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Suspicious Minds: A Study of the Attitudes that African Americans held regarding the Japanese During World War II

Timothy E. Buchanan

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Suspicious Minds: A Study of the Attitudes that African Americans held regarding the
Japanese During World War II

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

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Abstract

This thesis explores African American viewpoints about the Japanese, from just before the bombing of Pearl Harbor up to Allied occupation of Japan after the Second World War. The primary sources for this thesis include Black newspapers, the papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as oral histories from African American veterans. The goal of this research is to provide a historical view of the African American perspective, both in the United States and abroad. This thesis also aims to fill the gap in the scholarship on this topic by bringing different groups of African Americans into the discussion about the Japanese. The central finding of this thesis is that African Americans' viewpoints varied during this time. Before Pearl Harbor, some were supportive of the Japanese because they felt they had a common cause against white dominance. After Pearl Harbor and through the end of the war, most African Americans were supportive of the American war effort even as they faced discrimination in the military and Jim Crow at home. Through their service in the Pacific theatre and in the occupation army, many black service men came to see past white American hatred of Japanese and realized that the Japanese people had been deceived by their own government and they were not so different from themselves.

Keywords: African American, World War II, Japan, Japanese, Pacific Theater

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Lori Beth Stewart and my mother, thank you both for being so supportive. This thesis would not have happened if it was not for the both of you. I cannot thank you enough for your endless amounts of patience and willingness to help during the revisions.

Acknowledgments

Completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the endless support from family, friends, and university staff. Lori Beth Stewart has been my right hand throughout this process. Thank you, without the long days and nights you spent coaching and supporting me, this thesis would not have been possible. I would like to thank my family for all the help and encouragement along this journey. I would also like to thank Elvis Presley, for providing the soundtrack during the many hours of research. My family listened, participated, and encouraged me from start to finish. The efforts of thesis adviser Dr. Kevin Greene and his ability to understand that this was a passion from start to finish while understanding that the topic and focus of this thesis had to be specific and convey the importance of my work and understanding. A very special thank you to Dr. Westley Follett; for your constant encouragement I am forever grateful.

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List of Abbreviations

NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NP	Negro Press
WWII	World War II
ANP	Associated Negro Press
CANO	Colored Americans National Organization

Chapter 1: Introduction

By the end of the 1930s, Imperial Japan was becoming an inspiration for African Americans, as a dark-skinned, imperial nation that was prospering and gaining respect in a world dominated by white-led countries. However, African American viewpoints changed after the Japanese attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This thesis explores attitudes African Americans held concerning Japan's government and citizens at the onset of World War II. The temporal framework begins on December 7, 1941, and ends at the start of 1943. Hopefully, this research will extend work from previous scholars by including the perspectives of many African American communities across both geography and class. While previous research has primarily focused on black leaders and the military, this thesis hopes to provide a clearer picture of this time in history by examining oral histories and black newspapers of the age in the hope of shedding new light on this significant time in history.

This thesis draws upon previous scholarly research, African American periodicals, and oral histories of African Americans who held opinions on the Japanese and served in the United States military during and after the war. Previous research has focused on African American civic leaders, press, and soldiers, resulting in two main themes concerning African American reflections on the Japanese during the age. First, African Americans were committed to supporting the war effort in order to defeat the Axis powers.¹ Second, other members of the African American community believed that black Americans should not be involved in a white man's war for imperial domination. Nevertheless, African Americans did their part to defeat the

¹ Reginald Kearny, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1998), xxvi-xxix, 93-95

Axis powers, including taking wartime production jobs and joining armed service branches. This thesis will reveal the varying attitudes held by the African American community in the United States as they participated in America's war against the Japanese.

Historiographic Review

Researchers have noted that African Americans were patriotic and served their country during World War II as well as every other war fought by the United States. There were some within the African American community who did not support America's involvement in the war. Some studies have suggested that African Americans held the Japanese in high regard for their accomplishments as a non-white country that prospered during this period of western imperialism. Over time, however, this would change.²

George Lipsitz points out that there were two attitudes among African Americans following the bombing of Pearl Harbor: those who favored the United States, and those who favored the Japanese. The latter looked up to the Japanese. They admired a nation that formerly lacked respect on the world stage but had ultimately proven itself proficient in finances, agriculture, and war.³ These liberal-minded African Americans believed they could both fight for their country as well as solve the racial inequality within the United States. These African Americans chose to accept their draft notices and served in hopes of earning the respect of their white Americans. Using Japanese propaganda that compares America's Jim Crow racism to that of Nazi Germany, Lipsitz pulls together accounts from both sides to show how radical the racial divide between the U.S. and Japanese had become.⁴

² Ibid.

³ George Lipsitz. "Frantic to Join... *The Japanese Army: Black Soldiers and Civilians Confront the Asia-Pacific War.*" In *Perilous Memories: The Asia Pacific Wars* (Durnham: Duke University Press, 2001). 348-360, 365

⁴ Ibid.

The United States government began showing concern about the attitudes of African Americans following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, especially whether they sympathized with the Japanese. Reginald Kearny presents evidence that the U.S. demanded a statement of solidarity from African American leaders shortly after the bombing, ensuring there were no domestic threats that could interfere with the war efforts.⁵ One threat was Japanese spies were present among black communities during the war. They attempted to influence African Americans' opinions of the war. However, their efforts fell short, according to Kearny. An article in the *Plain Dealer*, a Kansas newspaper, documented a story of an African American woman doing her part for the war effort by helping to eliminate a known spy. The article explained how a woman named Mrs. Marshall was suspicious of a Japanese man who went by the name Mimo De Guzman. He had married into the black community and began approaching community leaders with Japanese promises of racial equality.⁶ The article told of De Guzman and his ability to rally an audience, but ultimately the African American leaders and community were able to convey their concerns to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and De Guzman was eventually arrested. The war effort at home was thus just as important as the fighting abroad. African American citizens succeeded in their war efforts while maintaining their distrust of the Japanese. African American civic leaders had warned their communities about Japanese lies and showed how self-serving the Japanese were. For Kearny, this article provided evidence of African American attitudes on the war against Japan.

⁵ Reginald Kearny, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1998), xxvi-xxix, 93-95

⁶ "FBI Breaks- Up Japanese Spy Ring In Cleveland, Ohio." Kansas City, KS.: *The Plaindealer*, June 19,1942 P.1,4.

Kearny shows that U.S. intelligence believed that African Americans were a targeted audience for the Japanese, on account of the racial inequalities that existed in the United States. The Japanese compared the racism that defined the black experience in America to what the United States had done to Japanese immigrants throughout the early twentieth century. Consequently, the U.S. government became concerned about feelings of inequality harbored by African Americans.⁷ This became a significant challenge as black Americans entered the war efforts as armed forces personnel.

