

Introduction

WITH ITS MAGNIFICENT HARBOR, steep peaks, and verdant surrounding islands, Hong Kong is one of the world's most physically imposing cities. The territory's 423 square kilometer area is divided into four areas: Kowloon, the New Territories, Outlying Islands, and the center of commerce: Hong Kong Island. This Crown Colony was punctuated by Victoria Peak, thirteen hundred feet above sea level, which provided an astonishingly panoramic view of the city and outlying islands. But this beauty was rivaled by the splendid beaches of Repulse Bay Beach. Then there was the quaint fishing village of the Aberdeen district, where hundreds lived aboard junks and sampans.

The British gained a foothold here after the conclusion of the Opium War in 1842, then fortified their position by obtaining the New Territories in 1898. On the eve of the Japanese invasion there were about 1.7 million residents in Hong Kong, including fourteen thousand Europeans and seventy-five hundred Indians—the rest were overwhelmingly Chinese. But it was the Europeans who basked in opulence while the Chinese were consigned to a desperate, racially blighted plight not unlike that endured by Negroes in the U.S. South. However, when the war arrived in December 1941, Japan started pouring molten gold down the throat of the fabulously rich Croesus that was "British China," choking it on its ill-gotten wealth.

Though Singapore, hundreds of miles to the south, was viewed as the most strategically sited outpost of the Empire, others viewed Hong Kong as possessing more potential—particularly as a gateway into the fabled China market. This market captivated the city of London with its dreamy prospect of selling billions of matches and socks.¹ Hong Kong, the "Pearl of the Orient," was also a center of international intrigue and espionage. Hong Kong was no paragon of democracy either,

because the Chinese had no say in whether they wanted to be ruled from London.

Hong Kong was also a critically important trade entrepot. Even today, Hong Kong with a population of about 7 million has hefty foreign reserves of about \$100 billion. By comparison, Brazil, Turkey, Russia, South Africa, and Greece combined did not reach this total—by far—though their combined populations were about fifty times larger than that of Hong Kong.² It is, according to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, “one of the wealthiest places on earth,” but now—as in the prewar era—it “suffers from one of the world’s biggest economic gaps—a ticket . . . to economic and social instability.”³ And on the eve of the invasion by Japan, this instability was exacerbated by a gaping racial inequality in which tens of thousands of Chinese dwelled in miserable penury while Europeans luxuriated.

Perhaps this is why the Japanese seizure of Hong Kong in December 1941—about a century after the seizure by Britain—and their assault on the Empire in Asia was greeted as a combination of apocalypse and Judgment Day. As one commentator put it, “the psychological damage was even greater than the military defeat.” Specifically, the capture of Singapore was “the greatest defeat an Asian army had inflicted on the Europeans since the bearded horsemen of Genghis Khan had swept from the east to the gates of Vienna more than seven centuries before. . . . a door closed on centuries of white supremacy.” It was a “battle of East and West, coloured and white. . . . And in losing that battle they lost so much more as well. They lost their psychological superiority, their belief in their right to rule; and when they had lost that, there was little else left to lose.”⁴

As the war raged, Ian Morrison conceded that “the supremacy of the white man, and the special status which he claimed, were bound to beget a reaction towards him.” But now, he acknowledged reluctantly, “the privileged status of white man in the Far East is a thing of the past. It will not return . . . the white man will have to make his way and create a position for himself on his merits and quality alone. . . . not, as often hitherto, by virtue of the pigmentation of his skins and the warships of his country’s navy.”⁵ He was partially correct: by the end of the century—at least in the United States—the prewar era was referred to as the period of “merits and quality,” while efforts to undo the ravages of white supremacy were referred to as the era of an obsession with “pigmentation.”

Driving this racial hysteria was many Europeans' fear that the day of reckoning had arrived. Not only would they be severely punished for past racial transgressions but worse, a new racial order would be forcibly imposed—with them at the bottom. This angst was not alleviated by the knowledge that the defeat of the Japanese invaders rested heavily on the often narrow shoulders of Asians and Africans, some of whom were none too keen to rescue those who had persecuted them on racial grounds.

