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Jasmine N. Mitchell

The History of Afro-Asian Solidarity and the New Era of Political Activism

East Asian Studies Honors Thesis

Spring 2021

I affirm I have adhered to the honor code.

Abstract The summer of 2020 marked a dramatic shift in race consciousness around the globe. The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, coupled with the rise of Anti-Asian hate crimes, sparked a global outcry of support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and renewed interest in solidarity between Black and Asian communities as a means to organize against systemic racism and white supremacy. This paper sets out to investigate the intersectional histories of oppression faced by these communities, offers a timely analysis of the history of Afro-Asian Solidarity domestically and on the international stage, and explores the relevance of Afro-Asian allyship to contemporary social movements, #BlackLivesMatter and #StopAsianHate. Based on the analysis of scholarly and journalistic sources, I argue that the transnational progress made through Afro-Asian solidarity in the global freedom struggle provides a compelling example and invaluable blueprint of the radical potential for Afro-Asian Solidarity in the age of Black Lives Matter.

Introduction

The summer of 2020 marked a dramatic shift in race consciousness around the globe. The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, coupled with the rise of Anti-Asian hate crimes, sparked a global outcry of support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and renewed interest in solidarity between Black and Asian communities as a means to organize against systemic racism and white supremacy. This paper sets out to investigate the intersectional histories of oppression faced by these communities, offers a timely analysis of the history of Afro-Asian Solidarity domestically and on the international stage, and explores the relevance of Afro-Asian allyship to contemporary social movements, #BlackLivesMatter and #StopAsianHate. Based on the analysis of scholarly and journalistic sources, I argue that the transnational progress made through Afro-Asian solidarity in the global freedom struggle provides a compelling example and invaluable blueprint of the radical potential for Afro-Asian Solidarity in the age of Black Lives Matter.

As many around the world sat home watching month-long protests amid the global COVID-19 pandemic, conversations around the issue of state violence, white supremacy, anti-

Blackness, allyship, and systemic racism entered the global new-cycle and international social media trending topics. In this series of historical moments, as anti-Asian hate crimes and xenophobic attacks reached historic heights, BLM activists were among the many calls worldwide to #StopAsianHate.¹ While BLM activists call attention to eradicating anti-Black racism, they are also pushing to eliminate systems of oppression that permeate beyond Blackness. This is a global fight against systemic racism. The spirit of Afro-Asian Solidarity is rooted in the recognition that a united effort in eradicating white supremacy is more critical than moderate progress made within these separate communities. Thus, the Black Lives Matter movement has taken form into a global fight against systemic racism through intersectional equity. However, critics of BLM have fixated on this racially specific title to avoid the radical change this movement demands. As the June 2020 BLM marches in Tokyo signaled, a renewed interest in the notion of Black & Asian solidarity has emerged within cohorts of Black and Asian activists around the world. While the historical forms of solidarity and allyship between peoples of African and Asian descent remain at the core of anti-racist organizing, in the age of Black Lives Matter, the lines have blurred as to who an activist is and what activism looks like.²

Following the March 2021 attacks against six Asian women in Atlanta, the official Black Lives Matter global organization and National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP), who have been vocal advocates against anti-Black racism, were among many who released statements against racially motivated violence against the Asian community. Unlike other statements against anti-Asian violence in the U.S. and white supremacy globally, BLM and the NAACP expressed these sentiments through solidarity in the shared experiences

¹ Onishi, Yuichiro. "A Politics of Our Time: Reworking Afro-Asian Solidarity." *Unmargin*. Web.

² Blain, Keisha N. "The Struggle to End Racism is Global". Organization of American Historians.

with white supremacy between the Black and Asian communities. In an Instagram Live discussion on how white supremacy has impacted Black and Asian-American communities, President of the Georgia NAACP Rev. James Woodall, offered strong support for Afro-Asian solidarity in the future of activism in the U.S., stating that “white supremacy is our enemy not each other...the power is in each other. Despite the challenges we face that often pit us [Black and Asian communities] against each other, we must stand together with the understanding that our [African-Americans] humanity, is tied to the humanity of all people.”³ As evidence by this very discussion, the global dimensions of Afro-Asian solidarity are far more accessible through new mediums of activism on social media. Grassroots Japanese organizations on the social media application Instagram @her.stand, @noyouth_nojapan, and @blossomtheproject have used their platforms and global outreach to translate the anti-racist messages of BLM activists and important histories of Afro-Asian solidarity to their Japanese audience.

In growing conversations between Black and Asian social media users about allyship for their respective communities, many have also highlighted the history of tension between them. While acknowledging Anti-Blackness in Asian communities and visa-versa, organizations such as HipHop4Changes used their social media engagement to educate their followers about the shared history in activism. Their post reads:

“In light of recent hate crimes against the Asian community, we thought we would promote a more commonly dismissed side of Black history—one that is intertwined with Asian history. White supremacy made us believe that Black and Asian people have always been at odds with each other, when in fact, history tells quite a different story.”⁴

³ Moon, Kat. "How Black-Asian Solidarity Is Taking on White Supremacy." 25 Mar. 2021. Web. 05 Apr. 2021.

⁴ (instagram page @HipHop4Change) “In light of the recent hate crimes against the Asian community...” *Instagram*. February 9 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLGGkathybl/?igshid=1xywqblhqb6eu>

For many in the Black and Asian community, the history of cross-community solidarity has been clouded by the history of tension. Thus, it is vital for today's Black and Asian activists to understand the history of Afro-Asian solidarity to be better informed in their activism in the age of Black Lives Matter.

This paper begins with a historical analysis of the development of Afro-Asian Solidarity through two prevalent bodies of research: 1) Afro-Asian Solidarity within the United States and its implications for and involvement with Japan and 2) Afro-Asian Solidarity on the international stage and Japan's role in de-colonialism. Through this lens, I will highlight these three critical points in the history of Afro-Asian solidarity: 1) Black internationalism in the 1930s and 40s, 2) decolonization in the 1950-70s, 3) and Black Power Movement in the 60s and 70s. In this paper, my definition of solidarity draws from scholar Diane Fujino's notion of "deep solidarity," where "linking [ones] liberty with justice for others in ways that often required a risk or sacrifice to direct self-interest."⁵ While many scholars have delved into Afro-Asian solidarity and used Japan, among other Asian countries, as a case study for successes or failures, I frame this analysis within the context of the freedom struggle. By Freedom Struggle, I mean social movements, domestic and international, that continuously encounter progress and structural setbacks. Past scholarship on Afro-Asian solidarity that has applied the success-failure analysis to Afro-Asian Solidarity movements overlooks the nuance, triumphs, institutional hurdles, and momentum of such a complex and continuous international movement. The very foundation of freedom struggle is riddled with successes and failures but is not defined by them.

⁵Fujino, Diane C. "The Indivisibility of Freedom: The NISEI Progressives, Deep SOLIDARITIES, and Cold War Alternatives." 15 June 2018. Web. 16 Apr. 2021.

Chapter 1 delves into the historical progression of Afro-Asian Solidarity within the United States. Beginning in the 1930s through the Black internationalist movement, I highlight the origins of Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies as articulated by prominent Black intellectuals W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey. To explore practices of grassroots organizing through Afro-Asian solidarity in the U.S., I detail the profound activism of Mittie Maude Lena Gordon and Pearl Sherrod. In describing the community organizing between Black and Japanese-American activists, I discuss the foundations of Asian-American radicalism and its connections to the Black Power movement of the 1960-70s. Chapter 2 seeks to unearth the global trajectory of Afro-Asian solidarity through the 1955 Bandung Conference during the Third World Liberation movement. The focus of potential in Chapter 3 draws from Jeanelle Hope's research on Afro-Asian Solidarity using the "radical potential" framework in the age of BLM. Hope argues that state-sanctioned violence, domestically and globally, as well as the geographic proximity of Black people and Asian Americans, are motivating new iterations of Afro-Asian solidarity in the era of #blacklivesmatter.⁶ With this in mind, I re-envision Hope's notion of "radical potential" as the capacity to overcome tensions that separate the Black and Asian communities to organize a united coalition against white supremacy using social media to galvanize support. In this context, I argue that while the conditions surrounding past iterations of Afro-Asian solidarity made a long-term impact and systemic change challenging, in the age of Black Lives Matter, it is vital to learn from these histories to explore the full capacity of Afro-Asian solidarity in 2021.

Chapter 1 - Afro-Asian Solidarity in Black America

⁶ Hope, Jeanelle K. "This Tree Needs Water!: A Case Study on the Radical Potential of Afro-Asian Solidarity in the Era of Black Lives Matter. 2019

As a concept, Afro-Asian solidarity ideology seeks to unify people Black and Asian communities under their shared marginalization to organize against white supremacy and colonialism. This crucial aspect of anti-racism *through* internationalism established a compelling framework for Black and Japanese-American activists in the United States to enter into a global, rather than domestic, fight against racism. Afro-Asian solidarity has always held a crucial role in the Black freedom struggle. This chapter will explore how influential freedom movements such as the Black internationalist movement and Black power movement employed a transnational lens to build a coalition of the “world’s darker races” to topple white supremacy and establish an international order based on racial equity.⁷

Within Black internationalism, I analyze three case studies of prominent and influential Black activists W.E.B DuBois, Mitte Maude Lena Gordon, and Pearl Sherrod to explore the depth of Afro-Asian solidarity during the 1930- 40s, examine the various approaches to Black internationalism these activists represented, and evaluate the method of solidarity they practiced with Imperial Japan and Japan-American activists. Continuing this historical analysis toward the Black Power movement, this chapter also explores Japanese and Japanese-American radicalism’s vital contributions in the 1950s-60s to the Black freedom struggle. In doing so, I argue that while the conditions around Japanese imperialism and war complicated the practices of Afro-Asian solidarity pushed forth by these activists, the roots of Afro-Asian solidarity born in the 1930s-40s had a profound impact on the future movements in the Black freedom struggle. In highlighting the currents of thought and advocacy at the foundations of Afro-Asian solidarity, I will demonstrate the transnational approaches to Black internationalism and the Black Power

⁷ Gallicchio, Marc S. *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

movement through the narratives of impactful Japanese and Japanese-American activists during this period.

Japan: “Champion of the Dark Races”

In the 20th century, Black internationalism grew out of the recognition that broadcasting the experiences and inequalities experienced by Black Americans on the international stage would be a transformative platform for the Black freedom struggle. U.S. anti-Black discrimination and western colonialism revealed to have valuable intersections to Black activists, particularly amid Imperial Japan’s rise in global attention in the early 20th century, in constructing a radical approach that would unify the plight of Black Americans and the struggles faced by Imperial Japan against western hegemony. Japan’s triumph over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 sparked pro-Japan sentiment within the Black community. Over the next four decades, this led Black internationalists to structure their internationalist ideology in response to Japan’s prominence.⁸ Japan’s ascendancy in international recognition offered Black Americans the glimmer of hope they so desperately needed, serving as a necessary symbol of the power of the world’s “colored” peoples.

Black internationalism provided one of many approaches posed by Black intellectuals in solving the “race problem” in the United States. Within the framework of Black resistance, Black internationalism sought to develop social, political, and cultural networks that embraced a collective struggle against systemic racism through a global consciousness. Black internationalist historian Keisha Blain writes that Black internationalism was “an insurgent political culture

⁸ Allen, Ernest. “When Japan Was ‘Champion of the Darker Races’: Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism.” *The Black Scholar*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1994, pp. 23–46. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41068457. Accessed 17 Mar. 2021.