African American service members were also scrutinized during the war. Ronald Takaki examined the hypocrisy of fighting for a government that failed to grant African Americans the rights promised them by the United States Constitution. Takaki used black periodicals and papers from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to uncover African Americans' ideas about this dichotomy. Specifically, he examined African Americans' "Double Victory Campaign," a politically charged media campaign demanding the opportunity to fight for their freedoms abroad and rights to be full citizens at home. Further, Takaki's study presents the myriad ways African American service members and their families were treated at various military installations as wartime mobilization began, such as the denial of access to public accommodations, including diners, hotels, and essential services. According to Takaki, this inequality was dividing African Americans while simultaneously entrenching segregation. Even so, the majority of African Americans in military service at the time were willing to do their part to defeat the Axis powers even in the face of inequality.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2000). 19-21, 24-33

Similarly, Douglas Bristol investigated African American soldiers during WWII. He noted that African American attitudes split about the war, given that a segregated military increased uneasiness within the black community. One white attorney, for example, feared African American soldiers would side with the Japanese, as they were both a darker race. Bristol suggested that armed and trained African Americans scared whites and increased their paranoia. Bristol used archival sources to show African Americans were treated within the southern military bases within the context of their attitudes concerning the Japanese Empire.⁹

Robert Jefferson looked at the 93rd infantry division to reveal that African American soldiers and their families were forced into menial jobs, provided substandard housing, and faced the same inequalities in military life as they had as civilians. Jefferson highlighted both the racial struggles these soldiers faced and the trepidations that African Americans held about fighting the war against Japan. The bombing of Pearl Harbor changed their opinions of the Japanese and gave the U.S. a significant reason to go to war.¹⁰

Lee Finkle, moreover, focused on the effects the African American press had on the black communities immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The initial reaction from the press was a cry for unity, but Finkle shows the response of the black community was much more complex. Many black media outlets called for the "Double V" program to ensure equality in the United States and victory against Axis powers. Though African Americans were volunteering for military service, they expressed knowledge that they were still treated as second-class citizens. Essentially, the black press revealed African American patriotism in the context of their support for the war effort but remained focused on the contradictions preventing the goal of equality.

⁹Bristol, Douglas Walter Jr., and Heather Marie. *Stur. Integrating the US Military. Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation since World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2017), 11-17, 21-24

¹⁰ Robert Jefferson, *Fighting for Hope: African American Troops of the 93rd Infantry Division in World War II and Postwar American* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 121-122, 129

Finkle argued that before Pearl Harbor African Americans saw the war as centered around white imperialists trying to overtake brown imperialists who were then a prospering nation-state. After Pearl Harbor, however, African Americans were devoted to fighting a war for freedom from imperialism.¹¹

Paul Alkebulan's work has provided the most recent research concerning the black press and African Americans' perceptions of the Japanese during the war. Alkebulan showed that despite the inequality faced by African Americans, the black press encouraged patriotic behavior among its readers and was avidly against the Japanese.¹² Similarly, John Dower argued that African Americans were against the Axis powers and saw the war as an opportunity for growth and equality within their own country. African American views of the Japanese reflected black attitudes towards southern whites and Jim Crow.¹³

Neil Wynn argued that African Americans initially wanted to fight for equality at home and wondered why they should fight for victories that left them living as "half American."¹⁴ Although African Americans did not want to fight a white man's war, Pearl Harbor shifted their focus to a need for the Double Victory program. When the U.S. entered the war, the fight for equality among African Americans did not end as they employed their military service to help promote their political efforts. The job opportunities resulting from war efforts were enough to

¹¹ Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1975) 201-215

¹² Paul Alkebulan, *The African American Press in World War II: Toward Victory at Home and Abroad* (Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2016) 8-9, 28-29

¹³ John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific Wars* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 176-178

¹⁴ Neil Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 45-47, 79

persuade African Americans to fight in the hope of obtaining greater equality. Wynn relied upon the black press and other sources to argue in favor of African Americans' evident patriotism.¹⁵

Political activist leaders Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois were influential voices within black communities. Du Bois and Garvey suggested that not only should African American soldiers remain sympathetic to Japanese ideas, but also that black leaders must connect the same pro-Japanese sentiments to the current black inequality within the United States.¹⁶ Essentially, for African American servicemen stationed in Hong Kong and British colonies, American white supremacy stoked their sympathy for Japanese imperialism in a manner that pushed African Americans further towards pro-Japan ideologies. Historian Gerald Horne examined the attitudes of these black servicemen who failed to consider the views of average blue-collared African Americans that were stateside. The focus of this work will be on African Americans within the U.S.¹⁷

Mark Gallicchio argued that African Americans viewed the Japanese in a favorable light before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Obtaining his information from letters and editorials in black newspapers, Gallicchio attempted to capture the experiences of average African Americans at home and abroad. African Americans abroad wanted nations that embraced white supremacy to change. However, after Pearl Harbor African Americans living in the United States were more concerned about the empires that threatened freedom and democracy, such as Japan.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Gerald Horne *Tokyo Bound: African Americans and Japan Confront White Supremacy*, *Souls* 3, No. 3, (2001), 25-26. Accessed October 3, 2017.

¹⁷ Gerald Horne, *Race War! White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire* (New York: University Press, 2004), X, 14, 43-48, 50-51,

¹⁸ Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan & China* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2-5, 106-111

Chapter Two: Reactions to the Bombing of Pearl Harbor

Reactions to the bombing of Pearl Harbor created a sense of urgency for African Americans to stand up for the defeat of Japan. Evidence shows that the combined effects of reactions to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the social injustices faced by African American citizens, and wartime patriotism resulted in different black attitudes towards the Japanese. African American newspapers, oral histories, and periodicals support the conclusion that African American attitudes changed after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Attitudes towards Japan developed into a more united front in support of the United States' war efforts. They eroded the admiration they once held for a non-white, imperialist power.

African American Response to Pearl Harbor

African Americans responded to the bombing of Pearl Harbor with continued support for the United States. Reactions were immediate. African American citizens came forward and began to express their feelings on the reprehensible acts committed by the Japanese on their homeland. Class distinctions among average African American citizens provide an interesting lens through which to view their take on the events. Reverend W.J. Faulkner of Nashville, Tennessee, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People (NAACP), gave his opinion on this event in an interview, expressing his belief that the nation had been divided too long. Faulkner suggested that the unexpected attack from the Japanese had threatened democracy in the United States and that inner conflicts at home had strained American unity. To him, if the United States was going to win the war, then the American people needed to stand as "one army of patriots" in defense of the country. Faulkner

understood the need for a real democratic United States to solidify the kind of national unity necessary to defeat the Japanese.¹⁹