Japanese militarists played adroitly on the feelings of those bruised by the ravages of white supremacy. In their internment camps the “majority” of the guards were Korean and Formosan under Japanese command; in these camps what unfolded was thought to be a new racial order with the latter on top and the European internees at the bottom. Non-Japanese Asians were being instructed to view Europeans as “inferior, subjugated people.”⁶ In Washington’s “eyes, the worst Japanese war crime was the attempt to cripple the white man’s prestige by sowing the seeds of racial pride under the banner of Pan-Asianism.” The “International Military Tribunal for the Far East. . . . accused Japan of, among other things, ‘racial arrogance’ in challenging the stability of the status quo that existed under Western rule.”⁷ Placing the presumed beneficiaries of white supremacy in the bull’s-eye was not without a painfully direct effect. The “death rate” of “Hong Kong survivors,” that is, veterans of military internment camps, was, according to one account, “23% higher than that of veterans who had served in other theatres.”⁸

Ironically, Japan’s targeted racial policies had a strangely deracinating impact. Patrick Hardie was a Eurasian, born in Borneo in 1928. He grew up in Singapore where he recalled later a “house-to-house search for the white men” there after the Japanese takeover. His brother “looked very western,” meaning “white,” but when the Japanese forces arrived he changed his “racial” identity and “called himself a Malay.” Later they reported to the newly imposed Tokyo authorities at “Beach Road.” The “Japanese got two tables and said, ‘What is your father? English? Then you have to go to one side. Those [with] fathers who are Eurasians, they will go to one side.’” And “having white father[s], all these people were brought to Roxy Theatre in East Coast Road, Katong,” and were eventually interned. Patrick Hardie, on the other hand, who was not taken for “white” by the invaders, was not interned; instead he became a driver for them. London’s policies, which

had privileged those of “pure European descent,” in one swooping maneuver were reversed by Japan, with consequences that reverberated even after the war’s end.⁹

Given the shattering nature of Japan’s racial policies in the occupied territories, why is it that these policies are—or were—not better known? John Dower writes that “if one asks Americans today in what ways World War II was racist and atrocious, they will point overwhelmingly to the Nazi genocide of the Jews. When the war was being fought, however, the enemy perceived to be most atrocious by Americans was not the Germans but the Japanese and the racial issues that provoked greatest emotion among Americans were associated with the war in Asia. . . . Japan’s aggression stirred the deepest recesses of white [supremacy] and provoked a response bordering on the apocalyptic.”¹⁰

These words suggest that the Pacific War should have left a cavernous imprint on the consciousness of Euro-Americans, not to mention the British. But there was another factor looming that served to vitiate this possibility. James Belich, the leading scholar of the titanic wars that led to a stalemate between the British invaders and the indigenous people of New Zealand, argues that as a result of this humbling episode, the British, like a child awakening from a vivid nightmare, resorted to their “final safety net,” which was “to forget.”¹¹ The Japanese racial assault was greeted with a similar syndrome of amnesia.

This blind spot about Asia and race was not simply limited to Japan and the war. The prominent U.S. journalist, Theodore White, acknowledged in 1975 that he had consciously omitted from his “reporting in all the years” he had spent in Asia “the simple dynamics of race hatred. Our presence there was self-defeating because they hated all of us, with historic good reason,” he concluded in a thinly veiled reference to the racially marked colonialism endured by so many Asians. Even chief U.S. ally Chiang Kai-Shek, White asserts, “hated white men.” White too felt that only the largest U.S. minority group could understand: “Perhaps only black Americans can sense,” he averred, “that wild and helpless fury which the Asians felt at the presence of white men.”¹² This was the powerful gravitational pull of which Japan took advantage before and during the war.