[that] emerg[ed] in response to slavery, colonialism, and white imperialism...[and] centers on visions of freedom and liberation movements among African descended people worldwide”.⁹

This sustained effort to forge transnational solidarities with the world’s “colored” peoples proved to be a vital means of existential justification of the Black freedom struggle and hope for Black Americans. Expert on Asia-Pacific history Marc Gallicchio writes, “...Japan occupied a prominent position in Black internationalism. They frequently viewed international events from a Japanese perspective, convinced that what benefited that nation would improve the condition of the world’s darker race”.¹⁰ Renowned scholar of Afro-Asian studies, Gerald Horne, argues that Japan was admired among African-Americans. Black intellectuals such as W.E.B DuBois, Marcus Garvey, and Booker T. Washington, and others, he adds, “all looked to Tokyo as evidence for the proposition that modernity was not solely the province of those of European descent and that the very predicates of white supremacy made no sense.”¹¹

The origins, evolution, approach, relationship to gender, nationalism, and anti-colonialism of Black internationalism far exceed the scope of this chapter; however, I intend to highlight the role of notable Black internationalist in articulating and developing the concept of Black internationalism through solidarity with the Japanese abroad and Japanese-Americans domestically. Black internationalist W.E.B. DuBois, Mittie Maude Lena Gordon, and Pearl Sherrod were prominent voices in the Black community and were particularly influential in inciting pro-Japanese sentiments. At the heels of World War I, these leaders in the Black community wrote countless articles for Black and Japanese audiences, engaged in community-

⁹ Blain, Keisha N. "Teaching Black Internationalism and Americanah." *Blog of the American Studies Journal*. 27 January 2015

¹⁰ Gallicchio, Marc S. *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.pp. 3

¹¹ Gerald Horne (2001) TOKYO BOUND:African Americans and Japan *Confront White Supremacy*, Souls, 3:3, 16-28, DOI: [10.1080/10999949.2001.12098168](https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2001.12098168)

centered activism to overcome economic disparities faced by Black and Asian communities, and collaborated with Japanese and Japanese-American activists in the U.S. and abroad in the unified effort to contest the global color line.

At the forefront of pro-Japan rhetoric within the Black internationalist movement was W.E.B DuBois in the early 20th century. In *Darkwater*, DuBois writes, “most men belong to the [darker] world. With Negro and Negroid, East India, Chinese, and Japanese, they form two-thirds of the populations of the world. A belief in humanity is a belief in colored men”.¹² W.E.B DuBois, in particular, was steadfast in what scholar Reginald Kearney calls “pro-Japanese utterances.” Kearney notes DuBois’ calls for pro-Japan support within Black America stemmed from his fascination with Japan’s resiliency in the Russo-Japanese War. In a 1905 Essay, “Atlanta University,” DuBois details how the “Yellow Peril” and the color line were intertwined and credited the Japanese on challenging the “foolish modern magic of the word white.”¹³ Kearny argues that DuBois’ projections of scenarios leading to the reordering of racial hegemony would require Japan at the center to overcome the notion that western military might and technological supremacy was proof of western racial superiority.

DuBois’ stance in support of Japan, despite growing expansionary imperialist Japanese foreign policy, was unwavering. DuBois maintained that:

“... the preservation of the color bar has been erected into a cardinal principle of modern civilization. Its preservation is threatened today principally by Japan; then by India; then by the Negroes of the United States and West Africa. Japan has attacked the legend of in-

¹²As Cited by Sidney Pash. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011; originally published by Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1940), 5, 9, 52; Du Bois, W.E.B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868–1963. *America, New Negro, and Japan*, 1937. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

¹³ Du Bois, "Atlanta University," in *From Servitude to Service: Being the Old South Lectures on the History and Work of Southern Institutions for the Education of the Negro* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1905), 197

vincible Europe and of a white race of unapproachable ability. Nothing that Europe and Europeans have done, but Japan is doing nearly as well and sometimes better.¹⁴

DuBois' willingness to overlook imperial Japan's imperialist ambitions policy had much to do with Japan's overt and covert actions in line with the Black Freedom Struggle.

DuBois, however, continued to defend Japan despite many Black scholars and activists highlighting the hypocritical nature of supporting Japan's colonization efforts while criticizing America's. This, perhaps, was due to Japan's bold actions to topple white supremacy, and American hegemony. According to Horne, the 1916 Plan of San Diego was an "abortive attempt by Chicanos and Mexico, in league with Japan and other foreign powers, to dismember the United States, killing all the white males in the West and Southwest to establish independent black and Indian republics while reclaiming territory for Mexico."¹⁵ On the world stage, despite the decrease in pro-Japanese sentiment within the Black community during World War II (WWII) due to Japan's growing imperial might, Japanese support for racial justice with the U.S. continued beyond the rhetoric of support into its foreign policy. While the irony of the previous sentence is puzzling, DuBois and other Black leaders were inspired by the anti-white supremacy rhetoric of Imperial Japan, despite the hypocrisy of the conditions surround other Japanese foreign policies. This was largely because of its novelty; no world power of Japan's rising prominence had recognized the plight of Black Americans in this way.

One such case of Imperial Japan's earliest engagement on the international stage supporting Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies occurred at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. William Monroe Trotter, a prominent and vocal critic of jim-crow segregation in the U.S in the early twentieth century, in response to President Wilson's 14 point plan for global post-war order

¹⁴ W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Folk: Then and Now* (New York, 1939), p. 368.

¹⁵Gerald Horne (2001) *TOKYO BOUND: African Americans and Japan Confront White Supremacy*, Souls, 3:3, 16-28, DOI: [10.1080/10999949.2001.12098168](https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2001.12098168)

at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, flew to Paris, interrupting the international conference and proposed a 15th point, racial equality. While Trotter alone was unsuccessful in raising the 15th point to global attention, Japanese government officials took a bold stance in support of Trotter in an attempt to expose U.S. race relations and poke holes into notions of western hegemony and white supremacy. To that end, *Black Radicals* columnist Mohammad Elnaiem details how a senior diplomat and principal delegate for the Japanese government, Nobuaki Makino, proposed a racial equality bill as the 15th point to President Wilson's 14-point plan to "demonstrate the U.S.'s failure to reconcile Jim Crow laws with the liberal principles that Wilson espoused abroad."¹⁶ This action, though unsuccessful, I argue, was Imperial Japan's first formal engagement with the notion of Afro-Asian solidarity on the international stage. This radical act of support from a rising international power, elevating the issues of white supremacy, Jim Crow, and violence against African Americans as a global issue, resulted in widespread support from the African American community as Japan in the 1920s-30s.

Following Tokyo's lead in the global push for racial justice, DuBois organized the first Pan-African Congress comprised of African-Americans and members from European colonial Africa. DuBois's leadership in the Pan-African Congresses and the Black community, coupled with his writings and political activities, pushed forth "the intellectual and practical basis of an Afro-Asian movement."¹⁷ Though he never defined it as such, DuBois's approach to Black internationalism laid the groundwork for the future of Afro-Asian Solidarity.

¹⁶ Mohammed Elnaiem "Black Radicalism's Complex Relationship with Japanese Empire" *JSTOR Daily*. July 18, 2018

¹⁷ Martin, Michael T., and Lamont H. Yeakey. "Pan-American Asian Solidarity: A Central Theme in DuBois' Conception of Racial Stratification and Struggle." *Phylon* (1960-), vol. 43, no. 3, 1982, pp. 217. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/274818.

While DuBois' prominence is not disputed, many scholars are also critical of Black intellectuals' tolerance of Japanese aggression against China in expansionist policies at the outset of the Second World War. Vocal critics of the pro-Japanese sentiment within Black internationalism share concerns with Japan's co-opted colonialism, especially given its repeated proclaims for racial equity. Scholar Sidney Pash notes that DuBois's admiration for Japan stemmed in part from his personal identification with the nation's accomplishments and its struggles in a white-dominated world. She critiques DuBois' hypocritical approach to Japan, arguing that "the familiar and the forgotten, was how deeply he identified with Japan and how this, along with a curious blend of racial and economic determinism and historical blindness, produced a Japanophile that embraced Japan, championed her accomplishments, and defended her action even when they became increasingly indefensible."¹⁸ For DuBois, Pash argues, Japan alone could protect China because only Japan had "outfought Europe on land and sea" and had "out-bluffed them in politics."¹⁹ Citing DuBois' utterances in support of Japan, Pash continues, stating that the success, which undermined "European supremacy in China . . . by smashing the legend of invisible Europe," inevitably caused "jealousy and resentment in China."²⁰ These feelings, Pash adds, twisted by the West, led many Chinese to "regard Japan as her real and main enemy and Europe and America as her friends."²¹ DuBois's trip to East Asia allowed him to see

¹⁸ Pash, Sidney "W.E B. Du Bois and Japan: From Japanophile to Apologist." *Japan Women's University Journal of American and English Literature* (March 2016): pp. 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp.21-22

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 22

²¹ *Ibid.* pp.22

first-hand Japanese imperialism operating in Manchuria.²² During his travels, he doubled down on his support of Japan in seizing Manchuria, suggesting that the Kwantung Army's expansionism was due to a fear that if Japan had not seized Manchuria, Europe would.²³



(Figure 1) W. E. B. DuBois with Japanese scholars in Tokyo, 1936
Source: <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-i0447>

In 1931, members of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the largest and most influential global Black nationalist organization of the twentieth century, were also pushed to grapple with this issue in the *Negro World* newspaper. An unnamed UNIA member writes, "No true Garveyite who is instinctively anti-imperialist will show sympathy to the imperialist activities of Japan in China, however, Japan's high-handed action in Manchuria has opened new opportunities for the triumphal march of Garveyism."²⁴ Historian Keisha Blain summarizes the Garveyite sentiment in stating that "while criticizing Japan's military aggression towards other people of color, the author proceeded to explain that Japan's rise would *still* benefit people of African descent—especially those who advocated political self-determination."²⁵ These sentiments by prominent Black intellectuals did not go without criticism. On the cusp of the U.S. engagement in WWII, Black America was being asked by these prominent leaders in the Black community to employ a level of double consciousness vis-à-vis Japan, overlooking Japan's imperialist ambitions, while also criticizing and experiences the realizes of white supremacy within the U.S.

²² W. E. B. Du Bois with Japanese scholars in Tokyo, 1936, 1936. *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312)*. Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

²³ *Ibid.* 28

²⁴ Unnamed UNIA author, "Garveyism's World Opportunities," *Negro World*, 5 December 1931.

²⁵ Blain, Keisha N. "The Deep Roots of Afro-Asia." *AAIHS*. 11 Feb. 2016. Web. 27 Mar. 2021.

Facing overwhelming backlash, DuBois offers an apologist explanation, rather than his usual relentless criticism, for Japan's path toward imperialism. He notes that "the tragedy of this epoch was that Japan learned Western ways too soon and too well, and turned from Asia to Europe ... She might have led Asia and the world into a new era. But her headstrong leaders chose to apply Western imperialism to her domination of the East, and Western profit-making replaced Eastern idealism."²⁶ It is important to note that while DuBois' approach to Afro-Asian solidarity was compelling to many Black Americans in the early 1920s, these views also faced equal criticism. I stress, however, that viewing Afro-Asian solidarity within the context of the freedom struggle, especially at the outset of what began informally as "Afro-Asian Solidarity" through Black internationalism, is a crucial lens to approach this analysis. DuBois did not and could not represent all the opinions of Black America, nor is it realistic that one movement, or even act of solidarity with Imperial Japan, could dismantle institutions of white supremacy. Afro-Asian solidarity, through the DuBois pro-Japan Black internationalist movement, merely started the first leg of a marathon race to dismantle institutional racism. We see this progress in igniting hope within the Black community from Imperial Japan's military success, international conversation about the plight of Black Americans in the U.S., and even Black and Japanese intellectual exchange about race relations and white supremacy. On the other hand, the wartime conditions, rampant violence and jim-crow segregation in the United States, Japan's imperial ambitions, coupled with the western world's grip on power in the international community all proved to be profound roadblocks towards progress for the Black freedom struggle. Be that as it may, the global freedom struggle is defined by its progress, not by its struggles.