Similarly, Ms. Fadie France, a secretary visiting Nashville, gave the same sentiments as Rev. Faulkner. Ms. France stated vehemently that her negative opinion of the Japanese centered on their devotion to aggression and obedience. She reiterated these feelings by using the Chinese as an example, primarily commenting on the horrific treatment of the Chinese at the hands of the Japanese during the Second Sino-Japanese War. To France, the Japanese's inhumane abuses of the Chinese from 1937-1939 stood as evidence of how Japan might treat African Americans should they invade the mainland. Ms. France's resentment of Japan for their actions against the U.S. simply reiterated her commitment to America's potential as both unlimited and unbounded.²⁰ Markena Watkins, a homemaker, weighed in on the terror of the Japanese attack.²¹ She, like both Faulkner and France, showed disdain for Japanese aggression but concluded that it would spark a fearless determination among Americans fighting for victory over Japan in the Pacific. An anonymous street pedestrian gave his heart-felt opinion on the war as well. To his mind, we should have remained isolationist, and he blames President Roosevelt's aggressive foreign policy for the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Better diplomacy, he argued, would have prevented "our" involvement in overseas affairs. Though the unknown person declared he would fight, he added that he would fight on "anybody's side."²² These interviews reflect black patriotism for the United States' war against Japan while revealing average African Americans' distaste for the Japanese. Many of these interviews viewed Japan as the enemy and were in support of defeating Japan after Pearl Harbor. Absent from these oral histories, though, were the

¹⁹ Faulkner

²⁰ Fadie France. "Man On The Street."

²¹ Mark Hannah Watkins. "Man On The Street."

²² Unknown, "Man On The Street." December 8, 1941.

struggles plaguing black communities during this period, including the lack of access to quality education, fair housing, and good jobs.²³

Percy Greene, editor for the *Jackson Advocate*, an African American newspaper out of Jackson, Mississippi, investigated the loyalty among African Americans concerning the attack on Pearl Harbor. Mr. Greene gave the consensus view that African Americans would fight no matter what color the enemy was, giving his opinion that the Japanese attack on the U.S. was unprovoked.²⁴ Greene believed African American communities shared this sentiment concerning the bombing of Pearl Harbor. His editorial in subsequent editions went as far as to quote a national magazine labeling the Japanese as “pure Aryans.”²⁵

African American thoughts on Japan stemmed from the fact that the Japanese were competing for world domination and imperial grandeur. The *Arkansas State Press* released an article days after the bombing pledging full support for President Roosevelt and the United States. The article gave the opinion that the Japanese were an ungrateful race that only looked out for themselves. African Americans, the piece concluded, had long been a dark-skinned race loyal to the U.S. Although taken from their homes and placed in internment camps in a manner reminiscent to Jim Crow racism, Japanese Americans were ridiculed by some African Americans after the bombing, despite having been long-established citizens of the United States.²⁶

In December of 1942, The *Kansas City Plaindealer* confirmed these same attitudes. The black newspaper pledged full support from the thirteen million African Americans in the U.S. for victory over Japan. Though there is mention of the injustices faced by African Americans in the article, such as lack of equal working and housing opportunities, it states that black citizens

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Percy Greene, “Japan and the United States at War.” Jackson, MS: *Jackson Advocate*, December 13, 1941. P. 8.

²⁵ Percy Greene, “News From the World at War.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, December 27, 1941. P. 8

²⁶ SNS, “Plight of the Worker.” Little Rock, AR.: *Arkansas State Press*, December 12, 1941. 6.

would do what they had always done as pioneers in the American experiment—defend their home.²⁷ The majority of African Americans were eager to support the United States in defeating the Axis powers in the same manner as the generations of African Americans before them. Less than two weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the National Negro Congress,²⁸ a “communist affiliated” group of African Americans whose goal was labor equality, sent a telegram to President Roosevelt pledging full backing of the black community in wartime efforts.²⁹ Roosevelt’s secretary simply replied, “thank you” and that “this patriotism was what drove the president.”³⁰ Roosevelt’s acknowledgment may not have been a formal endorsement of the Nation Negro Congress, but it stands as recognition of African American’s war efforts and patriotism.

African American journalists, civic leaders, and individuals within the black community expressed attitudes towards the Japanese in many ways. Dr. Malcom S. MacLean, president of Virginia’s Hampton University, a historically black college founded immediately after the Civil War, issued a pledge of support for the war against Japan. MacLean pointed to a loathing of Japan due to their actions against the U.S. at Pearl Harbor. In his telegraphed pledge, he assured President Roosevelt of full black assistance in the war, adding that the skilled hands and labor of the all-African American college were at his disposal. The pledge ran in the *Jackson Advocate* as well, expressing a desire to protect the U.S. from the imperialist ways then spreading across the globe. The call to action by MacLean was also a plea for unity on the home front.³¹ African Americans “were prepared” to fight in the same manner as they had been

²⁷ SNS, “We Are At War.” Kansas City, KS.: *The Plaindealer*, December 12, 1941. 4.

²⁸ Reginald Kearny, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1998), xxvi-xxix, 50-52

²⁹ Negro Congress, Little Rock, AR: *Arkansas State Press*, December 17, 1941. 5.

³⁰ SNS, “Negro’s Help Is Encouraging-FDR.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, December 27, 1941. P.2.

³¹ SNS, “Pledges All Out Support To War Effort.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, December 26, 1941. P.4.

fighting against white supremacy for years at home. Japan had betrayed the U.S. and, in so doing, provoked African American shock and anger. An article published in the *Negro Star*, an African American newspaper out of Wichita, Kansas, examined an artist colony's concerns about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Contributors to the article, like African American Actress Etta Moten, spoke of being electrified by the bombing, expressing that this was "our country" and that the attacks should drive citizens to rally and fight.³² Evidence suggests that African American celebrities, leaders, and average citizens were in agreement concerning the surprise attack that had been committed on U.S. soil.

The African American press printed pieces that were attractive to their audience. The primarily black audience consisted of readers that read both black and white publications. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, there were still issues of inequality plaguing the United States. These included discrimination, lack of housing, and access to quality jobs. Journalists in the black press wrote about these social injustices as well as the war abroad and provided coverage of opportunities for African American citizens in the U.S. Through these articles, journalists gauged the African American community regarding these issues. The evidence reveals African American patriotic loyalty to the United States but also emphasizes a need for improvements regarding race relations and equality.

Loyalty of the Black Press Questioned

Although African American newspapers were still concerned with issues of unequal housing, work opportunities, and the war effort in the U.S., the white press felt these issues should be

³² "Artists On West Coast Take War In Stride: No Exodus As War Some Breaks." Wichita, Kansas: *The Negro Star*, January 2, 1942. P.3

tabled until the war was over. In May of 1942, white columnist Westbrook Pegler, a syndicated journalist, accused the black press of printing anti-war propaganda while attempting to further the agenda for African American equality in the U.S.³³ The article met with challenges from the black press demanding proof of these claims. The African American press was eager to express its feelings on the war and the Japanese. Evidence points to the African American press using its loyalty as leverage in its fight for equality. Nevertheless, the majority of African Americans remained supportive and patriotic. The *Jackson Advocate* offered a rebuttal to Pegler's calling into question the loyalty of the black press. Accusations and defamation of the African American press and its character were becoming a trend. Percy Greene argued that the attitude of the African American press had merely pointed to the desire for a better place in America for African Americans. Greene stated the black press had been "agitating for greater opportunity for the Negro to work, fight, and die to preserve the American Way of Life."³⁴ Greene acknowledged that there needed to be improvements in racial equality if African Americans were to aid in the preservation of white America's way of life. If African Americans were working in factories and fighting overseas, they deserved the same opportunities that white Americans were granted.

