notions point towards the idea that Japan’s adherence to western racial hierarchical structures was used more as self-preservation strategy of the nation than true ideological beliefs.

The negative representations of black people held by Japanese citizens follow practices largely derived from the Western ideology of racial categories and hierarchy. In this historical account, one can see the roots of racial prejudice held by the Japanese against blacks’ stem from their yearning to appear western. This illuminates the prevalent racism embedded in western culture, to the extent that Japan conformed and perpetuated racist attitudes in order to adhere to Eurocentric views of civility. The need to appear “civilized” to the western world reflected Japan’s insecurities about their racial and cultural standing in the eyes of the west. To subdue the association of primitivity that the west associated with the Japanese, the nation found itself conforming to this western ideology and placed itself racially “above” peoples of the African Diaspora and other Asian ethnicities. The power dynamic between the western world and Japan unveil dualities of race and national identity as interrelated forms of national consciousness. The

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid pp. 6

relationship between Japan's learned anti-black racism and the resurgence and reliance on American ideals to rebuild post-war Japan displayed a stark resemblance in the centrality of American cultural discourse on the non-white minority seen in earlier encounters between Japan and the United States.

### ***Race and National Identity in United States-Japanese Relations during the Trans-war period***

The historical rooting of the racial classification of “othering” has shaped American diplomatic history.<sup>7</sup> The rise of the U.S. as a world power meant that American domestic racism would engulf the international community.<sup>8</sup> Racist sentiments in U.S.-Japanese relations flourished during WWII. As Yukiko Koshiro has pointed out, the U.S.-Japanese perpetual exchange of “trans-pacific racisms” modeled western ideologies of racial hierarchy. Both Japan and the U.S. applied these racial ideologies as a tool to legitimize its diplomatic goals. The U.S. portrayed the WWII as a battle for the preservation of Anglo-Saxon ideals against Japanese interference, depicting the Japanese in wartime propaganda as inferior, uncivilized, ape-like creatures (figure 1).

Japan, like the U.S., also used racialized propaganda to disseminate its ambitions to rally against the “demonic and beastly Americans and British” (*kichiku Bei-Ei*); both sides indulging in heated racist rhetoric, ironically criticizing each



Figure 1 Anti-Japanese Propaganda, 1945

---

<sup>7</sup> Othering refers exclusion of persons who do not fit the Western idealized norm. The Algo-Saxon perception of “other” included all peoples “of color”, or any group not of European descent.

<sup>8</sup> As quoted by Koshiro, Yukiko. “Introduction: Race in U.S.-Japanese Relations.” *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan*. Columbia University Press, 1999. from Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Yale University Press, 1987. Ch. 3 (“The Hierarchy of Race”)



other's racist attitudes, and professing their own superiority.<sup>9</sup> As racial animosities on both sides of the Pacific festered, and the war came to an abrupt end April 1952, the issue of race loomed in occupied Japan within the means of governance by American G.I. and the perceptions of occupied soldiers by the Japanese. It was the goal by SCAP personnel to redefine Japan's national identity to assimilate into Western civilization and to better align its racial compatibility with whites.

The post-war period, however, saw a shift from overt forms of racist sentiments on both sides, to covert forms of discrimination perpetuated by American G.I.s.<sup>10</sup> Institutionalized practices such as the anti-fraternization regulations and segregated cultural enclaves in occupied Japan expose the implicit means of governance used the United States to maintain its ideas of superiority over Japan.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the chastisement of mixed-race children in Japan served as another force of implicit racism perpetuated by the U.S. The depictions of Japan as an inferior imitator of the white races, as author Koshiro argues, was used as a strategy to drive Japan towards western ideals and ideology. By ridding the Japanese away from their own culture and identity, and towards Americanism, the occupation, in turn, drove Japan towards ideologies that reinforced the notion of race and national identity; but following Eurocentrically modeled discourse. Koshiro argues the American-Japanese relationship as one where, "The Japanese yearning for any sort of equality with the Americans appeared to be rooted in an inferiority complex towards whites—a proof of their willingness to survive in the Western hierarchy" (Koshiro, p.12). In order to align itself with the west, Japan accepted a subtle yet convincing