²⁶ W.E.B DuBois, *Worlds of Color*, pp. 69-70

Unsung Heroines of Afro-Asian Solidarity

Like DuBois, countless Black activists promoted Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies as a radical political response to global white supremacy. While scholarship on Black internationalism at the outset of what had not yet been coined as “Afro-Asian solidarity” is robust, this male-dominated scholarship suggested that Black women only provided a secondary role in this element of Black freedom struggle. Many Black studies and Asian studies scholars have critiqued scholarship in their respective fields that overlook the contributions of women in radical movements throughout history. However, few Afro-Asian scholars have delved into the profound intersectional impact women have contributed to the Black internationalist movement. One such scholar who has dedicated a tremendous amount of research into the crucial role women have played in Black radical movements is American historian and scholar Keisha Blain. Moving beyond the male-dominated “Garvey-centered studies of the UNIA and taking seriously Black women’s political engagement,” Blain unearths the contributions of notable and influential women in the Black internationalist movement, whose profound impact shaped the landscape of the movement. This section will focus on two key Black-female internationalists: Mittie Maude Lena Gordon and Pearl Sherrod, whose national and transnational impact within the Black internationalist movement in solidarity with Japanese communities; providing a roadmap for 21st-century activists to mirror their community-engaged anti-racist organization through an intersectional approach.

Mittie Maude Lena Gordon was a Black internationalist and feminist who played a fundamental role in community-based organizing through an international lens, or what Blain calls “grassroots internationalism.”²⁷ An unsung Black internationalist and founder of the Peace

²⁷ Blain, Keisha N. *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom*. Philadelphia, PA: U of Pennsylvania, 2019. pp.8

Movement of Ethiopia (PME), Mittie Gordon's contribution to Black internationalism was seen through her organization and used to collaborate and exchange with individuals from various parts of the globe. While Gordon has been largely absent from scholarship in the Black freedom struggle, her activities provide a window into how Black nationalist women engaged in global politics and illuminates the entangled histories of twentieth-century Black nationalism and internationalism with Japan. Mitte Maude Lena Gordon's organization, Peace Movement of Ethiopia (PME), was the most prominent Black nationalist organization by a woman in the United States. Founded in December 1932, the PME promoted Afro-Asian solidarity during the Depression-era while facilitating a political campaign to advance black emigration to West Africa.²⁸ With a national following, Blain highlights that after only a year of PME was established, Gordon organized a nation-wide campaign, with an estimated 400,000 signatures of African Americans willing to leave the U.S. While calls for Black emigration and separatism were not uncommon, the PME's unique base of Black and Japanese working-class supporters across the country were drawn to its political ideology that prioritized racial and economic empowerment, universal emancipation, and Black feminism, as the disastrous effects of the Great Depression wreaked havoc on poor and working-class families.

Through her writings and speeches in her leadership role at the PME, she "agitated for Afro-Asian solidarity, calling on Black men and women to collaborate with Japanese people as a viable strategy to combat racism and global white supremacy."²⁹ In Gordon's political vision, as described by historian Keisha Blain, the potential collaboration between African Americans and

²⁸ Keisha N. Blain, "[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World': Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics in the 1930s" in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, 17 (June 2015), pp.100

²⁹ Keisha N. Blain, "'The Dark Skin[ned] People of the Eastern World': Mittie Maude Lena Gordon's Vision of Afro-Asian Solidarity," in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women's International Thought*, eds. Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler (2020).

Japanese people would “not only bolster each group’s political standing on a global scale, but it would also help to end white colonial rule in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and other parts of the globe.”³⁰ Like other Black internationalists who pointed to Japan’s military accomplishments as evidence that the nation would be equipped to challenge white supremacy in the U.S. and abroad, Gordon shared these sentiments. However, she sought to engage Japanese-American activists who were mobilized in the Black freedom struggle to increase pro-Japanese sentiments within the Black community and bridge relationships with Japanese government officials to assist in Black emigration. This particular approach of Black internationalism is what sets Gordon apart from other Black leaders and internationalists.

Gordon’s ideology and position on engagement with Japan were remarkably divergent from other Black internationalists, not only because of her identity as a Black woman but also as a working-class member of society. Before creating the PME, Gordon was a prominent member of the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World (PMEW), a pro-Japanese organization that supported the unification of people of color globally. The PMEW grew in popularity, especially among working-class Black activists in the 1930s, because of its mission to elevate racial and economic inequalities within the Black community. At the center of this mission was PMEW leader and Asian activist Ashima Takis, who delivered a speech at a United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) meeting, where Gordon was present, detailing his plan to facilitate Black emigration to Japan.³¹ This was particularly attractive to the PMEW’s large working-class base, as he described the job opportunities and equal opportunities in various sectors of society in Japan’s newly colonized Manchuria. According to Blain, Gordon’s differing ideological stance on Black

³⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 102

³¹ *Ibid.* pp.189

emigration and “critical views of African American patriotism touted by civil rights leaders set her apart from the PMEW,” leading her to create the PME.³²

Gordon intentionally provided opportunities within her organization for women to engage in nationalist and internationalist politics during the Great Depression. Her approach through PME heavily promoted Afro-Asian solidarity with Japan and employed an intersectional approach to Black internationalism that also sought to address the patriarchy common in Black activism for social and political rights of “dark races.” Gordon’s vocal and public pro-Japanese sentiments, however, eventually worked to her detriment. After Pearl Harbor, according to Blain, “an FBI informant who discreetly attended one of Gordon’s meetings in Chicago in 1941, relayed that Gordon had dissuaded supporters from serving in the U.S. army and offered a positive outlook on Pearl Harbor”, arguing that ‘on December 7, 1941, one billion black people struck for freedom’”.³³ This led to her and 12 other Black activists’ arrest in Chicago for sedition.

Mittie Maude Lena Gordon offers a profound and sorely needed social and political perspective into the various ways working-class and poor Black and Asian activists engaged in the global freedom struggle. While Gordon was among a cohort of Black activist-intellectuals who forged connections with Japanese and Japanese-American activists to increase pro-Japanese sentiment with the Black community, her approach far exceeded the ivory tower of the academy and sought to reach the working-class people. This proved to be a compelling strategy to effectively challenge racism on a global scale. Gordon’s political activism provides a fascinating case study into the nuances of Afro-Asian Solidarity. Through the Gordon case, one can see both

³² Ibid. pp.191

³³ Quoted in Hill, *FBI’s RACON*, 526. As Cited by Keisha N. Blain, “‘The Dark Skin[ned] People of the Eastern World’: Mittie Maude Lena Gordon’s Vision of Afro-Asian Solidarity,” in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women’s International Thought*, eds. Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler (2020).

an unwavering commitment of pro-Japanese rhetoric and action, even after the U.S. had declared war on Japan, but also a raw view into the desperation of Black Americans for global support against the horrific realities of white supremacy, jim-crow, and violence.

Gordon was not alone in her global fight against racism and the patriarchy. Pearl Sherrod, a Black female internationalist, was a driving force in establishing a feminist lens to anti-racism with direct ties to Japanese international and Japanese-American domestic communities.

According to Afro-Asian solidarity scholar Keisha Blain, Gordon was the first African American woman to become the leader of the nationally recognized Afro-Asian solidarity organization,

The Development of Our Own (TDOO). TDOO, Blain details, was a “Detroit-based anti-racist political movement that sought to unite African Americans with people of color in Asia during the Great Depression.”³⁴ In her landmark speech at the Pan-Pacific Women’s Association

(PPWA), in the summer of 1937 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Sherrod delivered a prolific address detailing the plight of people of African descent in the United States and other parts of the world.³⁵ Although Sherrod was a profound Black internationalist, the lens in which she

approached her activism with direct engagement with international Japanese communities,

coupled with a deliberate intersectional approach to address experiences of Black women within

Black freedom struggle, propelled her notoriety. According to Afro-Asian feminist scholar

Cheryl Higashida, as cited by Historian Keisha Blain, Pearl Sherrod’s politics centered around

“Black internationalist feminism within the Communist Left.”³⁶ According to Higashida, Black

internationalist feminism was unique in its approach to Black internationalism, feminism, and the

³⁴ Keisha N. Blain, “[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World’: Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics in the 1930s” in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, (June 2015), pp. 90

³⁵ Keisha N. Blain, “[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World’: Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics in the 1930s” in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, (June 2015), pp. 91

³⁶ Ibid pp.92

freedom struggle more broadly because it challenged the “heteronormative and masculinist articulations of nationalism while maintaining the importance... of national liberation movements for achieving Black women’s social, political, and economic rights.”³⁷

In detailing Sherrod’s narrative within the TDOO, Blain writes that Sherrod’s rise within the TDOO was first overshadowed by her Japanese husband, “Major” Satokata Takahashi.³⁸ Blain adds that “as the leader of TDOO and prominent Japanese leader in promoting Afro-Asian solidarity with Japan in black communities during the 1930s, Pearl Sherrod’s activism was not yet at the forefront of the international stage”³⁹. Unfortunately, the overshadowing of Black women was not uncommon among many political organizations, and the TDOO was by no means an exception, especially because of the audiences it attracted from the Nation of Islam (NOI).⁴⁰ TDOO’s platform of racial solidarity, political self-determination, and economic self-sufficiency was particularly resonant with working-class communities in Detroit who were devastated by the Great Depression. Moreover, the sociopolitical realities in Detroit dominated with racist and xenophobic “yellow peril ideology” against people of Asian descent, coupled with the continued anti-Black racial discrimination and segregation, created the conditions for TDOO to gain national attention and broad support between Black and Asian communities.⁴¹ Under Takashi’s leadership of TDOO, he advocated for “yellow, brown, and black against all white people,”⁴²; echoing the “widely embraced political view [of the Nation of Islam] that

³⁷ Cheryl Higashida, *Black Internationalist Feminism: Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945-1999* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013). As cited by Keisha Blain (2015)

³⁸Keisha N. Blain, “[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World’: Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics in the 1930s” in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, (June 2015),

³⁹ Ibid. 92

⁴⁰ Among the vast political ideologies of the National of Islam, one of its core beliefs was the subservency of women to men.