Cliff Mackay, a columnist for the *Jackson Advocate*, provided a detailed and eloquent response to Pegler's unsubstantiated accusations. The charges by Pegler, in Mackay's opinion, were fruitless and unfounded. Mackay called into question Pegler's true intentions with the article, an unfounded attack on the promotion of the Double Victory campaign. After all, Pegler had questioned the black press' loyalty in connection to supporting wartime efforts. Mackay felt that Pegler was "slurring" the credibility of black journalists. Mackay went so far as to admit that

³³SNS, "Pegler Challenged To Prove Colored Press Subversive." Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, May 9,1942. 4

³⁴ Percy Greene, "Mr. Westbrook Pegler And The Negro Press." Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, May 9,1942. 8

he, just like other African American journalists, attended many of the same schools as white journalists.³⁵ The attack on the integrity of black journalists was a tactic used by Pegler to give doubts about their reporting while simultaneously sidestepping the real issues. Pegler was a rival journalist who was not a friend of the black press.

The black press supported the Allies defeating the Axis powers but were equally committed to continuing their fight for democracy. Pearl Buck, a white author from the *Jackson Advocate*, called for a solidification of democracy, arguing that social injustices in the U.S. were dividing unity at home. These prejudices, moreover, were the exact type of ammunition Japan needed to divide African Americans in the U.S. and their support of the war effort. Buck cites lynching, race riots, and lack of equality within the black community as examples of the painful injustices suffered by the African Americans at the hands of white supremacists in the very homeland they sought to defend. To Buck, “discrimination in the U.S. military, defense industry, trades unions, and all our social institutions are of the greatest aid today to our enemy, in Asia, Japan.”³⁶ Victory against the Japanese would not be a real victory so long as there were still issues of discrimination on the home front.³⁷

Social injustice was tarnishing the already strained relationship between minority races and the white community in the United States. Newspaper articles highlighted concerns about racial inequality within African American communities. However, these articles were not meant to convey a lack of loyalty nor sympathy for the Japanese. Instead, these messages were designed to feature the issues that affected morale among African American citizens. The January 1942 lynching of Cleo Wright in Sikeston, Missouri, affected African American morale

³⁵ Cliff MacKay, “Telling A Big Lie.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, May 9, 1942. 2.

³⁶ Pearl Buck, “Charges Race Bias U.S. Foe In East.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, February 21, 1942. 7.

³⁷ Ibid.

and attitudes about the war. Percy Greene stated that actions such as these produced uncertainty and fear among the African American population.³⁸ As a result, Japanese groups, like the organization Pacific Movement of the Eastern World, founded by Japanese agents in the U.S. in the 1930s, used lynching as evidence as to why the black community should support Japan in the war. Their attempts to weaken African American patriotism alarmed black leaders alerted to the stir of emotions brought on by the Japanese concerning these injustices. James Falls, a civic leader, expressed his opinion in a separate article via the *Arkansas State Press*. Falls stated that these “groups have been a nightmare to deal with for years,” and he stamps them as a scheme to “swindle poor negros.”³⁹

Kansas City’s *The Plaindealer* echoed Percy Greene’s arguments about how the riots in Louisiana and the lynching in Missouri had deterred the nation from recognizing what was important: unifying democracy while defeating Japan. The evidence of concern was that the Japanese were using the race riots in Louisiana and lynching in Missouri to divide the U.S. by attempting to manipulate African American attitudes about the war.⁴⁰

Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, president of the historically black Morehouse College, urged black readers to consider that the “Japanese have no particular love or interest in the darker peoples of the earth. Japan is for Japan,” ultimately suggesting that they would “depress” people of color, just as white supremacists had.⁴¹ Mays’ remarks, published in the *Jackson Advocate*, show that African American leaders took the opportunity to influence ideas about Japan within their community. Mays, moreover, vehemently argued that the “American Negro” should have

³⁸ Percy Greene, “The Sikeston Lynching and Negro Morale.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, February 7, 1942. 8.

³⁹ ANP, “Pro-Jap Propaganda Creates Stir Among Negro Leaders.” Little Rock, Arkansas.: *Arkansas State Press*, March 20, 1942. 1, 8.

⁴⁰ “Missourians To Stage a State-Wide Mass Meeting.” Kansas City, KS.: *The Plain Dealer*, February 6, 1942. 1.

⁴¹ “Dr. Mays Says Japanese No Friends of Negroes.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, May 23, 1942. 1.

no sympathy for Japan, that he should idolize the country he lives in, and fight for freedom from within.⁴² These statements reiterated African Americans' varying positions concerning their support for the war. The black press, it seems, was determined to present all sides.

A syndicated article in the *Jackson Advocate* illustrates this point. The article accused African American journalist Joseph Smyth of taking money from the Japanese during the war. This was seen as a sign of disloyalty to his country.⁴³ The Federal Bureau of Investigation found no evidence of wrongdoing by Joseph Smyth or his associates concerning their acceptance of money from the Japanese consulate.⁴⁴ However, the money was intended to produce Smyth's proposed book that intended to educate the public on the problems that black Americans faced. The act of accepting money from the enemy could be misleading. Ultimately, the evidence proves that the black press was loyal, but did not sacrifice its integrity to raise awareness of issues that plagued the African American community.

African American support for the war effort

The African American community rushed to the recruiting offices after radio programs conveyed the importance of volunteering for their country. Statements from Army recruiters, however, implied that service for African American men in the regular army would be quite limited. Naval recruiters gave the same sentiments. Both service branches said black soldiers and sailors could serve as "messmen and servants."⁴⁵ The consensus was to arm African Americans with brooms

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ SNS, "No Connection of Negro Press With Japs, Say FBI." Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, October 3, 1942. 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid..

⁴⁵ Emmett J. Smith, "The Right To Fight." Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, January 17, 1942. 8.

and dust mops, while white soldiers defended the home front. U.S. military policies were only interested in the African American community for menial labor.