The scholar Alexander Saxton is no doubt correct that “there were good reasons for supporting the Allied cause in the Second World War; yet it added little to understanding white racism in American cul-

ture."¹³ This is true, though the caveat might be added that it has added little to our understanding of racism in British culture either. Thus, because these policies are—and were—shrouded, fewer lessons could be drawn leading to deeper understanding of race and racism.

One reason why this wrenching wartime experience has not led to a crystalline comprehension is because as these events were unfolding, the London authorities chose to downplay them. When Japanese racial atrocities targeting Europeans and Euro-Americans were revealed, London noticed that “generally speaking . . . there has been a relative lack of Chinese interest in the British and American disclosures”; worse, it was noted forlornly, “it is also possible that the Chinese appreciate—and secretly sympathize with—the fact that one Japanese aim in perpetrating these atrocities was the humiliation of the white man, as part of the plan for his expulsion from East Asia.”¹⁴ In a “secret” memorandum from India, a British official cautioned that “publicity” about the “specific question of ill treatment of white captives should not be undertaken for the present, though a statement in general terms might be issued without reference to race of prisoners.” Hence, it was decided that “the point is to emphasise by every means Japanese barbarity towards other Asiatics, but not to bolster up [the] Japanese self-proclaimed role as defender of Asiatics by putting out stories of their barbarous treatment of Europeans.”¹⁵

Thus, in the heat of war the shoots of postwar racial policy and the forced retreat from white supremacy were already evident: a compelled assertion of equality between European and non-European peoples, and further, an assertion of “nonracialism,” denying even the relevance of a characteristic that heretofore had been proclaimed from on high.

The United States, in some ways more sensitive than the United Kingdom to such racial questions because of its tortured history of racial slavery and indigenous dispossession, went a step further. In mid-1942 the U.S. Joint Psychological Warfare Committee sent a “secret” proposal to their British allies, warning that “it is essential to avoid giving unwitting aid to the Japanese propaganda attempt to convert the Pacific war into a racialist, Pan-Asia war.” It was “advisable to institute a program of propaganda directed toward people in this country to lessen the strong racial prejudice existing in white Americans toward colored races, including the Negro. Such propaganda could not take the form of direct statements regarding this racial prejudice, but could be done indirectly by telling the accomplishments of colored races.” It was

also “essential to avoid reference to such terms of racial opprobrium as ‘little,’ ‘yellow,’ ‘slant-eyed,’ ‘natives,’ etc. Within limits of considerable care, it will be possible to meet Japanese anti-white propaganda with the utterances of American Negro leaders.”¹⁶

Again, one detects the compelled contours of postwar racial policy as the war was unfolding: an exquisite awareness of racial sensitivities, which would be derided years later as “political correctness,” straining to avoid giving offense to those formerly subjected to such noxious practices systematically; plus, pushing “American Negro leaders” forward, especially on the global stage, so as to deflect concerns about Jim Crow.¹⁷

The Australians were instructed sternly in “Political War Directives,” coded as “Most Secret,” to “avoid especially anything that can be construed as an assumption of racial superiority.” The only divergence deemed suitable for deployment was “using German racial doctrine as a Nazi-Japanese irritant,” that is, “the fact that Germans consider themselves superior to all other nations, considering [Japanese] as fit only to slave for Germany.” Turning to Vietnam, it was reported with sobriety that “Annamites have seen the people of the yellow race, the Japanese, show themselves masters of organisation and display at least temporary superiority over Europeans” and thus “it is unsafe to assume . . . a return to complete French control after the war. . . .” Thus Canberra, which had a state-sanctioned policy of racial superiority, was obligated to make at least a rhetorical retreat from these practices.¹⁸

But this was a retreat through a minefield. British officials, for example, knew that “it is a tricky business to tell [Japanese] that Hitler despises the yellow races; they might answer, ‘the only person we [hear] this absurd insult from is *you*.’”¹⁹