⁴¹ Ibid. 94

⁴² Quoted in Allen, “When Japan was Champion of the ‘Darker Races,’”³². As cited by Keisha Blain (2015)

‘African-American economic and political struggle against Western imperialism [was connected] with that of the dark races in Asia’”⁴³

“Major” Takahashi’s union with Pearl Sherrod was instrumental to the legitimacy of TDOO as an Afro-Asian solidarity organization, representing the literal embodiment of this cause as a Black-Japanese interracial couple during a time where marriage with other races was frowned upon. Because of the vital role this marriage placed on the strength of TDOO, along with Takahashi’s understanding of Sherrod’s political ambitiousness, unlike other Black nationalist organizations like the NOI and Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, which promoted patriarchy and gender hierarchies of leadership, TDOO began offering unique political opportunities for Black women radical activists in the organization. Blain highlights that “in addition to serving as secretaries, some women were organizers and recruiters, helping to popularize pro-Japanese sentiments in black communities. One article in the Cleveland Plain Dealer described the efforts of an unidentified woman activist in TDOO, who ‘made numerous trips through the southland [and eastern seaboard] to organize ... Negroes in the cause of Japan’”.⁴⁴

While Sherrod established a unique role within the organization, it was not until April 1934, when “Major” Takahashi was deported, that she could develop into her own within TDOO as she became de facto leader. Sherrod, however, was uninterested in the idea of being simply a mouthpiece for her husband while he was incarcerated. Blain details that in Sherrod’s new role, she “used her political writings, influence, and leadership role in TDOO to promote Afro-Asian solidarity, challenge black patriarchy, and forge alliances with women leaders.”⁴⁵ One such

⁴³ Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2003), 168. As cited by Blain (June 2015)

⁴⁴ Leon W. Taylor, “Japanese Propaganda Among American Negroes,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 18, 1943

⁴⁵ Keisha N. Blain, “[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World’: Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics in the 1930s” in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, 17 (June 2015), pp.98

example of Sherrod's display of leadership was seen in a June 1934 editorial in the Detroit Tribune Independent in which "she audaciously declared that African Americans needed to join forces with the Japanese:

'[O]ur minds have been diseased, and we have tried 'Mr. White's' medicine and failed; tried 'Mr. Black's' medicine and failed. Now we must try 'Mr. Brown's medicine.'" "No doubt he will cure us of the mental disease which was caused from a lack of organization," Sherrod continued, "then we can develop ourselves.'"⁴⁶

According to Blain's analysis of this quote, Sherrod is suggesting that "Mr. White's and Mr. Black's medicine," representing the "shortcomings of mainstream civil rights activism and black separatism," was ineffective in solving the race problem in the United States and therefore needed a new antidote—"Mr. Brown's medicine" or political collaboration with the Japanese.⁴⁷ Sherrod's appeal to Black men and women to "eschew the political approaches of mainstream civil rights leaders and black nationalist activists," Blain argues, "underscores her broader internationalist vision—one that was 'connected ... to an overarching notion of black liberation beyond any individual nation-state or colonial territory.'"⁴⁸

The importance of these Black nationalist organizations to this paper is clear; racially specific movements have the capacity to promote and advocate for communities of color. This is not to suggest that Black and Asian communities all agreed with the activism of the TDOO nor the PME; however, these case studies offer an essential view into Black radical movements that center the working class through an international lens. Despite the ideological differences

⁴⁶ Mrs. P.T. Takahashi, "Development of Our Own," Detroit Tribune Independent, June 16, 1934. As cited by Keisha N. Blain, "[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World': Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics in the 1930s" in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, 17 (June 2015)

⁴⁷ Keisha N. Blain, "[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World': Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics in the 1930s" in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, 17 (June 2015), pp.99

⁴⁸ Ibid. pp.99

between Gordon and Sherrod, their contributions to Black internationalism highlight the opportunities, progress, and struggles within their respective organizations that carried the torch for Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies. With the luxury of hindsight's perspective as a researcher, a collaborative coalition organized jointly between the PME and TDOO could have been monumental progress for Black feminism, Black internationalism, and Afro-Asian solidarity.

In Blain's article on Sherrod, she notes that Sherrod was heavily influenced by Gordon's pro-Japanese views as well as her progressive gender politics and even attempted to invite Gordon to join forces with TDOO to challenge global white supremacy on local, national, and international levels through their respective organizations; TDOO and PME. In a June 1934 letter to Gordon, Sherrod pleads with Gordon to arrange a private meeting in Chicago: "I beg to say if a date can be made for me to meet you I shall be glad to talk to you. This movement is too serious to be played with...I shall also bring letters showing you my authority direct from Japan and if no one else can do that I am asking you not to accept them for your people[']s sake."⁴⁹ It is important to note that at the time of this letter, both Gordon and Sherrod were facing increased surveillance and harassment from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) due to their outspoken support for Japan amid World War II. Whether it be differing views on political ideology, opposition to Black emigration, or scheduling conflict, a meeting between Gordon and Sherrod never came to be.

As I will detail more fully later in a later chapter, this example of missed opportunities within Afro-Asian Solidarity, especially between two prominent Black-female Black

⁴⁹ Mrs. P.T. Takahashi to Mittie Maude Lena Gordon, June 11, 1934 (Exhibit 167), *The Development of Our Own*, FBI file no. 65-562-109. All FBI files cited in this article were obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). As cited by Keisha N. Blain, "[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World': Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics in the 1930s" in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, 17 (June 2015)

internationalists such as Sherrod and Gordon to collaborate using their respective political leadership in precisely the point of focus in this paper detailing radical potential. While information does not currently exist to explain why these two leaders chose not to jointly coordinate their efforts, especially given the apparent overlap in platforms, the radical potential for substantive change through an intersectional approach to Black internationalism could have been profound. In Blain's words, these two Black internationalist feminists displayed a "dual commitment to building transnational and transracial political alliances while advancing a feminist agenda."⁵⁰ In the context of the freedom struggle, this approach laid the groundwork for Blain's notion of "grassroots internationalism" that was instrumental decades later for the Black Power movement. From the legacy of Afro-Asian solidarity within the Black internationalist movement, the transnational relationship-building between Japanese and Black activists remained the driving force for later solidarity efforts to fight for racial justice. The leaders may be killed, arrested, or silenced, but the ideology, passion, and will of the people always continue fighting for racial justice and Afro-Asian solidarity.

Yellow Peril Supports Black Power

The development of Japanese-American radicalism bore its roots in revolutionary Black activism. At the heels of World War II, the impact of Japanese internment camps in the United States was explosive to Japanese American radicalism. While Asian-American activism was present before WWII, the realities and aftermath of forced segregated confinement, racial discrimination, and anti-Asian violence sparked a radical awakening for many activists. Within

⁵⁰ Keisha N. Blain, "[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World': Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics in the 1930s" in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society*, 17 (June 2015), pp. 92

Asian-American communities and promoted by the Japanese American Citizen League (JACL), the assimilationist politic and model minority image impressed upon leftist and Marxist Japanese-Americans was abandoned in the wake of Black radical movements in the 1960s.

Echoing this point, Asian American studies scholar Diane Fujino writes:

“...Japanese American politics were dominated by [the] JACL’s focus on legalistic, integrationist challenges within the established system to obtain fair housing and nondiscriminatory employment practices and to promote nonracist image of Japanese Americans. This politic matched that of the NAACP and other moderate civil rights organizations, in contrast to [the] high-risk direct action confrontations, including CORE’s freedom rides and SNCC’s sit-ins, or more radical efforts to transform oppressive structures.”⁵¹

By the late 1960s, young activists from Asian-American communities were impressed and inspired by the militancy, political analysis, organization, and symbolism of Black nationalists and Black power advocates.⁵² Much like Asian American youth’s push back against the model minority trope, young Black activists were also dissatisfied with the civil rights movement’s progress, seeing it as a pacifist option for racial justice. As a result, the Black Panthers and other “yellow power” organizations sought to collaborate in their global fights against white supremacy.

In this infamous image of Richard Aoki holding a sign that reads “Yellow Peril Supports Black Power,” many scholars and activists alike point to its bold message of solidarity as a pivotal point in Afro-Asian Solidarity during the late 1960s Black power movement.⁵³ The origin of the term “yellow peril” was used as a derogatory at the beginning of the 19th century



Figure 2 courtesy of California Watch by Howard L. Bingham of the Black Panthers 1968

⁵¹ Fujino, Diane. "The Black Liberation Movement and Japanese American Activism: The Radical Activism of Richard Aoki and Yuri Kochiyama". *Afro Asia*, edited by Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2008, pp. 155-198. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822381174-011>

⁵² : Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar (2001) *YellowPower: The Formation of AsianAmerican Nationalism in the Age of Black Power, 1966-1975*, *Souls*, 3:3, 29-38, DOI: 10.1080/10999949.2001.12098172

⁵³ (Figure .2) courtesy of [California Watch](#) by Howard L Bingham of the Black Panthers 1968

when Chinese laborers were brought to the United States to replace enslaved labor by Black Americans after emancipation. Many white workers in the U.S. saw these Chinese laborers as a threat to their livelihood because they [the Chinese] were being exploited for their labor and paid significantly lower wages than their white counterparts. As a result, Chinese laborers were subject to intense racist attacks, leading to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Yellow peril was meant to define the existential danger East Asian peoples posed to the Western world.

Exemplifying this sentiment and pointing to one of the earliest references to “yellow peril” can be traced to artist Herman Knackfuss’s work entitled “Peoples of Europe, Defend Your Holiest Possessions” (Fig.3). This image, which appeared in the 1898 Harper’s Weekly by thousands of U.S. readers, was commissioned by German Emperor Wilhelm II based on a dream where he saw a Buddha on the back of a dragon, storming Europe.⁵⁴ In the image, an archangel attempts to persuade the nations of Europe to

band together against the approaching Buddha riding a dragon, which is meant to depict Asia. This image was widely referred to within the U.S. as “The Yellow Peril.” This anti-Asian sentiment spread across Western civilization into the 20th century and surged during the war period. John Dower writes, “the vision of the



(Figure 3) photo courtesy of [Herman Knackfuss/Pall Mall Magazine/Hathi Trust Digital Library](#)

menace from the East was always more racial rather than national. It derived not from concern with any one country or people in particular, but from a vague and ominous sense of the vast,

⁵⁴ Chow, Kat. "If We Called Ourselves Yellow." *NPR*. NPR, 27 Sept. 2018. Web. 27 Mar. 2021.

faceless, nameless yellow horde: the rising tide, indeed, of color.”⁵⁵ Asian-American activists in the 1960s sought to reclaim this pejorative term and utilize it as a personified embodiment of their persistence for radical change.

The unsettling similarities in Black and Asian Americans’ experiences and depictions as apes, primitive, or even magical were not fully weaponized against these communities until the 1960s. At the outset of the Korean War, following Japanese internment and decades of anti-Asian racism heightened in the U.S., Asian-American activists were increasingly drawn to the visible shifts toward revolutionary goals through militant tactics utilized in the Black power movement.⁵⁶ Echoing this point, scholar Jason Jones writes, “the Black Panther Party served as a controversial locus and tangible form for the hopes, dreams, and frustrations of Black Americans. This struggle was [also] captured by the Japanese...[who] shared a relationship defined within the context of American prejudices, racism, and racial politics”.⁵⁷

Richard Aoki was one of the Black Panther Party’s (BPP) most notable Japanese members and the highest-ranking non-Black leader. While at Merritt College with Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, Aoki joined the BPP and raised to the level of a Field Marshall. Before becoming a panther, Aoki and his family were forced to live in an internment camp during the war period. His personal experience with racial segregation and his experiences in America with racial discrimination radicalized his political ideology towards far-left Marxism. A prominent student activist on the Merritt College and UC Berkeley campuses, Aoki sought to

⁵⁵ Dower, John. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

⁵⁶ Fujino, Diane. "The Black Liberation Movement and Japanese American Activism: The Radical Activism of Richard Aoki and Yuri Kochiyama". *Afro Asia*, edited by Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2008, pp. 155-198. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822381174-011>

⁵⁷ Jones, Jason Christopher. "The Black Panther Party and the Japanese Press." *Journal of African American Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2017, pp. 42–70. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44508191. Accessed 27 Mar. 2021.

promote and assist the Black freedom struggle as a Black Panther while also developing an Asian version of the BPP.⁵⁸ Soon after that, Aoki formed the Asian American Peoples Association (AAPA), modeled after the Black Panthers, and maintain close ties with the party. While solidarity organizations such as the Red Guard and AAPA organized national recognition in its cause, it was drawn heavily from middle-class college-educated groups. As a result, the Los Angelo's-based Yellow Brotherhood (Y.B.) was formed “out of the nexus of political militancy, ethnic pride, and social pathos.”⁵⁹ The Yellow Brotherhood was particularly unique in the membership it garnered. Scholar Jeffrey Ogbar notes that the Y.B. included membership of former gang members, ex-convicts, veterans, and nisei and sansei—second and third-generation Japanese-Americans who pushed back against the assimilationist politic and were unapologetically resistant to racism in their communities.