Nevertheless, support for the war effort came from not only average citizens but also well-known members of the African American community. Joe Louis, a well-known boxer from this period, was vocal about his support for the war and was an inspiration to his African American fans and the black community. Louis spoke at “I Am An American Day,” shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Louis said that he was “anxious to go” to a large crowd. One hundred fifty thousand of the attendees were African American.⁴⁶ Private Louis was an advocate for the U.S. in WWII and placed his boxing skills at the forefront of his war efforts against the Japanese. Louis donated his boxing purse to the war relief in December of 1941, within weeks of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Private Louis was preparing for his fight outside of the ring. He gave a morale-raising statement to the public about how everyone had a job in this war effort.⁴⁷ In an article released in January of 1942, Private Louis released a statement during his military induction, admitting that “he was anxious to get a crack at those Japanese.”⁴⁸ Private Louis ensured that he was not above being involved in the efforts to defeat the Japanese during the war. Louis expressed his opinions in public forums, where both white and black citizens were present. To Louis, the war effort should be the responsibility of all citizens.⁴⁹

African Americans knew that fighting for the home front also meant fighting for the very freedoms of white America that they were not afforded. Even though relationships between black and whites were bleak, both answered the call to serve their country to defeat Japan. African American youth were exposed to this fight for freedom through the black press. The *Jackson*

⁴⁶ “Joe Louis Pleads For Justice At N.Y. Fight.” Greenville, MS.: *Taborian Star*, May 21,1942. 1.

⁴⁷ C, “Joe Louis Says Boxing Must Help Defense” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, December 27,1941. 1.

⁴⁸ SNS, “Louis Anxious To Get Crack At Japanese.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, January 17,1942. 6.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Advocate published excerpts of General Benjamin O. Davis Jr.'s presentation at an African American youth conference that reiterated the same attitudes. The only African American to obtain the rank of General during this period, Davis expressed that the black community was not asking for special accommodations.⁵⁰

Throughout 1942, the attitude of both African American servicemen abroad and citizens at home held an anti-Japanese tone. Support for war efforts continued to swell through the black press. The *Taborian Star*, published in Greenville, Mississippi, was no exception. The paper published two A. Phillip Randolph articles from his news magazine, *Black Worker*, sharing his opinion on the role of black citizens in the war. The first, published in the *Taborian Star*, stated that African Americans “must give fully and freely of his blood, toil, tears, and treasure to the cause of victory for the United States over Japan.”⁵¹ The article gave the opinion that though they are a less dominant race in this country, they were still citizens of the U.S. Randolph suggested that “the Japanese are a haughty, cold-blooded, ruthless, warlike people,” ultimately calling for unity among all races in the United States.⁵² Randolph used this same article to express that the plight of African Americans in their fight for equality had not been forgotten, but remained in the background. To Randolph, patriotic unity was needed to defeat the Axis powers.

African Americans' sentiments and their efforts for the war were expressed even in their deaths. An article from the *Jackson Advocate* expressed the feelings of acceptance by their country, and contended that the black community “pays with the coin of death,” and is ready to make “our nation strong, unafraid and wholehearted in its dedication to victory.”⁵³ The article pointed out that Axis powers were not what was needed in the fight for a real democracy, and

⁵⁰ SNS, “Don’t Become Impatient, Davis Advises Youth.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, April 25, 1942. 1.

⁵¹ “The Negro Has A Great Stake In This War Says Randolph.” Greenville, MS.: *Taborian Star*, January 1, 1942. 4.

⁵² A. Philip Randolph, “The Negro In Japan.” New York, NY. *Black Worker*, August 1, 1942. 4.

⁵³ SNS, “Axis Leaders Offer No Hope For Race.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, July 17, 1942. 2.

efforts of all African Americans were needed to gain victory in the war. The tone used in the articles was patriotic. They emphasized that the lack of democracy in the U.S. would not unhinge the efforts of African Americans in the war, nor were their attitudes swayed by the Japanese to disgrace their home front.

African Americans were not only showing support for the war with their patriotism, but they also supported the war efforts with money. A January 1942 article in the *Arkansas State Press* encouraging the purchase of war bonds and stamps showed additional avenues of support for the war effort. The article stated that the purchase of war bonds “is more than that- it is an aid to the nation and its war effort at this time.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Percy Greene commended the efforts of citizens purchasing war bonds and stamps in a September 1942 *Jackson Advocate* editorial. Greene stated that “the negroes of Jackson can as effectively demonstrate their patriotism and loyalty” with the purchase of war bonds and stamps.⁵⁵ Greene expressed the importance and safety of this act and reminded the readers that it was their duty to invest in America. The purchase of war bonds and stamps were also on the minds of African American youth. A seven-year-old boy, January Sebron Jr., was praised for his contribution to the cause. Sebron went door to door, singing for housewives to purchase bonds and stamps to “help Roosevelt and MacArthur win the war.”⁵⁶ The *Jackson Advocate* suggested that African Americans of all ages could do their part for the war effort. Sebron, dressed in a soldier’s cap and uniform, himself spent \$35 dollars on U.S. savings bonds to provide an example of how black youth could participate.⁵⁷ The act of spending money, in this case, was an outstanding effort put forth by African American

⁵⁴ “What Others Say: Defense Bonds Are For Victory.” Little Rock, AK.: *Arkansas State Press*, January 2, 1942. 4.

⁵⁵ Percy Greene, “The Hinds County Negro War Bonds And Stamps Committee.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, September 12, 1942. 8.

⁵⁶ ANP, “Seven-Year Old Lad Uses Vocal Talent To Sell War Bonds.” Jackson, MS.: *Jackson Advocate*, April 11, 1942. 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

citizens and showed the faith and hope held for the victory of the U.S. in the war to defeat the Axis powers.

Chapter 3: African American Attitudes on Japan from 1943-44

Ernest Clarke, a military musician who had been captured by the Japanese in China, stated there was no regard for African Americans among Japanese soldiers.⁵⁸ Clarke had been part of a prisoner exchange and was the only African American aboard the vessel that returned the released prisoner to the United States in December of 1943. Japanese attitudes towards all Americans were marked by hatred. Clarke admitted as much, suggesting that “since the start of the war, Japs do not trust the African Americans anymore.” Clarke said the Japanese told him that the next time they saw him there would be no leniency. African Americans realized that Japan was their enemy and would continue to fight America and its inhabitants, regardless of race. From 1943-1944 black support for war efforts continued to grow, even as attitudes held by African Americans concerning the Japanese changed from admiration to abhorrence during their service overseas. For example, African Americans were initially repulsed by the racial slurs used against the Japanese. In time, however, African Americans began using the terms themselves.⁵⁹ In effect, African Americans continued to view the Japanese as America’s enemy and a threat to Americans of all races when it became clear that the attack on Pearl Harbor was not the limit of Japan’s terrorism. Japan’s actions forced African Americans to understand the significance of the war and sent them springing into action. Through the use of the black press, black advertisements, and archival sources from the National Association of Advancement for Colored People (NAACP), it easy to conclude that between the years 1943-1944, the majority of black opinions about the Japanese from were negative.