Yet nations that had turned white supremacy into a blunt system were often perplexed by the nuances of racial and ethnic maneuvering. In mid-1942, officials of Britain’s Ministry of Information met as the war seemed to be going quite well for Tokyo. “The question was raised whether” they “could make use of the pronouncement by the Japanese that in Malaya and in Thailand they proposed to oust the Chinese from their important trading position for the alleged purpose of giving the Malays a greater share in the country’s economic life.” Yet, it was noted sadly, “the argument is a double edged weapon.” In short, London ran the risk of driving more Malays—in Malaya and the populous Dutch East Indies—straight into the arms of the welcoming Japanese if they

publicized Tokyo's demarche.²⁰ Years of an enforced white supremacy were being entangled in the mesh of seeking to fight a war purportedly for freedom and democracy.

There are other reasons why the racial policies of this horrendous war are not better known. For various reasons, the question of race in the Asia-Pacific region has been obscured intentionally. As the twentieth century dawned and the war in the Philippines gripped the feverish imaginations of many in Washington, the U.S. military in Hawaii "sought to avoid racial conflicts: one general order explicitly stated 'such delicate subjects as . . . the race question, etc., will not be discussed at all except among ourselves and officially.'" There was a decided fear among many officers "who believed, quite as sweepingly, that 'there was a natural bond between the rural Filipinos and the American Negro'" troops and a robust ventilation of the "race question" could only convince these two groups of their mutual hostility toward white supremacy.²¹ A corollary to this reticence was the report that during the Pacific War London was "reluctant to initiate an anti-German campaign among West Africans because officials calculated that such propaganda might encourage a revolt against white rule as such. 'Having been encouraged to hate one branch of the white race, they may extend the feeling to others,' warned one memorandum."²²

Washington, and especially London, faced tremendous constraints in coping with Japan's "race war." At that desperate moment they had to distinguish themselves not only from Japan's racial policies—but also had to distance themselves from their own racial practices. London had to proclaim the exalted aims of democracy of the Atlantic Charter, while seeking to deny democracy to their Asian and African colonies. The British Empire especially was flummoxed by the turn that race took during the war. One approach adopted was an eerie silence about what was going on. Even in the Middle East, it was decided that though "the Palestine question raises great attention . . . one should discuss as little as possible sensitive points like colour" or "racial characteristics."²³

Consequently, given this orchestrated silence, unearthing the impact of the race war on the British Empire is not easy. Complicating this conundrum is the fact that even before the war erupted, "It is striking how little racist thinking was questioned before the Second World War. Even critical critics of imperialism were reluctant to criticize the racist justification for national expansion."²⁴ Back then, "few Britons of any

class were concerned with the conditions of the people ruled by England. . . . School textbooks barely mentioned the colonies. Those works that did predictably described the colonies in paternalistic and racist terms, as did most popular literature."²⁵ Even in the early postwar era, "it would be vain to search through the debates of the House of Commons in recent years for any general debate on the problems of the British Empire as a whole or the impact of these problems. . . . In the old days the annual India debate used to be guaranteed to empty the House."²⁶ Though Japan imposed a brutally racial policy on Europeans interned in Hong Kong, few of the flood of memoirs that emerged from this catastrophic experience even raised this topic, as if it were too tormenting—or dangerous—to recall.²⁷

It was a momentous occasion in 1853 when Commodore Matthew C. Perry waded on shore in Japan, ending more than two centuries of self-imposed isolation. At this auspicious moment, he chose to march between two orderlies, "both tall and stalwart Negroes." Though he represented a nation that exalted African slavery, and while docked in Hong Kong had sanctioned a racially insensitive performance of "Ethiopian Minstrels" amid "roars of laughter," for whatever reason "he wished citizens of color to take part" during this epoch-rendering instant. As a precursor of a tendency that was to emerge full-blown in coming decades, the Japanese during this landing "were more interested in the Negroes," the "first they had ever seen."²⁸