The BPP and yellow power movement influenced each other in “alliances, networks, conference, and general dialogue.”⁶⁰ Like the BPP, organizations such as the Yellow Brotherhood and Asian American Hardcore dismissed the notion that improving social conditions within the United States was predicated on closer proximity to whiteness. In this global freedom fight, Japanese-Asian activists were particularly vocal in their discontent with the treatment of Black people in America as well as other minority communities.

As detailed earlier in this chapter, activist Satokata Takahashi, once a leader of the TDOO, set the groundwork for much of the pro-Japan Black internationalist organizing for Japanese-American communities. His early support for the Black freedom struggle in the 1930s-

⁵⁸ :Richard Aoki as cited by Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar (2001) *Yellow Power: The Formation of Asian American Nationalism in the Age of Black Power, 1966-1975*, *Souls*, 3:3, 29-38, DOI: 10.1080/10999949.2001.12098172

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pp.34

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp36

40s was a driving force in the ways in which Japan and Black Americans engaged their activism in the 1960s during the Black Power movement. In prominent Black newspapers such as the Detroit Tribune Independent, “Major” Takahashi denounced racism and called on black men and women to join forces with Japan: “I come here to promote international unity between the dark people of Japan and the dark people of America to lead them to a better and fuller life. What Japan has done in the past 70 years, the Negroes, too, can do by accepting Japan’s five guiding principles.”⁶¹ According to Blain, Takahashi, and those who embraced his teachings, maintained an internationalist vision that linked national concerns to global ones. Most importantly, they envisioned Afro-Asian solidarity as a viable strategy for combating racial oppression in both domestic and international contexts.

One such Japanese American activist influence by Takahashi’s ideologies during the Black Power movement was Amy Uyematsu. Uyematsu’s message highlighted the plight of Japanese and Japanese American’s as a uniting element of the history of inequalities faces by Black Americans. In a prolific statement for Afro-Asian solidarity, Uyematsu asserts: “Asian Americans can no longer afford to watch the black-and-white struggle from the sidelines. They have their own cause to fight. Since they are also victims—with less visible scars—of the white institutionalized racism. A yellow movement has been set in motion by the black power movement.”⁶² In this powerful declaration, Uyematsu, like many other Japanese and Japanese-American activists, sought to create a basis of mutual understanding between Black and Asian peoples and emphasize (without direct use of the specific term) the radical potential of uniting the two groups against white supremacy. Although Japanese-American radicalism was

⁶¹ Ibid. pp.31

⁶² Uyematsu, A. The emergence of yellow power in america. GIDRA. (1969). Retrieved from: <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~hist32/Hist33/Uyematsu.PDF> pp. 9

particularly instrumental during the Black Power Movement in emphasizing the necessity in Afro-Asian solidarity, journalists were instrumental in capturing the transnational presence and importance of the Black Power movement within Japan.

Black Panther Party representations Japanese Media

Scholar of modern Japanese media, Jason Christopher Jones, argues that “representations of the Black Panther Party in Japanese newspapers rest at the nexus of the themes of escape, war, and black American-Japanese relations.”⁶³ Jones’ study of Japanese press representation of the Black power movement offers a critical lens into the transnational reach of the Black Power movement, the Japanese publics’ awareness of the Black freedom struggle, and the global conversation about Afro-Asian solidarity. In his analysis of the three top-circulating Japanese newspapers—*Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Asahi Shimbun*, and *Mainichi Shimbun*, Jones contextualizes the Black American-Japanese relationship from 1966 to 1979 to unearth Japanese perceptions of the Black Power movement and sentiments about Afro-Asian Solidarity. By exploring the Japanese perspective on both ends of the “pro-liberal/pro-radical-conservative spectrum,” Jones offers a comprehensive view into the nuances of Japanese perspectives on the Black Power movement.

In Jones’ study, he finds that Japanese reporters in Japan and Japan-based writers at foreign news affiliates (such as Reuters and Associated Press) offered different approaches to conveying news regarding the BPP. Articles from Japan-based writers for foreign news affiliates, Jones highlights, offered “readers with basic knowledge reading the BPP in each editorial section.”⁶⁴ This, in Jones’ view, “serve[d] the purpose of placing readers on equal footing so as

⁶³ Jones, Jason Christopher. “The Black Panther Party and the Japanese Press.” *Journal of African American Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2017, pp. 49. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44508191.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* pp.62

to make possible a contextualized interpretation of the BPP and its activities.”⁶⁵ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Asahi Shimbun*, and *Mainichi Shimbun* newspapers each approached their contextualization of BPP reporting differently. According to Jones, *Yomiuri* and *Asahi* both used cinematic representations of the BPP for their readers, but *Asahi* also added book reviews of popular narratives from Black Panthers such as Phillips Foner’s, *The Black Panthers Speak* (1970), while *Yomiuri* used commentary of Black intellectuals such as Nathan Glazer.⁶⁶ Despite their varied approaches to conveying information, these Japanese newspapers were instrumental in representing the BPP to its Japanese readership. However, it is important to note that reporting of the BPP in Japan, like other publications worldwide, did not always support the BPP or its message. The *Asahi Shimbun* was one of few Japanese newspapers in Jones’ research that offered a critical, and at times problematic, view of the BPP and its activities to the Japanese public.⁶⁷

According to Jones, *Asahi Shimbun*’s early 1960s reporting of the BPP displayed a “predisposition toward sensationalization of the party’s militaristic and anti-establishment face.”⁶⁸ Jones also found that the lexicon used in much of the reporting of the BPP in *Asahi* often use the term 黒人問題 – *kokujin mondai* [The Black Problem], and was associated the term with “crime, arrest, court, bail, plots, extremism/radicalism, demonstrations, shootings, murder, and kidnapping; accounting for 64% of *Asahi* BPP articles selected his survey.”⁶⁹ While this depiction does not reflect the fullness of the BPP’s goals, missions, and activism, what perhaps is

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp.62

⁶⁶ Ibid.pp.62

⁶⁷ Its important to note that because the Black Panther Party was a highly controversial group, many publications took a highly critical view of its activities. The *Asahi Shinbun* was not alone in its critical stance against BPP.

⁶⁸ Ibid. pp.62

⁶⁹ Ibid.pp.62

more problematic is the racialized imagery that *Asahi* paints of the BPP and Black people more broadly. This, in turn, perpetuates the cycle of Anti-Blackness in the Asian community and is the biggest hindrance to the radical potential of Afro-Asian Solidarity. While *Asahi Shimbun* alone is not the sole perpetrator, this racialized language against Black people reflects a long history of white supremacist notions of racial hierarchy being impressed upon Asian communities to divide communities of color. While I will detail these histories in more depth in the third chapter, it is important to highlight the ways in which print media plays a role in socializing its readers' perceptions of race.

Like *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Asahi Shimbun*, and *Mainichi Shimbun*, the research organization Japan Black Studies Association (JBSA) [黒人研究の会—*kokujin kenkyu no kai*] played an influential role in the Japanese public's understanding of the Black experience in America and abroad. Created June 22, 1954, the Japan Black Studies Association (JBSA) is a scholarly organization comprised of Japanese intellectuals whose curiosity in American history, literature, and culture led them to explore the complex history of the Black American experience. Founder of JBSA, Nukina Yoshitaka, says that she was “motivated to create the Black Studies Association because he believed Japanese under United States military control had a commonality with African Americans, as both groups had their nationalistic/racial pride stripped by American capitalism and imperialism.”⁷⁰ As a scholar of American literature, Nukina was particularly interested in the writings of Black intellectuals to better understand the depth of American history. Fascinated by the “Negro question,” Nukina and other members of JBSA focused their scholarly energies on expanding the way Japanese scholars have and should be studying America. Thus, JBSA started as “an organization to study black life, culture, history,

⁷⁰ Tsunehiko Kato, "The History of Black Studies in Japan: Origin and Development," *Journal of Black Studies* 44 (8) (November 2013):pp. 834.

and other related issues.”⁷¹ International relationship scholar Kato Tsunehiko highlights that while JBSA was solely comprised of scholars, its mission was to publish numerous articles and journals to educate Japanese society about the Black experience historically and in the current climate. Given the time in which the JBSA was created, scholars who joined the organization were particularly eager to study the civil rights movement’s development in the United States.⁷² In addition to JBSA’s scholarly curiosity in Black America, there was also interest in “the ongoing worldwide move toward independence of the former Western colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.”⁷³ As JSBA continued to grow in notoriety within Japanese scholarly communities, so did the fields of study JBSA members undertook in their scholarly works.

During the 1960s, Japan too experienced a rise in social unrest. Public protests in response to the revised U.S.-Japan Security treaty, coupled with student-led movements against the use of Okinawa military bases in the Vietnam war, led JBSA to be more civically engaged with Japanese citizenry in their calls for a more democratic society.⁷⁴ In doing so, they published scholarship that connected the Black freedom struggle to the demands for democratization in Japanese society. While JBSAs, a solely research-based organization, never publicly participated in politically dissident activities, the organization was steadfast in its commitment to educate the public about the history of the Black freedom struggle in the U.S. and the continent of Africa. In keeping with this mission, JBSA published the first-ever collection of African American literature to the Japanese public by Japanese scholars entitled *The Collected Works of Black Writers*. According to Kato, JBSA also held a series of public lectures on African American and

⁷¹Furukawa, Hiromi. (1986). Kenkyu Kai to Shuuhun deno Tsuioku [My memory of JBSA and related things]. *Kokujin Kenyu*, 56, As cited by ibid. pp.836

⁷² Tsunehiko Kato, "The History of Black Studies in Japan: Origin and Development," *Journal of Black Studies* 44 (8) (November 2013):pp.836

⁷³ Ibid. pp.836

⁷⁴ Ibid. pp.838

African history, society, and culture, also including radio lectures throughout the 1960s and 70s.⁷⁵

Japanese American and African American communities Kayomi Wada also highlights how “the Journal of Black Studies[also] published articles about the condemnation of racism by both the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China.⁷⁶” While JBSA was particularly instrumental in conveying translated narratives on the Black experience to the Japanese public at the height of political activism in the 1960s and 70s, it continues to be a vital resource to the Japanese people on immersing issues in the Black freedom struggle; especially in the era of Black Lives Matter. JBSA was and continues to be a vital linkage institution in information the Japanese public on the plight of Black people and the necessity of solidarity to overcome white supremacy.