⁵⁸ANP, “Says Japanese Care Nothing For Dark People,” *Jackson Advocate*, December 18,1943. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Previous Research on Racial Climates Regarding Japan

The mutual use of racially-charged stereotypes was prevalent among Americans and the Japanese.⁶⁰ Americans referred to the Japanese as “vermin, the apes, the inhuman Japanese,” while the Japanese labeled Americans as “Anglo-American devils and fiendish foes.”⁶¹ Both countries were hard at work feeding their citizens race-based propaganda to support their war efforts. These stereotypes of the Japanese appeared widely in the American press. Some even made it into the black press.

Editorials featured in black newspapers negatively portrayed the Japanese. To Elmer Carter, an African American journalist in Arkansas, the Japanese were the “Aryans of the East,” similar to the Nazis in that they only looked out for their own country.⁶² Japan’s conquests of other darker-raced nations in their attempts to conquer the Allies alarmed black journalists like Carter. Carter compared the U.S. military’s segregation policy to Japan’s attempt to divide the Chinese. The issue of segregated units needed resolving to set a tone of real solidarity among all Americans, which in turn would inspire other nations to follow their lead. Carter also noted that Japan had no qualms about fighting African Americans even as black servicemen served in a segregated military.

African American reporter James Hamlett even compared “white lynchers” to “pagan Japs.”⁶³ His article related the lynching of a seventeen-year-old African American from Tennessee to Japanese atrocities in Asia. An article by Dean G.B. Hancock conveyed how

⁶⁰ John Dower. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. (New York: Partheon, 1986) 73.

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Elmer Carter, “Plain Talk, It Not Need Be So,” *Arkansas State Press*, June 11, 1943. 2.

⁶³ James A. Hamlett Jr. “Weekend Chats,” *The Plaindealer*, December 8, 1944. 1.

America was not ready for Japan's "military and naval prowess."⁶⁴ Hancock said that the U.S. called the Japanese "monkeys" and was not prepared for the arsenal that they produced. The Japanese were "little brown men," who proved to be a worthy opponent against "big white men and their Negro comrades."⁶⁵ Hancock compares the United States' actions to Germany's mistake of underestimating the Russians and warns that America should not take Japan lightly.

Black journalists also published testimonies from military personnel to exhibit the evolving attitudes about the Japanese and black patriotism. An unknown African American journalist called Japan "imperialistic" and lumped them into the same category as the "Nazi Germans."⁶⁶ This damning statement presented the Japanese in a negative light while revealing the magnitude of their hatred for all other races. "*The Communicator*," a newspaper from Camp Livingston in Louisiana, described a soldier's death at the hand of a Japanese soldier. The author stated that Japan stands for enslavement and hatred, revealing that the Japanese soldier shouted at his victim, "you are going to die. I am going to kill you with this Japanese sword according to the Samurai Code."⁶⁷ The goal of this article, it seemed, was to inform readers that Japan was capable of and willing to commit heinous acts against anyone, regardless of race. Furthermore, some editorials expressed these attitudes through the voices of the African American clergy. In one such piece, a clergyman urged church-going African Americans to purchase bonds and to contribute to funding bombs.⁶⁸ The production of weapons of war, the minister claimed, "are all those Japs care about."⁶⁹ Indeed, Japan was sparing no expense in its war efforts and machinery.

⁶⁴ Dean Gordon B. Hancock "Between The Lines, A Mortal Weakness," *The Plaindealer*, October 22, 1943. 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ ANP, "Samurai Code," *Arkansas State Press*, November 12, 1943. 6.

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ "mornin' Jedge," *Arkansas State Press*, September 17, 1943. 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid

Japan's attack on the United States was beginning to bring African Americans together. J. Redding, author of the book *No Day of Triumph*, provided an interview published by the *Negro Digest* in which he expressed that African Americans would never be viewed as equals by whites. However, they could fight the Japanese because they considered African Americans “sub-human foes.”⁷⁰ Redding shined a light on the inequality that African Americans faced as they strived to succeed at their “sub-human jobs” within the military. Many African American soldiers and sailors were building roads or cooking instead of fighting the Japanese, but they were surely capable of pulling America’s “chestnuts out of the fire.”⁷¹ This article condemned the Japanese and the way U.S. military policy treated African American servicemen.

⁷⁰ “What The Negro Believes,” *The Plaindealer*, January 14, 1944. 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid*

Chapter 4: African American Soldiers' Accounts from the Pacific

Black soldiers played a significant part in gauging the attitudes of African American communities during the period 1943-1944. Private First Class Alton Fleming from Georgia, spoke to the black press while recovering from war wounds gained in the Pacific. Fleming stated that Japanese soldiers were on “dope and used it freely.”⁷² Fleming stated that “Japs” as he referred to them, were high on “narcotics” during the war, and that drugs were found on deceased soldiers in high quantities. Fleming expressed his thankfulness for his fellow soldiers and their ability to give the “Japs a warm reception.”⁷³ African American soldiers were working hard and faithfully to provide an adequate defense against the Japanese, and many stationed in the Pacific theater were in support of the messages emerging from the black press. Letters to the press from service personnel helped convey soldiers' perceptions and impressions of the Japanese. Corporal William Eaton wrote to the *Arkansas State Press* and thanked the paper for its war efforts and implored it to continue publishing war-related stories.⁷⁴ Eaton remarks, “I want to tell you all that the Japs have no respect of persons; they will kill anybody.” Eaton took it upon himself to show how grateful African American servicemen were to the black press.

African American servicemen took great pride in fighting for the United States against the Japanese. Corporal Roland Collins, of Gulfport, Mississippi, recalled a night when African American soldiers took a stand against the “nips.”⁷⁵ Collins expressed his pleasure at being the

⁷² SNS, “Georgian, Wounded In South Pacific, Recovers At Tuskegee,” *Jackson Advocate*, July 31, 1943. 2.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Japs Will Kill,” *Arkansas State Press*, July 14, 1944. 4.

⁷⁵ Scoop Jones, “Saga Revealed Of Five Negroes On Buna Trail, Engineers Turn To Combat To Knockout Japs,” *Jackson Advocate*, September 23, 1943. 1.