What motivated Perry? This remains unclear. Perhaps he wished to impress the Japanese with the realization that they too could become enslaved, not unlike "stalwart" Negroes in the Americas. Or perhaps they could simply be subjugated, like those who resided in Hong Kong and India. Whatever the case, what ensued was one of the more extraordinary developments in human history: the Meiji Restoration, the creation of an advanced society by Asians in a blunt refutation of the predicates of white supremacy. As the scholar Peter Duus put it, the Japanese "had transformed themselves into a modern nation mainly out of fear"—fear that they too could be enslaved or colonized. According to Duus, this also helped to induce among many Japanese a sincere desire to overthrow white supremacy. This "would be on a par with, but on a grander scale than either the French Revolution, which emancipated the 'common people' or the Russian Revolution which

emancipated the 'working class.' It would be no less than a 'revolution for mankind,'" the liberation of those who were not "white."²⁹

Self-defense may have motivated this "sincere desire," for it was evident that Britain was cutting a prodigious swath through Africa and Asia because of the widespread use of African and Asian troops. Undermining white supremacy and alleviating the plight of the dispossessed might help to ease the increasing pressure on Japan itself. The British army that attacked Hong Kong in May 1842 was comprised predominantly of Indians. Throughout the nineteenth century the Indian army was sent on numerous occasions to fight for British interests in campaigns in China, Egypt, and elsewhere. Just as it was the Indian market that accounted for 20 percent of British exports by the 1880s and propelled the island nation to wealth, so it was the Indian army and its huge reserve force that allowed London to confront the huge conscript armies of continental states like Germany, France, and Russia. Lord Curzon was no doubt correct when he said, "As long as we rule India, we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it we shall drop straightaway [to] a third rate power."³⁰ Strikingly, Indians—not only on the subcontinent but throughout Asia, notably in Hong Kong—were some of Japan's closest allies during the war.

Japan's fear of possible servitude unless the nation was transformed drastically was heightened by the fact that the British often deployed the ultimate epithet—"Nigger"—not only against Africans but against Asians as well.³¹ Indeed, the repetitive pattern in which this quintessential U.S. epithet was used in Asia, along with the equation of Asians themselves with simians—a comparison once thought to be reserved for Africans—points to the toxic unity of a white supremacy that spanned the Pacific.

Hence, the popular African American musician Buck Clayton was moved when on arriving in Shanghai in the 1930s he saw "four rickshaws coming down the street with some white American marines in them. The next thing I heard was the white guys saying, 'There they are. Niggers, niggers, niggers!' And before long one of them threw a brick that they had piled up in rickshaws." These Euro-Americans obviously saw parallels between Chinese and Negroes. So did Clayton. Illustrating the essential unity between and among victims of white supremacy, he joined in the fray alongside the Chinese targets of these epithets and against his erstwhile American compatriots. "Soon fists were flying

everywhere," and one of his opponents had the audacity to dislodge "my brand new Stetson hat." Enraged, Clayton "grabbed this cat and put a headlock on him and proceeded to run his head into a brick wall" and "just as a last gesture I kicked him in the butt as he ran." When "it was all over the Chinese onlookers treated us like we had done something that they had always wanted to do and followed us all the way home cheering us like a winning football team. I guess they figured it was something that should have been done a long time before, because I remember one time I saw a marine fall off a bicycle and he promptly got up, went over to a Chinese coolie and kicked him in the ass and then got back on his bicycle and rode on off."³² This anecdote illuminates simultaneously how some people of European descent treated both blacks and Chinese contemptuously and how this disdain could drive the latter two groups together. Above all, the concept of white supremacy was tailor-made to be exploited by Tokyo.