---

<sup>9</sup> Koshiro, Yukiko. "Introduction: Race in U.S.-Japanese Relations." *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan*. Columbia University Press, 1999. Pg. 1

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. pg.10

logic of American supremacy in Asia.<sup>12</sup> International relationships fostered during the trans-war period shaped many evolving beliefs in ideology through cultural exchanges. U.S.-Japan relations reflected an American dominated power dynamic, while the African American relationship centered around community; both instances of diplomatic relations affixed on the issue of race.

### ***Minority International Solidarity and the “Double V” campaign***

The historical interrelationship of race and international cooperation extended throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was amplified during global conflicts. Studies of the African American-Japanese relationship largely center around two areas of focus: black internationalism and the “Double V” campaign. Largely ignored by occupation scholars, this area of wartime scholarship delves into the African American civilian experiences during the trans war period and aims its analysis around this global movement; where African Americans and the Japanese forged a minority solidarity as a symbolic fight against white hegemony and support of Japan as the preeminent world leader.

While the role of race during the wartime era has been a well research study among historians and occupation scholars alike, African Studies Scholars, on the other hand, emphasize the way in which international conflicts affected the civil rights movement. Scholarship surrounding notions of race and global conflicts, at the beginning of the war, sought to unify the country in its hatred for fascism, as a tool to diminish race tensions. This, as scholars argued, set up a united American front against one common enemy, fascism.<sup>13</sup> As seen in *The Pittsburgh Courier*, a leading black newspaper during WWII, the author praised Vice President Henry

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pg.12

<sup>13</sup> In this context, the term “American” is extended beyond white-ness, to solidify the point of unification under the “Double V” campaign.

Wallace for endorsing what they called the “Double V” campaign.<sup>14</sup> The Double Victory (most commonly called Double V) campaign, launched by the Courier in 1942, became a rallying cry for black journalists, activists and citizens, to secure both victories over fascism abroad during World War II and victory over racism domestically. This united front, seemingly to address racial tensions and unite the country acted more as a ploy to increase recruitment of black soldiers, I would argue, than the pure intention of fighting racism. Be that as it may, the Double V campaign heightened African Americans awareness and involvement of international issues, in the hopes for domestic reforms.

This keen awareness by African American activists, scholars, and citizens of global conflict spurred contending movements to the Double V campaign when strides towards racial equality had not materialized as an issue worthy of a united front. The most prominent contesting movement being the black internationalist movement. Black internationalist, unlike proponents of the Double V campaign, emphasized the role of race in world politics and linked the struggle of African Americans with the struggle for equality of all nations “of color” against white hegemony.<sup>15</sup> Black internationalist believed that through African American-Japanese international cooperation, and heightened global racial consciousness by issues of minorities, racial injustices would develop into a global issue, rather than an American-specific problem. Forging these international relationships, even with nations the U.S. was at war with, was more important in strengthening the voices of black activists, than a united front against fascism. This movement diverged from the notions of race and national identity as many black activists were willing to support an “American enemy” for the sake of global racial equality. During the Trans-

---

<sup>14</sup> John R Williams (Courier Correspondent), “Epochal Radio Speeches Reflect Courier's 'Double V' Theme” *The Pittsburgh Courier* (1911-1950); Jul 31, 1943; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Pittsburgh Courier

<sup>15</sup> Gallicchio, Marc S. *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

pacific war, there was an implicit pride held by African-Americans of the Japanese, who were non-white national power challenging the western power, ideals, and culture. The African American-Japanese relationship was strengthened during this movement, as many black intellectual and political leaders forged interracial solidarity during the war with the Japanese as a representation of the broader and global struggle against white supremacy. African American activists, poets, and scholars, including W.E.B. DuBois, were invited to nurture the African American-Japanese relationship and forge a minority movement against western hegemony veiled in white supremacy.