“first American ground troops to wipe the ‘Japs’ out of the Buna area.”⁷⁶ Collins volunteered to aid an Australian unit to attack Japanese soldiers, carrying and operating a 31-millimeter weapon that was quite difficult to transport. The weapon was cumbersome and had to be carried through mountainous terrain at night. Collins stated that he was “always having a desire to fight” and was willing to step up against the Japanese. Collins’ confidence, as expressed in the article, came from his crafty ability to move heavy munitions in total darkness. Collins described the encounter with the Japanese as the “adventure of a lifetime that he would never forget.”⁷⁷

African American soldiers like Collins were in a battle for their lives when encountering the Japanese and were eager to defend themselves. However, they also leaned on their spirituality to help guide them through uneasy moments. For instance, “praise the Lord and pass the ammunition” became one of their most popular slogans.⁷⁸ An article in the *Jackson Advocate* from August of 1944, showed how some African American soldiers who were clergymen stretched the limits of their Christian values by participating in the war. Private John Jenkins, US Marine, mentioned knocking out a Japanese machine gun to survive. At the same time, fellow Marine, Sergeant Leo Mann, was forced to dive into a foxhole after hearing Japanese mortar rounds whizzing around him. His only thought was to pray for his safety and, surprisingly, forgive the Japanese of their sins. Private Washington shared his own experience in the same attack by the Japanese. He testified that this event inspired him later to preach from the Book of Daniel in the Bible where it says, “protection was simultaneous with danger.”⁷⁹ Faith played a large part in these men’s lives, both at home and at war. The marines were instructed both to

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Sgt. Charles R. Vanergrift, “Heroic Negro Marines Live Up To Tradition In Battle For Saipan,” *Jackson Advocate*, August 19, 1944. 4.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

show no mercy against the Japanese and to not be captured. They knew that no matter what their skin color, captured Americans were not treated well and needed to continue to fight and pray.⁸⁰

Percy Greene acknowledged the faith and values that black men hold. Greene admitted that the black community “embraced Christianity” and that the “evils find no fertile soil in him which to feed.”⁸¹ Greene understood that hatred of the Japanese was leading the United States on an irreversible path of either “ultimate destruction or national suicide.”⁸² Greene reinforced how African Americans felt about the Japanese and the war in the context of their strong Christian faith.

Capturing prisoners of war and keeping them subdued was a task that could be just as dangerous as field combat. More important, it stretched black soldiers’ moral and ethical scruples even further. Returning Marine, Lewis Franco, shared stories of his time in Guadalcanal where he was tasked with taking Japanese prisoners.⁸³ His squad was ordered to cease bringing in prisoners on account of “some funny tricks” of the Japanese, such as leaving wounded U.S. servicemen in the field, waiting for other U.S. servicemen to rescue them, and then the Japanese would ambush and kill them.⁸⁴ Consequently, his unit took no more prisoners and, in fact, began to eliminate them instead. Of course, they had to obey orders from their superiors while also practicing self-preservation. This predicament put these African American soldiers in a position to make life-and-death decisions for both themselves and the Japanese. Franco admitted that his unit was responsible for killing “700 Japanese in one afternoon,”⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Percy Greene, “Hate and Prejudice” *Jackson Advocate*, July 8, 1944. 8.

⁸³ Papers of the National Association of Colored People, Index 9, Reel 10, text-fiche, S. 510-511

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

A series of stories running in the black press showed that African Americans were the target of racial propaganda perpetrated by the Japanese in hopes of further dividing race relations in the United States. Professor Clyde Miller, quoted in the September 1943 issue of the *Jackson Advocate*, claimed that “propagandist exploitation of feeling of racial superiority and racial inferiority is extraordinarily effective, dynamic and dangerous” in its attempt to undermine American war efforts.⁸⁶ Some of the Japanese propaganda might even have led Japanese soldiers to commit war crimes. According to an article in *The Plaindealer*, Sgt. Vouza, a Melanesian native fighting alongside the Americans, was captured behind enemy lines, tied to a tree, tortured with bayonets, and left to die because he would not reveal intelligence on Marine locations.⁸⁷ The article emphasized the fact that even though Vouza was a “former cannibal” who ate humans, he behaved better than the Japanese.

Alternative Views Among African Americans

Pro-Japanese attitudes in African American communities existed and occasionally created discord within the black community. One case involved a group of individuals involved in the Colored Americans National Organization (CANO), an African American organization that held pro-Japanese beliefs. The U.S. government accused the group of “insubordination, disloyalty, and refused military duty.”⁸⁸ Individuals were charged with obstructing the recruitment and enlistment of black troops in the United States military. Charles Newby, an active CANO member, discouraged African American recruitment from May through August of 1942.⁸⁹ At a forum in Chicago, Newby stated that “colored men should not join the United States Army,”

⁸⁶ Ernest E. Johnson, “Haitian President To Visit Nation,” *Jackson Advocate*, September 25, 1943. 1,8.

⁸⁷ Innes, “Metal Awarded Native Who Survived Jap Torture.” *The Plaindealer*, January 1, 1943. 8.

⁸⁸ *Papers of the NAACP*, Part 18, *NAACP 1940-55. Legal File. Racial Tension*. Microfilm, Reel 8. S. 875-887.

⁸⁹ *Papers of the NAACP* Part 18, *NAACP 1940-55. Legal File. Racial Tension*. Microfilm, Reel 8, S. 880.

claiming it was “to the negroes’ advantage to side with the Japanese in this war.”⁹⁰ For Newby and other CANO members, “the salvation of colored folk lay in victory by Japan,” and therefore “colored folk should utilize their influence toward that end.”⁹¹ The indictment suggested that “colored folk” should not be exempt from this threat. Similarly, Stokley Hart promoted the “common bond between the Japanese and the Negro because both are members of the colored race.”⁹² Both Newby and Hart believed that wartime support of the Japanese was the best route for African Americans living in Jim Crow America. Hart felt that the “people who belonged to this organization [CANO] would assist the Japanese”; those who would not “would be killed.”⁹³ Hart continued with his admiration of the “Tojo's,” implying they would be the saving grace of African Americans. Hart issued threats to those African Americans who did not belong to CANO.

Newby and Hart were part of a larger group of individuals who were investigated for treasonous behavior. Frederick Robb, of CANO, hoped that “the Japanese would rule this country and when it did it would be to the advantage of the Negro.”⁹⁴ Robb was accused of highlighting the military might of Japan by showing a slideshow of Japan attacking Pearl Harbor.⁹⁵ Robb used the destruction of Pearl Harbor to recruit for CANO to gain support for Japan. Robb argued that “Japan is one of the darker races, and it is time for the darker races to take over the world.”⁹⁶ He urged the crowd that “Negroes owe no allegiance to the American

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *Papers of the NAACP Part 18, NAACP 1940-55. Legal File. Racial Tension.* Microfilm, Reel 8, S. 881.

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ *Papers of the NAACP Part 18, NAACP 1940-55. Legal File. Racial Tension.* Microfilm, Reel 8, S. 884.