Yet this was a hard lesson for some to learn. Lewis Bush was interned in Hong Kong where he received a bitter taste of subordination. But his experience did not prevent him from participating in what he termed "nigger minstrels" while interned. He made no connection between these performances and other incidents, for example, when a Japanese soldier came to "our room" to "slap and kick us around, stand us to attention and then harangue us on the iniquities of the American and British. 'You win war,'" the soldier screamed, "'and you make all Japanese like black slaves!'"³³

Many Europeans and Euro-Americans routinely used the term "monkey"—often deployed against those of African descent—to describe the Japanese.³⁴ Benjamin Proulx, captive in wartime Hong Kong, referred to the Japanese who imprisoned him as the "cartoon personification of monkey-Japanese. . . . Their bodies were stubby, like apes, but strong."³⁵ The South African O. D. Gallagher—who had reason to be familiar with racial invective—referred to the Japanese as "apes in uniform" and "slant-eyed flying apes called Japanese."³⁶ The leading U.S. military figure in wartime China, Joseph Stilwell, not only used the term "nigger" but also "wops" and "gooks"—and "chinks" to refer to the Chinese who accompanied him in the trenches.³⁷ Years after the war had concluded, this despicable practice was still going strong, as the well-respected historian of Hong Kong, Alan Birch, made an indelicate colloquial reference to "another nigger in the woodpile."³⁸ In short, many of those of European descent tended to lump together in an all-

embracing racism those of non-European descent. This in turn was a generous donation to Tokyo's effort to band together the planet's majority in an all-embracing crusade against white supremacy.

The first statesman to have used the term "yellow peril" publicly was reportedly Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm. He was inspired by the Australian writer, Charles Pearson, whose work had an electrifying impact on the Pan-European world: "It is doubtful that any book with an Australian inspiration has ever had a greater impact among intellectuals in Britain or the United States." The popular *Fu Manchu* series, the subject of numerous U.S. and British films from the 1920s forward, spoke of the alleged Asian need to "control the world and eliminate the white race."³⁹ The Kaiser reflected this alarm in 1895 when he "commissioned an artist to draw an allegorical picture depicting the European powers called together by the Archangel Michael, and united in resisting Buddhism, heathenism and barbarism." This fear and loathing among those of European descent was a product of apprehension not only of the potential power of China but the actual and growing power of Japan. They feared an abrupt reversal of fortunes in which the racialized colonization that Europeans had pioneered might be turned against them.

For its part, in the early twentieth century the Japanese elite "knew that, deep in its collective heart, the white race feared domination by the yellow race. . . . It was plain that should Japan and China combine to fight Russia, fear of the 'yellow peril' would become so intense that Germany, France and other countries would most probably intervene." In turn, Theodore Roosevelt felt that "at bottom" Japan tended to "lump Russians, English, Americans, Germans, all of us, simply as white devils inferior to themselves. . . . They include all white men as being people who, as a whole, they dislike and whose past arrogance they resent." As the new century dawned, racial nervousness was surging, with Tokyo near the heart of this troublesome matter.⁴⁰

Bruce Cumings, a scholar of Korea, has written that "in the first decade of [the twentieth] century Japan was flypaper for many Asian progressives,"⁴¹ attracting them in droves as an antipode to European colonialism. The Chinese were also attracted, though China's justifiable post-World War II anger at Tokyo and related reasons has made this a difficult point to raise. One observer has uncovered close ties between the Japanese ultranationalist faction, the Black Dragon Society, and the Chinese hero lauded by Communists and nationalists alike:

Sun Yat-Sen. The BDS “aimed at driving all Europeans and Americans out of Asia” and so did Sun. Simultaneously, after the Bolshevik Revolution in European capitals there was a perception of a growing alliance between Tokyo, Moscow, and the Chinese leadership aimed at their common antagonists, principally London and Washington. When Tokyo and Moscow concluded a treaty in 1925, when others were seeking to isolate the Bolsheviks, the perception of an alliance was strengthened.⁴² As Soviet and Japanese influence rose among Sun’s forces, the Chinese leader’s “speeches became increasingly anti-western. . . . [His] concept of nationality came to imply racial struggle in which China would rid herself of the unequal treaties, extra-territoriality and foreign controls on her economy, while the People’s Livelihood implied a socialist state.”⁴³