The Black internationalist movement challenged the notion of white hegemony, by forming an international minority coalition. It was thought by black internationalist that through African-American and Japanese solidarity, the Japanese victory in WWII would also be a triumph against white imperialism. As this movement gained momentum, the hypocrisy that western nations who perpetuated racial discrimination in the west were also chastising Japan for its racial categorizations within the eastern world was exposed as means to rectify the learned way of racism in the eastern world with Japan as the emerging world leader.

The foundation of this movement went through a series of stages between 1900 and 1945 which paralleled with African Americans idealized view of the Japanese. Before 1904, there was little awareness of the Japanese; however, during the Russo-Japanese War, the African American community began to associate the Japanese as “colored” but more as an idealized minority-nation who might overthrow western hegemony.<sup>16</sup> It was not until World War II, that important black figures extended the relationship between African Americans and the Japanese to operate in solidarity in the struggle to overturn European racial hierarchical structures. At the height of

---

<sup>16</sup> Kearney, Reginald. *African American Views of the Japanese Solidarity or Sedition?* NetLibrary, Inc., 1999.

the black internationalist movement (1930-45), African Americans began to view Japan as the leader of the non-white nations and meaningful progress toward dismantling institutionalized racism in white hegemonic countries with a non-white leader-nation at the forefront.

African Americans who supported Japan more than their home country became a domestic issue and complete embarrassment for the U.S. as a world leader. In order for America and other Allied nations, to maintain their global power; the issue of race was a tool to catalyze national solidarity and action against Japan which perceived itself as ethnically homogenous. Thus, the occupation of Japan following World War II revealed itself to be more of a reestablishment of racial hierarchical structures between non-white nations than the establishment of democratic ideals.<sup>17</sup> Much of the scholarship by occupation scholars analyzing the role of race as an independent variable in the occupation of Japan fails to address the interrelation of race relations within Japan as a means to maintain racial hierarchical structures. Both within occupied Japan and on the world stage, the allied forces goal for occupation was to rid Japan of its ambition to be the nation to trample western hegemony. This raises the question as to what factor lead to the racial stratification between black G.I.s and Japanese citizens in occupied Japan.

Considering the reverence of the Japanese held by much of African American, many black newspapers detail the favorable shift in attitudes of the Japanese by the black community. The use of many black newspapers and media from the Japanese perspective will shed light on some of the many examples of discriminatory practices in occupied Japan, as well to serve as evidence to support my assertions. Some black reporters even referred to Japan as the “model

---

<sup>17</sup> Koshiro, Yukiko. “Introduction: Race in U.S.-Japanese Relations.” *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan*. Columbia University Press, 1999.

minority”, in their fearless attempt to overthrow white hegemony. As a result of these widespread sentiments, the outcome of the war was believed to be of great importance to the future of race relations and civil rights in America by African Americans. The acceptance of WWII as a fight for racial equality was thought by the African American community to suffer a catastrophic set back just as Japan’s defeated nation had.

The “Asiatic’s Are Colored Too,” illustration on *Chicago Defender* September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945 edition offers a symbolic representation of the Victory over Japan Day (V-J Day), September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945, where Imperial Japan officially surrendered. Rather than the USS Missouri’s landing in



Tokyo Bay, this illustration details the “USS Mississippi” flying the Confederate flag, and a marching band playing “Dixie”. This pictorial narrative symbolizes the U.S. color prejudice and southern racist attitudes that black GIs and civilians believed would be transferred into Japan along with its mission of democratization. The two prominent figures in the illustration depict a rugged black soldier debarking from a ramp label “for colored’ and tapping the shoulder of a frail Japanese civilian as he sympathetically states, “I know how you feel bub!” This representation of the black soldier speaks to the racial segregation and between black and white GIs that was “onboard”, along with Jim crow and white hegemony. The compassionate interactions depicted between the Japanese and Black GIs speak to their appreciation of Japan’s fight against the domination by European powers and reinforcement of racial hierarchies.