In this robust historical analysis of Afro-Asian solidarity within the U.S., I highlighted the foundational Black radical movements, Black internationalism, and the Black Power movement to illustrate the origin and trajectory of Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies. The depth of this historical lens of Afro-Asian Solidarity is critical to understanding Black and Asian cross-community organizing and its application to political activism in the age of Black Lives Matter. While this analysis encapsulates the breadth of the U.S.-based origins and practices of Afro-Asian solidarity, the Third World Liberation movement also took hold of Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies in its global efforts against colonialism, western domination, and racial discrimination. Today’s globalized world activists operate in necessitate an equally in-depth analysis of the history of international, inter-governmental efforts against white supremacy

⁷⁵ Ibid.838

⁷⁶ Wada, Kayomi “Black studies Association (kokujin kenkyu no Kai) of japan” Black Past. December 29, 2008. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/black-studies-association-kokujin-kenkyu-no-kai-japan/>

through Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies to apply a nuanced radical approach to activism in the age of Black Lives Matter.

Chapter 2 - Afro-Asian Solidarity in the Era of Decolonialism

Throughout the history of Afro-Asian solidarity, non-state actors have remained at the center of the movement. However, at the heels of economic devastation and two global conflicts, the 1950s post-war geopolitical landscape gave way for governments to forge transnational solidarity for decolonization. Although the international community had long avoided discussions about race and colonization, particularly western countries that asserted the misconceived notion of its unimportance compared to other more “pressing” issues, African and Asian nations’ decolonization efforts garnered global attention. Taking a position on such a polarizing issue against the colonial undoubtedly troubled the western world, especially the world’s largest superpower, the United States. Amid the beginning of the Cold War between the U.S. and USSR, many assumed that the race problem would continue to be pushed along as an issue of little importance to the international community. This changed in April 1955 at the Bandung Conference—otherwise known as the Asia-Africa Conference of 1955. Given the shared histories between these nations, this forum for inter-governmental collaboration proved to be a pivotal historical marker in the global fight against colonialism and racism through solidarity. In this chapter, I intend to highlight the background and importance of the Bandung conference and the Japanese governments’ approach and participation in this forum. I also delve into Black America’s response to Bandung and contextualize the conference’s role within the trajectory of Afro-Asian Solidarity.

With this framing, I argue that the current approach in Afro-Asian solidarity scholarship that analyzes the Bandung Conference solely within the Third World Liberation movement framework overlooks how U.S.-based grassroots internationalism influenced the Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies in this landmark event. Moreover, these bodies of work fail to highlight the commonalities in mission and motivation between Afro-Asian solidarity in Black America and Afro-Asian solidarity on the international stage. Historically, viewing the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference within this context of the freedom struggle in Afro-Asian solidarity has yet to be fully explored. While the Bandung Conference had different actors, forums for engagement, and approaches, the fight for freedom against Western imperialism and racial hegemony mirrors the goals of past interactions of Afro-Asian solidarity seen domestically in the United States. Analyzing the 1955 Bandung Conference as part of the trajectory of Afro-Asian solidarity history, I argue, contextualizes the movement beyond the individual-centered level, as many past studies have. At the core of the Bandung Conference lies questioning of the concept and practice of injustices of the international political system. Although there is no evidence to suggest that the 1955 Bandung Conference participants were directly influenced by the Black internationalist and Black Panther movements' application of Afro-Asian Solidarity, the causal connection between the shared articulation of Afro-Asian solidarity ideology is compelling and worth exploring further.

The Bandung Conference was historic for many reasons but was particularly monumental in that it was the first international endorsement of Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies. While African and Asian countries were at the center of this landmark forum, global attention was also attuned to this conference's outcomes. Closely covered in U.S. newspapers and television news broadcasts, this first-ever conference between African and Asian nations had a galvanizing effect

on oppressed people worldwide. African American activists, who had advocated for these ideologies for solidarity for decades, were particularly eager about the radical potential this forum could have in the fight for equality for Black Americans, even without the U.S.'s participation.

The demands from newly decolonized Asian countries advocated for the United Nations (U.N.) to refocus its policies to address the political, economic, and racial inequalities against emerging economies on the international stage. On the other hand, many Western nations were more concerned about the cold war, leading to the emergence of a political bloc within the U.N. of African and Asian nations. Ironically, Third World Liberation (TWL) scholars characterize this united front of African and Asian countries against inequalities on the international stage as “Afro-Asian (A.A.) Solidarity,” but make little effort to identify the connection between this Afro-Asian ideology rooted in the creation of the conference to the U.S.-based transnational Afro-Asian Solidarity activism that preceded it. Despite recent government-focused efforts in support for Afro-Asian solidarity, such as the 1993 Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) and 2005 New Asian-African Strategic Partnership, that solidified the commitment to “the shared destiny of the two continents,” research that delves into the racial elements of the conference and its effect of international race relations are scarce.⁷⁷ As highlighted in Ampiah’s study, one such tangentially applicable research is seen in Cary Fransers’ book, *An American Dilemma: Race and Realpolitik in the American Response to the Bandung Conference, 1955*. In her analysis of western foreign and domestic policies, and responses to the issue of race, Fraser argues that “The Afro-Asian conference launched [in] an

⁷⁷ Ampiah, Kweku. *The Political and Moral Imperatives of the Bandung Conference Of 1955 : The Reactions of the US, UK and Japan*, BRILL, 2007. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oberlin/detail.action?docID=771992>. pp. 3-4

era of growing anti-racist assertiveness by the people of colour [against] ideologies of white supremacy that girded segregation in the United States, apartheid in South Africa, and European colonial rule in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.⁷⁸ Here Fraser raises a powerful point: that despite the isolated nature of their experiences with white supremacy in various parts of the world, these African and Asian leaders found solidarity in their shared experiences and took a radical stance against the most powerful countries in the world to elevate their voices against injustice.

The Bandung Conference and Japan's role in Afro-Asian Solidarity in the era of decolonization

The Bandung Conference (hereafter referred to as the Afro-Asian conference) held in Bandung Indonesia was the first-ever large-scale meeting between Asian and African delegations without the presence of Western powers.⁷⁹ The conference itself operated within two areas of interest to African and Asian countries: 1) denouncing colonialism perpetuated by all western powers against African, Asian, and Latin American countries and establishing economic partnerships to divest from the dependence on the West and 2) organizing a framework for nonalignment, or neutralism, as an economic, political and security alternative to engagement in a western conflict, the Cold War.

Of the 29 nations who attended the Afro-Asian conference, participating members primarily represented former colonies. Organizers of the event included Indonesia (also hosting nation), Burma (now Myanmar), India, Dominion of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and Pakistan. Australia and New Zealand, who are both “geographically in Asia, but were [neither] invited to

⁷⁸ Fraser, Cary. “An American Dilemma: Race and Realpolitik in the American Response to the Bandung Conference, 1955.” In *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988*, Brenda Gayle Plummer, Ed., 115-40’. The SHAFR Guide Online. Ed. Alan McPherson. Brill Reference Online.

⁷⁹ Presence as in physically attendance of a delegation. As later in the chapter reveals, the US had much influence of the actual conference because of its allies/partners.

the conference, [n]or given observer status,” proved to be an example of the organizers intent to unite against the western colonial powers and address long-overdue conversations about racial inequalities.⁸⁰ In addition to the conference’s focus on decolonization, factions plaguing the international community amid the Cold War between Western democracies and Communist nations led participating countries to focus on economic, political, cultural cooperation with one another over the western world. This pledge among African and Asian nations for economic, political, and cultural collaboration included several policies distancing themselves from the West. This also included coordinated efforts towards neutralism to reorient their focus on the decolonization of all nations. According to historian Jiwon Amy Yoo, part of the Afro-Asian conference had:

“...a pledge of support for those nations still colonized by the Western states, especially the nations of Africa. The delegates discussed and agreed upon economic alliances, respect for human rights in their countries, and emphasized peace between Africa and Asia. The Africa and Asia nations also pledged to mutually support their economic development, vowing to rely on themselves instead of Western foreign aid.”⁸¹

Yoo also details the Bandung conference’s 10-point program, which called for various reforms within the international community to address the economic, political, and racially discriminatory practices sanctioned against newly independent nations. Policies in the 10-point program included “settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations, and recognition of the equality of all races and the equality of all nations large and small.[Also calls]...for non-intervention in the internal affairs of other nations and repudiated acts or threats of force against other nations.”⁸² The

⁸⁰ Ampiah, Kweku. *The Political and Moral Imperatives of the Bandung Conference Of 1955 : The Reactions of the US, UK and Japan*, BRILL, 2007. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oberlin/detail.action?docID=771992>. pp. 33

⁸¹ Yoo, J. Bandung Conference, 1955. BlackPast.org. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/bandung-conference-1955/> August 8, 2009

⁸² Ibid. section 3

western powers targeted in these policies, European colonizers, the U.S., and the Soviet Union, feared that many newly independent nations would fall victim to communist ideology.⁸³ Some scholars argue these fears were coupled with the concerns of the race-based solidarity forged among these nations, accounting for 54 percent of the world's population. Be that as it may, among the newly-independent Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries, there was a belief that in maintaining neutrality, they could avert war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and coordinate a united effort to revitalize their respective regions without western interference.⁸⁴

While recent forms of Afro-Asian governmental cooperation have ignited with Japan, mirroring the Bandung solidarity framework, the Japanese government's participation in the 1955 conference was much less impressive and riddled with controversy. Japan's complicated history with the U.S. and regional Asian neighbors, as a former colonial power and defeated nation, translated to its' strategic approach to the conference instead of genuine solidarity. Toeing the line between Japan's partnership with the U.S. and ambitions to re-engage diplomatically with regional neighbors, Japanese representatives agreed to pursue the neutralist approach with its neighbors vis-à-vis the Cold War. Still, they were nonaligned on issues around race, colonialism, and western hegemony. Expert of 1950s Japanese Diplomacy Kewku Ampiah argues that, in the Japanese view, their attendance at the Bandung conference was used as a crucial opportunity in creating Japanese foreign policy objectives, under Prime Minister Hatayama Ichiro's administration, free from U.S. influence following the end of U.S. occupation. This understandably enraged other African and Asian leaders at the conference. However, Ampiah explains that the "socio-political circumstances in the aftermath of the war and its

⁸³ Ibid. section 3

⁸⁴ Ampiah, Kweku. *The Political and Moral Imperatives of the Bandung Conference Of 1955 : The Reactions of the US, UK and Japan*, BRILL, 2007. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oberlin/detail.action?docID=771992>. pp 16

effects on [Japanese] domestic politics...[coupled with]...America's influence on the country" led to a meek show of support to either cause.⁸⁵ Drawing from Japanese government documents and Official Gazettes of Diet, Ampiah offers a one of its kind lens into the Japanese government's strategic plan in the Bandung conference and engagement in Afro-Asian solidarity efforts within the U.N. in the short and long term.

To better contextualize Japan's engagement, or lack thereof, in the Bandung Conference, Ampiah details the post-WWII conditions facing Japan that complicated their "international standing and domestic political situation."⁸⁶ Under U.S. occupation from 1945-1952, Japan's lack of defense capabilities coupled with growing U.S. influence in its foreign policy resulted in "demands from both the left and right of the domestic political spectrum that Japan should strive for 'genuine, as opposed to 'formal,' independence – *dokuritsu* [from the United States]. Under the Prime Minister Hatoyama administration, these sentiments continued to grow, particularly among parliament (Diet) members, leading to growing support for neutralism. This self-preservation strategy allowed for a balance between the desire to enact foreign policies independent from the U.S. and goals to re-establish Japan within the community of Asian nations. Ampiah defines neutralism as "the avoidance of formal political or security commitment to either of the major power blocs," the United States and the Soviet Union.⁸⁷ The international political climate of the 1950s was further complicated for Japan due to security concerns, ironically, as a result of the US-Japan Alliance.⁸⁸ Out of this economic and security necessity,

⁸⁵Ibid. pp 12

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp.166

⁸⁷ Ibid. pp.8

⁸⁸ Because of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, Japanese alliance with the U.S. made is a sitting duck for military aggression from the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Soviet Unions investment into the People's Republic of China's (PRC) military, heightened concerns from Japanese government leadership of an imminent attack from PRC and/or the Soviet Union as Cold War tensions continued to rise.