Even before the rise of Sun, the Empress Dowager “entered into a pact with the Boxers giving them a free hand against foreign white residents in the country and their Chinese sympathizers such as all Christians were presumed to be.”⁴⁴ As for Chiang Kai-Shek, he attended the “Shinbo Gykyo (Preparatory Military Academy) in Tokyo; he remained in Japan four years. . . . As a part of his study he served with the 13th Field Artillery (Takada), Regiment of the Imperial Army,” where he gained a “working insight into the Japanese language, mentality and strength.”⁴⁵ As late as the winter of 1940–41, “it was widely rumored that secret meetings were being held there between Japanese agents and representatives of Chiang kai-shek.”⁴⁶ Chiang was not unique. Amy Li Chong Yuet-ming, the late wife of contemporary Hong Kong’s preeminent billionaire, Li Ka-shing, was “fluent” in Japanese.⁴⁷ Ironically, the British may have boosted Japan’s efforts by vigorously persecuting the most passionate anti-Tokyo forces: the Chinese Communist Party.⁴⁸

Hence, when the Japanese invaded Hong Kong in 1941, some Chinese willingly and eagerly joined the war against the British crown. Quickly there emerged a “sensational revelation,” a “plan to massacre the entire European community of the colony.” “Zero hour was to have been A.M. on December 13, 1941.” Chinese triads, or brotherhoods widely viewed as organized crime formations, were to spearhead this scheme. “Leaders of the underworld were gathered together and a meeting was held between them and police officials at the Cecil Hotel.” After hours of vigorous debate—and perhaps the payment of a sizable bribe—the authorities “came to terms with the underworld.”⁴⁹

Of course, Sun himself was a “Triad official of long standing”; “overseas Triad branches were fully utilised for the dissemination of Republican propaganda.” However, by the war’s advent, Chinese triads were split between pro-Chiang, neutral, and pro-Japan formations. The latter worked closely with the invaders and profited handsomely during the occupation.⁵⁰

But the triads were not alone. Tokyo “had little difficulty in successfully recruiting numerous Chinese collaborators or traitors to fill the ranks of the puppet governments” in China. The invaders were “bolstered by the influx of troops from former warlord armies, Nanking’s puppet army swelled to nearly 600,000 men.” There was “little wonder that the [Communists] charged the KMT [nationalists] and Chiang with being united with the enemy or puppet troops.” Thus, the story of Wang Ching-wei, the chief collaborator with Tokyo, “should not be written off lightly as the tale of a traitor to China.”⁵¹

Inevitably, the racialized colonialism forcibly imposed in “British China” played a major role in compelling some Chinese to become “traitors” to an Empire that held no allegiance to them. Similar dynamics no doubt compelled a number of Japanese Americans to cross a similar line. Japanese Americans who fought on behalf of the nation that interned their relatives have received justifiable attention. Less attention has been paid to an untold number—outraged by the illogic of white supremacy—who crossed the Pacific and aligned themselves with Tokyo in the occupied territories. Even before Pearl Harbor there was an “extraordinarily high level of per capita contributions from” Issei in Hawaii to the Japanese war effort. Hanama Harold Tasaki, to cite one example, was born in Maui in 1913, studied at Oberlin College and worked in California. In 1936 he went to Japan and joined the military. Why? Among other reasons, he “had carried a residue of resentment, recalling discrimination against Hawaii’s Japanese. One memory remained vivid: at PTA meetings his mother and father had been snubbed by haoles [whites].”⁵² He was not alone.⁵³ Many Asian American expatriates, perhaps because they were seeking revenge for the racism they had endured in the United States, were viewed by European internees in Hong Kong as among the most vicious authorities they had encountered.⁵⁴

But then Tokyo surrendered and Hong Kong was liberated, only to return to British suzerainty where it was to remain until 1997. However,

the war had decimated the European colonists, as many were killed or died during internment. After August 1945 some had the wherewithal to repair to the more comfortable racial climates of South Africa, while still others fled the region virtually penniless after their wilting experience. Much of their property had been looted, either by the Japanese invaders or the Chinese. Their roles in the economy had been supplanted during the war by these two groups as well. So when the British fled and the Japanese were ousted, this created opportunities for the Chinese—which horrified many.