Eurocentric racism, during the wartime period inadvertently fostered community among African Americans and the Japanese, who shared a common victimization at the hands of western hegemony. Be that as it may, the defeat Japan dampened the hopes of American

Americans who believed Japan as a world leader would bring about racial equality. they also set out to restore the racial hierarchical structure that coincides with western global power. To further hinder the sentiments of minority solidarity, the U.S. military instituted discriminatory practices that coincided with Jim Crow to replicate American culture in occupied Japan. Moreover, the racialized form of governance by American military personnel re-reestablished the hierarchy of races in Japan.

### **RACISM IN OCCUPIED JAPAN**

The learned “American way of racism” by Japan uncovers the intersectionality of American exceptionalism and western superiority maintained by white G.I.s. The notion of white superiority was explicitly reflected through the practice of segregated military and institutionalized discriminatory practices that mimicked Jim Crow, solidified the transfer of American ideals; in the form racism unto Japan.

#### ***Jim Crow in Occupied Japan and a Segregated U.S. Military***

The U.S. military occupation forcing liberty, equality, and democratic ideals are not the only irony of the occupation of Japan. But what is possibly more paradoxical, is the way in which the U.S. condemned Japanese racial hierarchical structures within Asia in the wartime period, when SCAP personnel maintained those same institutionalized structures throughout the occupation. Beyond that, the very military forces that were implementing the mission of democratization were serving in a segregated military that reinforced and encouraged discrimination and inequalities between white and black soldiers. These discriminatory practices carried out by American military forces, I intend to prove in this study, were to reinforce the American forms of racial hierarchy but veiled in the facade of democratization.

Renowned occupation scholar John Dower examines the many societal changes of consciousness during the occupation in *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of the World War*. He details the institutionalized structures within General Headquarters (GHQ), facilitated by General Douglas MacArthur, to instill American democratic values upon the people of Japan. Moreover, he details the hierarchies of race and privilege that were intensified in virtually every interaction between the victors (allied forces) and the vanquished (citizens of Japan). Dower, coins the term, “Little America”, in reference to the allied forces plan to reorient Japan into a modern, democratic nation by transplanting their American ideals to Japan. The notion of Little America speaks to the ways in which American culture and ideologies were transferred to Japan during the occupation. Moreover, the Jim Crow modeled forms of racial segregation and discriminatory practices that were ingrained into American culture, were embodied in a cultural exchange of Americanism in the U.S. military during the Occupation of Japan.

To a large extent, African Americans were familiar to Jim Crow discriminatory practices in America. But, it was believed by black G.I.s in occupied Japan that there would be an elevation in social status as military personnel in reaping the benefits as members of occupying forces. Though, black G.I.s were confronted with a paradox of privilege and limitation, consisting of persistent discrimination and increased freedoms.<sup>18</sup> Many institutionalized practices by the occupation forces maintained the segregation among black and white GIs. Accounts from African American soldiers stationed in the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment in Camp Majestic in Gifu illuminate how they grappled with the toxic race relations, segregated military and racial prejudices in their encounters with the Japanese in Gifu. Though the all-black 24th Infantry Regiment was relocated from Okinawa to mainland Japan to join the occupation forces of the

---

<sup>18</sup> Strange, Lauren. “The Experiences of African American in Occupied Japan, 1945-1952” *World Outlook: An Undergraduate Journal of International Affairs*, issue 44, 2013, pp. 29



U.S. Army as part of the all-white 25th Infantry Division, the sharing of a common base proved impenetrable to the social segregation that consumed the lives of black GIs in the segregated U.S. Military. Many of the personal accounts by SCAP personnel, specifically black soldiers serving in the 24th Infantry Regiment in Camp Gifu, detail the explicit discriminatory practices by the allied forces to reinforce racial hierarchy. In addition, black newspapers exposed the irony in African Americans fighting for a nation that maintained Jim Crow laws and de facto segregation that stripped away the same rights and liberties they black soldiers would be fighting for. These black newspapers played a pivotal role in exposing these discriminatory practices and openly criticized the segregation of the military and other policies to strengthen the voices and experiences of black GIs.