Japan's neutrality campaign sought to build diplomatic relationships with its Asian neighbors, which were severed during Japan's imperialist campaign of the Asia Pacific during the war period. Echoing this point, Ampaih adds, "...coexisting peacefully with its neighbors and all nations was seen as a strategy potentially capable of opening up avenues for lucrative international trade...[moreover, there was a realization that]...national security could be achieved through the application of the diplomacy of peace instead of the threat of war remain [their] ambition)".⁸⁹

With this context of Japan's domestic and international political realities, one can better understand Japan's hesitant engagement in the Bandung Conference, particularly on race and colonialism. Japan's cautious approach to the event, even down to deciding the delegation members, was under the close watch of the U.S. State Department. Summarizing the issues and concerns domestically and internationally by Japan's presence in the Bandung conference, Ampaih asserts that:

"Given Japan's credentials as a humiliated former colonial power, the anti-colonial agenda of the meeting made its conservative leaders jittery. At the same time, Tokyo did not want to be seen by the colonial power, Britain in particular, as a succor to decolonization. The Bandung countries' relentless criticism of the West, and the U.S. in particular, also made the Japanese slightly uncomfortable about ...the talks."

To this point, it becomes clear as to why and how Japanese officials chose to take a backseat in the Bandung conference when the issue of colonialism entered discussions. Be that as it may, Japanese officials' unwillingness to acknowledge one of the core issues addressed in the Afro-Asia Conference reflects how the Japanese government has and continues to align itself with the West on politically sensitive topics because of its security dependence on the U.S. One such statement from a representative of the House of Councillors for the Social Democratic Party,

⁸⁹ Ibid. pp.170

Uehara Estujiro, reflects the Japanese delegates' strategy to avoid controversial issues such as colonialism at the conference. In Estujiro's account of the series of meetings, he opined that much of the discussion was overhauled with strong "condemna[tion] of imperialism, racism, and colonialism" from countries who were victims of colonialism.⁹⁰ He added that while he "did not oppose anything they [newly-decolonized nations] said," there was no statement of solidarity against colonialism either.⁹¹ While his comments were largely reflective of his party's political ideology, rather than a sentiment shared by the majority of Japanese society, these statements reflect a pattern of disconnect between authoritative Japanese voices and the range of dissident viewpoints that existed in 1950s Japan.

Ampiah argues that Uehara Estujiro's "comments might also be seen as an admission of the fact that Japan attended the event with an agenda that was perhaps divorced from the true spirit of Bandung."⁹² This assertion unearths the implications of Japan's complex history with its own racial and national identity in proximity to the West and Asian neighbors. Echoing this point, modern Japanese scholars Atsushi Tajima and Michael Thornton argue that the Japanese government has a history of displaying "strategic solidarity" on issues of race to balance its aspirations of equal stature to the West and towing the global color line in calls for solidarity.⁹³ The disconnect between government representatives and activists' statements for racial justice is also problematized within the context of the freedom struggle across the globe. Hereto to the Japanese context exemplified the tension between civil society and government on the issue of

⁹⁰ *Gaimuinin kaigi roku* (Proceeding of the Foreign Affairs Committee), No. 4, Kanpo (Official Gazette), May 6 1955 pp.4 ; As cited by Ampiah (2007) pp. 189

⁹¹ *Ibid.* as cited by Ampiah (2007) pp. 189

⁹² Ampiah, Kweku. *The Political and Moral Imperatives of the Bandung Conference Of 1955 : The Reactions of the US, UK and Japan*, BRILL, 2007. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oberlin/detail.action?docID=771992>.

⁹³ Atsushi Tajima & Michael Thornton (2012): Strategic solidarity: Japanese imaginings of Blacks and race in popular media, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 13:3, 345-364

race. While the 20th century was plagued with government representatives who refused to represent the calls for racial justice efforts of their constituencies, this gap continues in the 21st century and is particularly impactful in the 2020 iterations of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The Afro-Asian Conference's role in global freedom struggle & Black America's response

The end of World War II, and Japan's defeat, signaled a sharp decline in pro-Japan sentiments in the African American community. Even after the withdrawal of U.S. forces in Japan in 1952, as detailed above, Japan's alliance with the U.S. shifted allegiances from Black America to officials in Washington. Although pro-Tokyo sentiments deteriorated, support for Asian nations as the catalysts for radical change in the international system and the domestic realities of oppressed peoples was maintained. The 1955 Bandung conference was a motivating factor for Black America's faith in the radical potential of Asian nations to topple white supremacy.

While the Bandung Conference did not affect African-Americans' domestic race issues in the U.S., many Black activists viewed the conferences as landmark progress in the Black freedom struggle domestically and globally. Despite many prominent Black internationalists' forms of activism being challenged by policing, political fragmentation, and disagreement within the Black community, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the continued ideologies of Afro-Asian solidarity displayed in the Bandung Conference resurged confidence in the movement. In his analysis of the conference, renowned international historian Matthew Jones echoes this point asserting that "the idea[s] of...transnational racial solidarity challenging a white-dominated

power structure that operated at both international and domestic levels was powerfully communicated by Bandung to many African-American leaders.”⁹⁴

The message behind Black America’s response to the Bandung conference also speaks volumes to the radical impact of Afro-Asian solidarity. Although the 1955 Afro-Asian conference did not directly address the experiences of Black Americans, the Afro-Asian solidarity ideologies amplified within the conference still spoke to this community. Transitioning to the last chapter, focusing on the Black Lives Matter movement, this sentiment of allyship and solidarity present in the Afro-Asian conference provides an invaluable example of the value of government and inter-governmental action in *support* of its citizens’ calls for racial justice. Hereto in this act of solidarity among nations in the freedom struggle, we see the impactful ways that collective action through Afro-Asian solidarity has amplified the message and continued the fight against white supremacy and systematic racism. In these past interactions of Afro-Asian solidarity within the U.S. and internationally, spreading the message globally was reliant on linkage institutions such as television, newspapers, and radio that at times did not reach all possible stakeholders within these communities. In the 21st century, social media has broadened this reach. Social media has thus, become a powerful mechanism in global accessibility and engagement on controversial issues. In this final chapter, anchored with the historical grounding of Afro-Asian solidarity, I highlight the radical potential of Afro-Asian solidarity in the age of Black Lives Matter through social media activism.

⁹⁴ Matthew Jones, A “Segregated” Asia?: Race, the Bandung Conference, and Pan-Asianist Fears in American Thought and Policy, 1954–1955, *Diplomatic History*, Volume 29, Issue 5, November 2005, Pages pp.865, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2005.00520.x>

Chapter 3 – The radical potential of Afro-Asian Solidarity in the age of Black Lives Matter through Social Media Activism

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is the most prolific and vast movement of the 21st century. This, in part, is due to its use of social media, grassroots organizing, and global outreach. While the originators of the hashtag #blacklivesmatter are credited to Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, Black Lives Matter has no official organizational leadership. As a result of this novel and vast social movement, scholars have approached the studies on Black Lives Matter through various lenses. Within BLM movement scholarship, research on the impact of social media activism is robust; few, however, have delved into the transnational impact of social media activism in the BLM movement. Building upon the trajectory of Afro-Asian solidarity in the 21st century, this chapter analyzes the effects of social media activism in the age of Black Lives Matter on Afro-Asian solidarity.

Drawing from Jeanelle Hope’s application of “radical potential” in the era of Black Lives Matter, I argue that the surge in social media activism through the #blacklivesmatter and #stopasianhate movements create the conditions for profound progress to be made through Afro-Asian Solidarity like never before. As detailed in previous chapters, many structural barriers prevented Afro-Asian solidarity from reaching its full potential. While these structural barriers operated in various forms, the inaccessibility of information prevented many activists from reaching a broader audience to forge international coalitions based on shared histories with white supremacy. Even global events with international media coverage, such as the 1955 Bandung conference, had a limited reach, especially for low-income/working-class communities. Social media has broken down these historical barriers in Afro-Asian solidarity.

Hope’s analysis centers around the ways state-sanctioned violence, domestically and globally, as well as the geographic proximity of Black people and Asian Americans, have motivated new iterations of Afro-Asian solidarity in the era of #blacklivesmatter.⁹⁵ Social media, however, doesn’t necessitate geographic proximity, thus allowing for an even broader form of Afro-Asian solidarity to be forged. Building upon Hope’s argument, I argue that the “radical potential” truly lies in the capacity for the Black and Asian communities to overcome their historical tensions. Unlike past iterations of Afro-Asian solidarity, social media allows for narratives of solidarity Black and Asian communities to be more accessible and no longer clouded by the history of tension. While these past iterations of Afro-Asian solidarity made many and long-lasting strides in the global freedom struggle, in the age of Black Lives Matter, social media offers unique opportunities to learn from these histories to explore the full capacity of Afro-Asian solidarity.

Black Lives Matter in Japan

August 27, 2020, in response to the shooting of Jacob Black in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Black Japanese-American tennis player Naomi Osaka called her participation in the Western and Southern Open tennis. In this profound act of protest against the historical pattern of police violence against unarmed Black women, Osaka also used her social media platform on Twitter to voice her outrage with police violence to her English and Japanese-speaking audiences. In this statement, Osaka details the pain



Figure 4 Naomi Osaka (@naomiosaka). Twitter. August 26, 2020

⁹⁵ Hope, Jeanelle K. “This Tree Needs Water!: A Case Study on the Radical Potential of Afro-Asian Solidarity in the Era of Black Lives Matter. 2019

of seeing such frequent acts of violence against the Black community as a Black woman. Reaching thousands with her message, even trending on Twitter, Osaka became an overnight figure of support for Black Lives Matter. As a mixed-race person of African and Japanese descent, her notoriety in Black and Asian communities spurred discussion around her Japanese identity, the politicization of sports, and anti-Blackness in Japan. As a physical embodiment of Afro-Asian solidarity, Naomi Osaka's outspoken support of BLM led to public social media debate among Japanese users about Black Lives Matter's relevance to Japan.

While protests drew large numbers of supporters, even in seemingly racially homogenous countries such as Japan, many BLM activists voiced their disappointment in the lack of agency countries outside the U.S. displayed to address its' own race and discrimination issues.⁹⁶ In a Vice article interviewing Black BLM protesters in Osaka, many shared a disappointment that many Japanese failed to address their role in upholding white supremacy. Vice interviewee identified as Sophie suggested that many Japanese people felt as though “[BLM] was generally viewed as a foreign problem, not relevant in a place where many buy into what social scientists have called the homogeneity myth, or the belief that there isn't much diversity to begin with in Japan.”⁹⁷ The notion of homogeneity in Japan is not a new issue. Many scholars have noted that this misguided assertion erases Zainichi Koreans, Ainu, and other minority populations in Japan. To refute these resurgent homogeneity claims in the wake of conversations around discrimination in Japan, the Mainichi Japanese newspaper released an article entitled, 日常にひそむヘイト 「日本に差別はない」は本当か (translating to survey results show “there is no discrimination” is not true). This article details a year-long survey organized by the Korean of

⁹⁶ Van Der List, Bobbie. "Why the Black Lives Matter Movement Fell Flat in Japan." *VICE*. 13 Jan. 2021. Web.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* paragraph 1

1,030 Zainichi Korean students and found that they overwhelmingly experience racial discrimination in schools and part-time jobs.⁹⁸ While the survey's outcome did not surprise many, its timeliness spoke to the urgency of conversations in Japan about discrimination.