One gentleman wrote to the colonial authorities in 1947, “deploring the fact that a number of persons appear to have flourished under enemy occupation.” But the “difficulty of obtaining evidence and otherwise establishing the fact of ‘collaboration’ as the origin of improved fortunes, as distinct from other causes, [was] great.” Tseng Yu-Hao and Denis Victor were not deterred by such assertions when they wrote to the crown’s representative. Hong Kong was “accused” of being the “Paradise of Collaborators,” they sputtered. This was a “black mark” on the colony’s reputation. Hong Kong’s “leading collaborators are mostly proteges or even members of some high councils of which [Hong Kong’s] government has no control.” Many of these were “buyers of land in the occupation days” who were now “trying to influence the former sellers to sign the deeds a second time,” thus multiplying the indignity.⁵⁵ Their appeals went unheeded, not least because at that juncture London required the support or at least sympathy of the collaborators in their confrontation with the growing power of the Communist Party, just across the border on the mainland.

“Race war” is not an alien concept in the Empire or the United States. The rebellion in India in 1857 was viewed in these disquieting terms.⁵⁶ In South Africa Jan Smuts noted privately, “I have heard natives saying, ‘Why fight against Japan? We are oppressed by the whites and we shall not fare worse under the Japanese.’”

In 1943 as a veritable “race war” was raging in Asia Senator Elbert Thomas of Utah worried about providing aid to China since just as “Genghis Khan got into Europe. . . . we can loose in Asia forces so great that the world will be deluged,” that is, in aiding China’s resistance to Japan, the United States might wind up bolstering a bigger foe. Congressman Charles Eaton shared this concern. If the “Oriental peoples” were to “have independent and civilized nations,” then “eventually the

United States . . . might be pushed off the map." In fact, he advised, "there might be a racial war between the yellow man and the white man in the future [and] we may be liquidated."⁵⁷

Edwin Embree, head of the prestigious Rosenwald Fund, spoke in similarly portentous terms in 1944. Linking the "advancement of the Negroes during the last half-century" with "the general upsurge of colored peoples the world over," he warned that the "balance has shifted radically." The "white man of the Western World," Mr. Embree said, "was being offered the last chance for equal status in world society." He continued, "if the Western white man persists in trying to run the show, in exploiting the whole earth. . . non-western people may in surging rebellion, smash him into nonentity."⁵⁸

This fear was magnified by the possibility that such a conflict could spill over onto U.S. shores and that African Americans might ally with Tokyo in the "final solution" of the question of the "white man of the Western World." Also declaiming in 1944, W. E. B. Du Bois, who had sought to forestall "race war" on the east bank of the Pacific, felt compelled to invoke this macabre concept again. "The remainder of the Balkans and Russia," he announced, "have been [viewed] as Asiatic barbarism, aping civilization. As quasi-Asiatic, they have come in for the racial contempt poured upon the yellow peoples. This attitude greeted the Russian revolution and [the major powers] staged almost race war to uphold tottering capitalism, built on racial contempt." The "'yellow peril'" he warned, "as envisaged by the German Emperor William II [*sic*] has by no means passed from the subconscious reactions of Western Europe."⁵⁹

Can we dismiss Du Bois's prophetic words today? Are relations between Japan and China and Asia on the one hand and the Pan-European world on the other still tinged—or saturated—with race, to the point of "race war"? Let us hope not. Still, it is well to reexamine the most recent occasion when "race war" reigned, not least since this phenomenon seemed to work symbiotically with the prospect of "class war" in compelling concessions from otherwise obdurate elites.