Executive Order 9981 issued on July 26, 1948, by President Harry S. Truman abolished discrimination "on the basis of race, color, religion or national origin" in the United States Armed Forces.<sup>19</sup> However, issues such as disproportionately harsh punishments, discrimination in the process of placement and promotion within the regiment, and poor living conditions continued to affect black GIs. In fact, under General MacArthur's leadership, rather than integrating black and white troops, all-black units such as the 24th Infantry Regiment, operated in Japan as part of the larger all-white 25th Infantry Division but independently within the all-white units as a whole. The institution of housing designated by regiment created a system in which white and black enlisted men would rarely intermix.

In many instances, U.S. military personnel attempted to ignore or gloss over complaints of discrimination and unfair treatment of black GIs in occupied Japan. As a result, many black newspapers allowed for the experiences of African American GIs stationed in occupied Japan to

---

<sup>19</sup> "Executive Order 9981" *Harry S. Truman Library and Museum*. July 26, 1948.

speak of their experiences. Similar to the institutional practices of housing segregation seen at Camp Gifu, was also seen in other areas of Japan. The Chicago Defenders Washington Correspondence team, as well as other prominent black newspapers such as the Afro-Baltimore times, facilitated in a linkage institution between black GIs and African American civilians to detail the experiences of black soldiers in occupied Japan. Many times, exposing the blatant discriminatory practices by white military personnel. From articles detailing race riots that took place in army barracks where troops of both races resided, to segregation of food, military, and medical supplies, the black press during appeared to be the only newspapers to report the discrimination and discord within the troops of Occupied Japan.

In the 1946 article titled “War Department Denies Jim Crow on Okinawa”, the Defenders Washington Correspondence team reported speculations of segregation in Okinawa, as separate shipping lists were found marked “white troops only” and “Negro troops only”. Aside from the overt practices of segregation, the most common form of discrimination against African American personnel occurred in relation to officer promotions. President Truman’s Circular 124 directive titled “Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Postwar Army Policy” established the principle of equal promotion procedures for qualified black Commanding Officers.<sup>20</sup> While this directive appeared steps in the right direction for military equality for black G.I.s, the conditionality of this policy allowed for white personnel to continue their discrimination of black GIs using the excuse that they were “unqualified”. In fact, a report by the Defender Washington correspondent that stated as of February 1947 no black officers were promoted, in response, General MacArthur contended that black GIs were most productive in all black units; reinforcing

---

<sup>20</sup> “Circular 124 Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Postwar Army Policy” *Record Group 220: Records of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, Army*. Gillem Board Report. April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1946

racial segregation at the highest levels of SCAP command.<sup>21</sup> There were also charges that the Okinawa division commander had overlooked black GIs who were eligible for higher ranked medical and dental staff positions. Statements from black GIs assert that lower-ranked, less-qualified white G.I.s were commonly chosen over black GIs solely on the basis of race in occupied Japan. These facts indicate that this racial division and discrimination was undeniably intentional. One black soldier argued, “Nobody is interested in ‘integration except the colored people. Camp Majestic is, for all practical purposes, an isolated, solid colored community.”<sup>22</sup> As this soldier suggest, these interaction and patterns indicate that the American military in the Far East not only made little effort to integrate black and white troops but also actively preserved organizational systems that maintained racial divisions.<sup>23</sup>

Disproportionate criminalization of black G.I.’s compared to their white counterparts reflected covert discriminatory practices; with broader implications. The ramifications of the vilified view of blackness were exemplified more prevalently in the Eighth Army blockade.<sup>24</sup> As targets by white military personnel, black G.I.’s fell victim to excessive convictions and inhumane punishments. Another study revealed that all-black service units in Japan had a court-martial rate nearly double that of white Eighth army unities in Occupied Japan.<sup>25</sup> The