In the wake of these conversations, many scholars have also been vocal in Japanese print media to explain the origins and history of Black Lives Matter and the Black experiences more broadly to the Japanese public. In an interview with *American Political and Social History* Professor Yoshiyuki Kido, he offered a historical analysis of the Black experience dated back to the Civil war, to contextualize the term “systemic racism” for Japanese readers.⁹⁹ While there are many vocal critics in Japan of the BLM movement, their critiques lie in a lack of understanding of the Black experience and a historical complex understanding of race in Japan. Dating back to the 1920s, and echoing this point, scholars Tajima and Thorton argue that:

“For many Japanese, the narrative that they were the champion of non-White races was indeed attractive, but actually one-sided, an ‘unrequited love’ idealized by many Black intellectuals but never widely supported by Japanese elites. Indeed, the evidence suggests that Japanese elites used this narrative not to establish non-White solidarity, but to distinguish themselves from non-Western nations/cultures, as close(r) to the Western powers they wished to emulate. The notion that Japan had a special rapport with other ‘colored’ people was part of a strategy to claim a status as ‘honorary Whites’ and a special place for Japan in the international racial hierarchy.

The history of Japan’s proximity to whiteness further contextualizes many critics distancing from the notion of shared experiences with white supremacy. Further complicating Japan’s perception of race lies in its own history in colonialism. The age of Black Lives Matter, I argue, sets out to reveal how white supremacy presents itself and gives space for those to explore the long process

⁹⁸ 日常にひそむヘイト 「日本に差別はない」は本当か (translating to survey results show “there is no discrimination” is not true), *The Mainichi*, February 2021. As cited in the *Mainichi* (Feb.2021)

⁹⁹ (今さら聞けない世界) 黒人差別なぜ今も? 南北戦争の「戦後」に苦悩する米国 (Translation: A world that can't be heard?) Why is there still Black discrimination? The United States suffers from the "postwar" of the Civil War

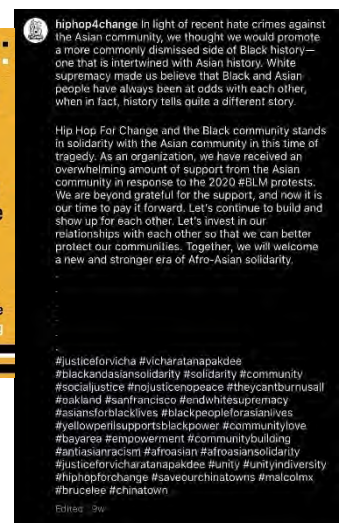
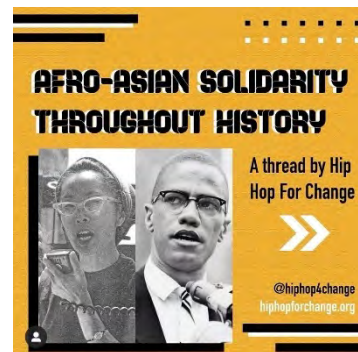
of learning and unlearning these ideologies. It is important to note that, in this paper, the interpretations and assertions of the platforms and goals of the Black Lives Matter movement are not drawn from official Black Lives Matter organizations, but rather a culmination of narratives from Black activists who have proclaimed themselves or been named by others as BLM activists. The BLM organization is a decentralized political and social movement that often protests against police brutality and anti-Black racism but is also used as an umbrella term for anti-racist activism more broadly, especially for Black activists. For Japan, given these complex histories, coupled with the nuance that BLM movement encapsulates, it will be challenging also to push forth the Afro-Asian solidarity lens of this movement as well. Be that as it may, conversations in Japan on the discussion of race and discrimination are at all-time highs, giving way for the trajectory of Afro-Asian solidarity to take its form in Japan through scholars, activists, and engaged citizens to join in the freedom struggle.

Social Media Activism in Black Lives Matter

As seen through the Black Lives matter movement, digital forms of activism are the future of political activism. Sparked from the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin in July 2013, the #blacklivesmatter movement reached millions of users of Instagram and Twitter in response. In this example of the power of social media activism, this chapter details the trajectory of Afro-Asian Solidarity and its radical potential to reach historic heights through social media activism. While the Black Lives matter movement operates in a vast network of understandings to various people, the way in which the #blacklivesmatter movement operates within the social media activism framework is unique. In what scholar Guobin Yang calls “hashtag activism, there are “large numbers of postings appear on social

media under a common hashtagged word, phrase, or sentence with a social or political claim.”¹⁰⁰ While hashtags are one method of organizing social media activism, recent forms of social media activism have set out to create infographics that can be shared on any user's personal pages, or “Instagram stories.” This particular level of engagement allows for social media activism to reach beyond its own followers and reach audiences all over the world through reposts and “Instagram story” highlights.

Grassroots organization hiphopforchange, for instance, was utilized its connections as a Black civil rights organization to reach a broader audience through social media. In the wake of the March 2021 anti-Asian hate crimes, in solidarity with the #stopasianhate social media movement, and as a Black grassroots organization, hiphopforchange created an infographic of the history of Afro-Asian Solidarity throughout history.

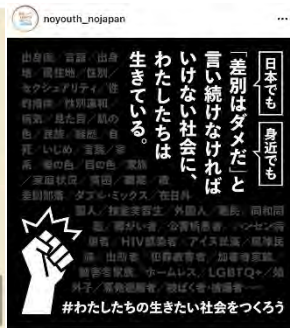


Likewise, many grassroots Japanese organizations on the social media application Instagram @her.stand, @noyouth_nojapan, and @blossomtheproject have used their platforms and global outreach to translate the anti-racist messages of BLM activists and essential histories of Afro-Asian solidarity to their Japanese audience. Through the use of Instagram, many grassroots organizations have reached a much broader audience and assist in the education of issues around race to its Japanese audience through info-graphics.

¹⁰⁰ Yang, G. “Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter. *Media and Communication*, 4 (4), 13-17. (2016)



her.stand 今の時代はnon racism は通用しない。「anti racism」のスタンスも持つべきだ
#ブラックライブスマター
June 5, 2020 · See Translation
Figure 4 Source: @her.stand Instagram. Jun 5, 2020



noyouth_nojapan ... noyouth_nojapan アメリカで起きてることは、「黒人」対「白人」という差別の張り合い。
「差別する人」と「差別を許さない人」との闘争です。
そして「差別する人」と「差別を許さない人」との闘争は、日本やわたしたちの身近な社会にだって、現在進行形の闘争です。「自分は差別してない」「自分の周りに差別はない」と思ってるかもしれない。
でも自分が多数派のとき、差別に差別は見えづらくなる。そんなとき、無意識に差別に加担してしまっているかも。自分を守られているし、気づかないし、安全だから。「自分は差別してないからいい」と、「周りに差別はある」んです。
今回前線に参戦した人や犠牲者が差別されてきたとか、今これらの差別に声を挙げよう、と言いたいわけではありません。
差別の歴史があることや、特定の場面で差別が起きてきた、これからは起こる可能性がある。
そのことと多くの人々が気づくことが、「変化」をつくるにつながらると、わたしには思っています。
今のムーブメントはいつか終わる。だけど考えることをやめてはいけない。
これは対岸の火事じゃない。わたしたちの意識だ。差別に声をあげ、「差別はダメだ」と言い続けよう。
#黒人の命も大切は#黒人の命は大切は#黒人の命は大切は#大切は
#noyouth_nojapan #peacefulprotest
View all 42 comments
June 4, 2020 · See Translation
Figure 5 Source: @noyouth_nojapan. Instagram. June 4, 2020



blossomtheproject ... blossomtheproject All Lives Matter という表現はアメリカでは人種差別反対運動に反対している白人の方、黒人への差別が存在しないと勘違いしている方がよく使っている言葉です。アメリカでのニュアンスと日本のニュアンスが違います。アメリカでAll Lives Matterという言葉を使うとあなたは黒人差別なんて存在しないと思われちゃいます。日本人の方々に間違っ使用して欲しかったのでこちらの投稿を載せました！
View all 109 comments
June 4, 2020 · See Translation
(Figure 6) Source: @Blossomproject. Instagram. June 4, 2020

This particular approach to transnational social media activism rests at the core of the radical potential of Afro-Asian solidarity. Never before were average Japanese citizens able to have access to information about the plight of other communities in such a way. As anti-racist organizations continue to use their social media platforms to convey vital information about the continued freedom struggle, it will be more important than ever for social media sites to address issues with disinformation and misinformation. While the trajectory of Afro-Asian solidarity has the capacity to reach new heights of engagement, upon this quest of freedom struggle, there will always be hurdles that must be overcome to reach new historic achievements. All anti-racist movements become stronger with the use of cross-community alliances. Through social media, these alliances have the capacity to be strong and more robust than ever before.

Narrative of a Black Scholar in East Asian Studies: The future of the study of Afro-Asian Solidarity

In Asian Studies, attention to the influence of and relationship to the African Diaspora is often overlooked, particularly in modern Japanese literature. As a scholar of Asian studies who is African American, however, it is frustrating that this area of focus in studying Asian history culture and society is so often dismissed as a core element in understanding Asia and the world. While this paper centers around Afro-Asian solidarity, I feel it is important also to highlight the radical potential of the *study* of Afro-Asian solidarity. Black Lives Matter forced the world to take a harsh look at the ways that we all devalue Black life. This, too, is relevant in Asian studies. To suggest that research that focuses on Black life in the formation of Asian society is not only wholly incorrect, it perpetuates the notion that Blackness is incapable of having profound impacts in the history of the world.

In a panel discussion on “Asian Studies and Black Lives Matter,” Black Japan studies scholar William H. Bridges IV argues that studies of modern Japan cannot be adequately understood without addressing questions by Black and critical race studies.¹⁰¹ This body of work into Afro-Asian solidarity is foundational to Japanese studies, as the paradigm of Asian Studies vis-à-vis Japan was “born in the wake of America’s forced opening of Japan and its imperial project.”¹⁰² Moreover, to best understand the social construction of “race” and minorities in Japan requires analysis into how Blackness is understood in Japan as a direct influence of western ideations of racial hierarchy, othering, and discrimination. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Black Lives Matter is a decentralized social movement with no fixed definition,

¹⁰¹ "Asian Studies and Black Lives Matter." Panel Discussion. *Association for Asian Studies*. 03 Dec. 2020.

¹⁰² Ibid. William H. Bridges IV in Asian Studies and Black Lives Matter Panel

platform, or application. However, I argue, BLM also led to calls for greater diversity and equity in the academy. As a research area affixed within this historical place of privilege, Asian studies, too, has its work cut out in this area.

In the spirit of the calls for allyship across the globe from Black activists, coupled with the resurgence in xenophobic violence against Asians and Asian Americans and renewed interest in the history of Afro-Asian solidarity, scholarship on the history and impact of African and Asian communities is more timely than efforts. Moreover, scholarship that reflects on the history of Afro-Asian Solidarity and offers a forward-looking analysis into the current state of the global fight against white supremacy is needed more than ever. Through this lens, Black Lives Matter offers a timely reflection within every inch of our societies to explore what we can do better. The age of Black Lives Matter is as much a moment of reflection, as action. This future of Afro-Asian solidarity rests upon our willing to take this action in activism, research, and daily lives.

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