---

<sup>21</sup> Find citation

<sup>22</sup> “Poor Excuse,” Baltimore Afro-American, May 24, 1947

<sup>23</sup> Strange, Lauren. “The Experiences of African American in Occupied Japan, 1945-1952” *World Outlook: An Undergraduate Journal of International Affairs*, issue 44, 2013, pp.34

<sup>24</sup> The Eighth Army served as the higher ranking of SCAP forces. During the occupation, the Eighth Army served both as an enforcing agency, implementing SCAP policies, and as a reporting agency. Under Military Government and direct orders from General MacArthur, The Eighth Army were primarily tasked with the non-military, civil affairs, and governmental aspects of the Occupation, for planning and policy direction. (Source: Reports of General MacArthur, : Chapter VII-The eighth Army Military Government *System U.S. Army Center of Military History*)

<sup>25</sup> As quoted by authors from Black Tokyo in “from Correction Branch, TAGO, copy in CMH “Military and Civil Offenses of Black Soldiers during the Occupation of Japan, 1946. *Court-martial refers to a judicial court for trying members of the armed services accused of offenses against military law*

disproportionate means of punishment for black service members from their white counterparts set a narrative to maintain the vilified image of black G.I.s to the Japanese citizens.

The racism in occupied Japan was nurtured by the practices of American GIs, however, there are cases of which European occupying forces also perpetuated the segregation between white and “colored” peoples. Disturbing news brought by Nippon times article on September 18th, 1949, reported an incident in which American military officials of Japanese and African descent were denied service from a British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) rest hotel in Ito, Japan.<sup>26</sup> The Kawana Hotel refused to allow these military officials due to the BCOF’s “white personnel only” policy. According to the article, the Japanese special forces were unable to intervene, as occupied forces locations were out of their jurisdiction. This speaks to the powerlessness of the Japanese to dissent against occupation forces policies, especially when its policies were contradictory to the entire mission of the occupation. General MacArthur’s Public Information Office, speaking on behalf of the U.S. occupational response, on the other hand, operated in damage control of the Far East Command image to the Japanese government rather than rectifying the issue. This speaks to the many policies and practices facilitated by occupied forces, beyond just the U.S. Army forces, to maintain racial hierarchical structures, and white superiority in Japan that also reflected the discrimination practiced in their home country.

### *African American-Japanese Encounters*

The initial encounters between the African Americans and the citizens of Japan, fell in line with the racist propaganda they had been fed by white GIs. As a result, many of the perks of being GIs in occupied Japan, such as military housing, access to the amenities provided by the Recreation and Amusement Association (RAA), and elevated social status, were overshadowed

---

<sup>26</sup> Peter Kalischer (United Press Staff Correspondent), “Racial Bar Put Up by BCOF Rest Hotels: U.S. Officers of Japanese Descent and Negroes Kept Out” *Nippon Times* September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1949

by the unequal and discriminatory practices by the white SCAP personnel and racist sentiments by Japanese citizens. Although modern Japanese racial ideology was influenced by the Eurocentric worldview, Japanese people's personal encounters with the Jim Crow U.S. Army reinforced their notions of American "whiteness".<sup>27</sup>

Before the arrival of black military personnel, there was immense shock and anxiety over the imminent presence of African American soldiers. According to many accounts by the local Japanese citizens, there was a popular association of black men with sexual violence. In one account, a local husband instructed his wife to hide in the attic of their home because the "kurombos" would rape all the women.<sup>28</sup>

Even in the language used by Japanese citizens to describe black and white soldiers, racialized sentiments creeps in. The term *kurombo* was used to describe black G.I.s, and was the most pejorative term in the Japanese language to describe people of African descent.<sup>29</sup> *Kuro* is a descriptive word for black skin, and *bo* has a connotation of infantilizing black people as non-mature, adolescent, and dependent beings.<sup>30</sup> Though there was a common association of American occupiers with sexual violence, the Japanese view of black G.I.s was shaped in a way that attributed them with characteristics of hyper-sexuality and primitiveness. Conversely, the Japanese usually described white G.I.s only as "American" soldiers (*amerika-hei* or *bei-hei*) in terms of their nationality, without any reference to their racial background. This blatant dehumanization of people from the African diaspora conveyed through the language of Japanese

---

<sup>27</sup> Yasuhiro, Okada, "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers' Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951." *The Journal of African American History*, vol.96, no.2, 2011, pp.179-203

<sup>28</sup> As quoted by Yasuhiro Okada in "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers' Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951." from *Kagamigahara-shi senji kiroku henshū iinkai*, *Kagamigahara Shimin no Senji Taiken*, 266, 277; Russell, "The Other Other," 89.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 187

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 187

citizens reflects their acceptance of Western racial prejudicial discourse that attributed to the “black rapist” myth in local communities.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the hyper-sexualization of black GIs, there were also many outrages animal-like associations to black men. For instance, in Gifu, the idea that black people had tails was spread by white GIs so pervasive among the locals that some African American soldiers took off their pants to prove that they did not, in fact, have a tail.<sup>32</sup> Barbaric, animal-like forms of racist propaganda were widely circulated to the local communities around U.S. military bases in occupied Japan.

Though the Japanese perspective of black GIs and the Japanese were centered around many prejudices, black G.I.s on the other hand, were unsuspecting of the Japanese. According to a Chicago Defender War Correspondent, the first interactions between black GIs and Japanese civilians were mostly filled with confusion.<sup>33</sup> From the perspective of the black GIs, many were more so surprised that the Japanese caricatures were not accurate depictions of the Japanese they had encountered. In this respect, black newspapers served more as informational purposes to relay back to African Americans to confirm or invalidate the myths and propaganda disseminated during the war period.

As the African American-Japanese encounters deepen, African American soldiers were forced to revisit the racial ideology and practices in the United States from broader racial,

---

<sup>31</sup> Yasuhiro, Okada, “Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers’ Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951.” *The Journal of African American History*, vol.96, no.2, 2011, pp.187

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Rainey with Michael Pierre, 29 November 1989; Joh Cash with Theodore R. Eldridge, Jr., 26 August 1988; Josh Cash with Richard Fields of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 18 August 1988; the U.S. Army of Military History documented oral history, Washington, DC

<sup>33</sup> *Waters Jr., Enoc P. “Nips Meet GIs, Curiosity Mutual” The Chicago Defender (National edition) (1921-1967), September 15, 1945 p.8, col.1*

cultural, and international perspectives.<sup>34</sup> Many black G.I.s observed first-hand the racial prejudices held by the Japanese. Charles Bussey, the commander of the 77th Engineer Combat Company, who stationed to in Camp Gifu detailed his experiences in racial attitudes held by the Japanese. He observed, “The Japanese were accustomed to feeling racially superior to the Koreans and other Asian people. Now they were being conditioned by the Caucasian majority to mistreat, cheat, and even hate the Negro and other minorities.”<sup>35</sup> The embedded Japanese ideology of racial hierarchy in Asia during the war, begs the question if this form of discrimination was due to the Japanese understanding of racially discriminatory practices learned from American military forces in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Be that as it may, the Japanese absorbency of Eurocentric racial norms shaped their perceptions of the black GIs that they encountered in occupied Japan in an enormous way.

## CONCLUSION

The transfer of Americanism and its ideals included far more than democratic values. Segregated U.S. military, institutionalized discrimination, prejudice, and racist attitudes held by white GIs in occupied Japan were some of the many forms of culture being exchanged. Much of the effect of the occupation on Japan’s perception of the African diaspora can be derived from historiographical analysis of the relations and influence from the west. The African American-Japanese relationship within the dichotomy of occupying forces, were able to perform both

---

<sup>34</sup> Yasuhiro, Okada, “Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers’ Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951.” *The Journal of African American History*, vol.96, no.2, 2011, pp.184

<sup>35</sup> As quoted by Yasuhiro Okada in “Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers’ Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951.” From Charles M. Bussey, “*Firefight at Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War*” (Lincoln,NE,1991),44.

within the victor and vanquished dynamic and in minority solidarity, as oppressed minorities by white supremacy.

The generational impact of Eurocentric racial hierarchical structures imposed on the Japanese has amplified the current race-related issues. The ramification of the policies during the occupation has created a strain on African American-Japanese relationships. Many of the notions and perceptions of peoples of the African diaspora shaped a negative view that in turn created demeaning stereotypes against the African Americans Japanese citizens encountered. Under the occupation, white G.I.s disseminated racialized propaganda to paint black GIs in a negative light to maintain the racialized sentiments in Japan. Though black GIs enjoyed the privileges afforded to them as military personnel, they were outweighed by the daily struggles of racially discriminatory practices perpetuated by the allied forces and Japanese citizens.

The racial prejudice against African Americans held by the Japanese was largely due to the lack of personal encounters with African Americans. The unknown of this racial group spurred many myths and exaggerated stereotypes as a result. On the other hand, Black GIs encounters with Japanese citizens in the all-black 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment detail the shift away from prejudice attitudes as personal relationships were formed between black GIs and the Gifu Community. In cases such as this, black G.I.s engaged within the community to the point that they became more accepted from the Japanese community than their fellow white G.I.s. This exemplifies the necessity of cross-cultural interactions between African American-Japanese relations, in order to deconstruct the negative images projected upon them.

I affirm I have adhered to the honor code on this assignment.



## WORKS CITED

---

- Yasuhiro, Okada, "Race, Masculinity, and Military Occupation: African American Soldiers' Encounters with the Japanese at Camp Gifu, 1947-1951." *The Journal of African American History*, vol.96, no.2, 2011, pp.179-203
- Russell, John. "Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1991, pp. 6-13.
- Gallicchio, Marc S. *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Kearney, Reginald. *African American Views of the Japanese Solidarity or Sedition?* NetLibrary, Inc., 1999.
- Koshiro, Yukiko. "Introduction: Race in U.S.-Japanese Relations." *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan*. Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Strainge, Lauren. "The Experiences of African American in Occupied Japan, 1945-1952" *World Outlook: An Undergraduate Journal of International Affairs*, issue 44, 2013, pp. 29-34
- "Executive Order 9981" *Harry S. Truman Library and Museum*. July 26, 1948.
- "Poor Excuse," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 24, 1947
- "Circular 124 Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Postwar Army Policy" *Record Group 220: Records of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, Army*. Gillem Board Report. April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1946
- Douglas MacArthur General Staff "Reports of General MacArthur: MacArthur in Japan: The Occupation: Military Phase." U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1966.
- Peter Kalischer (United Press Staff Correspondent), "Racial Bar Put Up by BCOF Rest Hotels: U.S. Officers of Japanese Descent and Negroes Kept Out" *Nippon Times* September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1949
- Timothy Rainey with Michael Pierre, 29 November 1989; Joh Cash with Theodore R. Eldridge, Jr., 26 August 1988; Josh Cash with Richard Fields of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 18 August 1988; the U.S. Army of Military History documented oral history, Washington, DC.

### Images:

- Japanese Print of European-style Minstrel Show "Assembled Pictures of Commodore Perry's Visit," artist unknown, 1854 Courtesy of the Tokyo Historiographical Institute and the MIT "Visualizing Cultures" program. Caption from Brian Rouleau "In the Wake of Jim Crow: Maritime Minstrelsy Along the Transoceanic Frontier" *Common-Place Archives* vol. 12 no.4 July 2012
- American Anti-Japanese Propaganda (artist unknown, date unknown)