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ *Papers of the NAACP Part 18, NAACP 1940-55. Legal File. Racial Tension.* Microfilm, Reel 8, S. 885.

flag because it was not the black man's flag; that Negroes had better learn the color of the Japanese flag if they wanted to go on living for the next three or four years."⁹⁷

Japanese Americans vs. Japanese

The U.S. government made Japanese American a target of fear and paranoia during the war. The Associated Negro Press (A.N.P.), a syndicated black news outlet, republished an article in December of 1943 that educated its readers about the difference between the Japanese of the Axis powers and Japanese Americans.⁹⁸ The article suggested that elections were near, and candidates would use an anti-Japanese platform to springboard into office. The article reminded its audience that Japanese Americans were moved to relocation camps during the war. "Race-baiters," it suggested, were igniting the flames of prejudice and proclaiming that a "Jap's a Jap."⁹⁹ Taking a contrary position, the article observed that Japanese Americans were thriving members of the community and immersed in America's melting pot.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Throughout this period, African Americans turned to the NAACP for guidance and assistance. Walter White, secretary for the NAACP, wrote letters from the Pacific theatre. In a January 1945 correspondence, White stated that "one basic pattern remains even here where the Japanese have industriously tried to fan the flames of hatred of white people."¹⁰⁰ White did not produce specific examples, but made claims that the "basic pattern is the same" after visiting "Hawaii, Johnston,

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸"From Other Columns," *Los Angeles Tribune*, November 8, 1943. 10.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Walter White. "*Papers of the NAACP Part 17, NAACP 1940-55. General Office file.* Microfilm, Reel 24, S. 502.

Kwagelein, Guam, and Saipan.”¹⁰¹ White expressed that even though the Japanese continued to spread hate, “fortunately” American soldiers were starting to see that Japan was attempting to use race as a weapon.

Anti-Japanese Views Depicted in Illustrations

Illustrations in the black press show negative viewpoints of the Japanese and mimic the anti-Japanese thought of the editorials. On November 25, 1944, the *Jackson Advocate* ran three illustrations promoting the sale of war bonds. Page one depicted a bomb smashing into the Japanese flag, and proclaimed, “Let’s finish the job--buy extra bonds today!”¹⁰² The image on page two depicted a Japanese soldier using the butt of his rifle to strike an American soldier, accompanied by an image of Uncle Sam, and a bomb aimed at the Japanese flag. The caption read, “While one enemy remains, our job is not done!”¹⁰³ On page six was an illustration that asked the reader, “THEY still die--will YOU buy?”¹⁰⁴ The objective of this advertisement was to get farmers to invest in the war by reminding them that “’44 is a Record Farm Year.”¹⁰⁵ On-page five of a December 1944 issue of the *Jackson Advocate* is an illustration featuring smoking ships. The caption read, “They Started it! Let’s Finish It!”¹⁰⁶ These ads inform the community that the only way to win the war was by defeating Japan. To do so, they must purchase war bonds. The illustrations depict the Japanese as tough opponents who must be destroyed. The war would not end unless all American citizens supported the war and helped to ensure a victory.

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² November 25, 1944, Advertisement, *Jackson Advocate*. 1.

¹⁰³ November 25, 1944, Advertisement, *Jackson Advocate*. 2.

¹⁰⁴ November 25, 1944, Advertisement, *Jackson Advocate*. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ December 2, 1944, Advertisement, *Jackson Advocate*. 5.

The black press also used cartoons in support of programs like scrap metal drives and the use of ration stamps. Two cartoon illustrations in a 1943 edition of *The Plaindealer* depicted negative attitudes concerning the Japanese.¹⁰⁷ The first shows an African American child donating belts with metal buckles, with the caption “Pop says these can do a better job on the Japs than me.”¹⁰⁸ The image has a sign in the top left corner that reads “SCRAP TO SOCK THE JAP.” The second image portrayed an African American woman walking past a storefront labeled “BLACK MARKET” with a Japanese character peering from the door and Hitler looking down from the roof. The caption expressed the woman’s refusal to buy black market goods and choosing instead to purchase rationed goods with her stamps. The caption below reads, “IT’S THE LEAST YOU CAN DO!!” African Americans were encouraged to do their part by purchasing rationed goods and scrapping metal.¹⁰⁹

While these advertisements continued in various media outlets directed towards African Americans, they became an effective means of communicating the need for the purchase of war bonds.¹¹⁰ In a December 1944 issue of the *Plaindealer*, an illustration depicted a B-29 Bomber with the caption “INVEST IN THE NEXT RAID ON JAPAN!”¹¹¹ Below the illustration are two paragraphs urging citizens to purchase more war bonds since the cost of B-29 Bombers was close to \$600,000 and needed for victory in the Pacific.¹¹² Also featured below the illustration is the frequently used image of a bomb smashing into the Japanese flag. The bomb is adorned with the number 6, as it is the sixth war bond drive during the war. In a December 1944 issue, *The Cleveland Gazette* published an illustration to bring attention to the prisoners of war still held by

¹⁰⁷ Ted Shearer, “Next Door,” *The Plaindealer*, October 1, 1943. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “Invest In The Next Raid On Japan!” *The Plaindealer*, December 8, 1944. 8.

¹¹² Ibid.

the Japanese.¹¹³ The image depicts Americans in a prison camp guarded by an armed Japanese soldier. The article invokes sympathy for captured American soldiers while stoking hatred for the Japanese. The powerful image urges readers to purchase more war bonds to help bring our soldiers home and defeat the Japanese. Declaring, “we are out to wipe the grins off their faces” by “finishing the job that the Japs started,” readers’ efforts in the sixth war bond drive will provide these American soldiers with “safe, independent futures.”¹¹⁴

Collectively, the black press presented African Americans as supportive of America’s war efforts while simultaneously expressing negative opinions of Japan. Arguments presented in editorials and personal interviews with African American soldiers, artists, and journalists depict the Japanese as hateful people with no regard for any race but their own. Pro-Japanese attitudes were few and exploited American race relations to entice African Americans to support Japan. Unfortunately, during this period America’s open racism continued to fuel sympathy for the Japanese among a small group of African Americans. For the most part, however, the black press showed African American loyalty to the U.S. through the purchase of war bonds, rationing goods, and scrapping metal.

¹¹³ “Thousands Of Americans Are Still In Jap Prisons,” *Cleveland Gazette*, December 9, 1944. 11.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Figure 1: War Bond Advertisement



Advertisement. November 25, 1944. *Jackson Advocate*, 1

Figure 2: We Must Buy More War Bonds!



Advertisement. November 25, 1944. *Jackson Advocate*, 2.

Figure 3: Buy Bigger War Bonds Now!



Advertisement. November 25, 1944. *Jackson Advocate*, 6.

Figure 4: Let's Finish It!



Figure 5: "Next Door" Political Cartoon



Ted Shearer, "Next Door," *The Plaindealer*, October 1, 1943. 7.

Figure:6 Advertisement for Ration Stamps



"Invest In The Next Raid On Japan!" *The Plaindealer*, December 8, 1944.

Advertisement, 8

Figure 7: Prisoners of War



“Thousands Of Americans Are Still In Jap Prisons,” *Cleveland Gazette*, December 9,

1944. Advertisement, 11

Figure 8: Advertisement for War Bonds



“Invest In The Next Raid On Japan!” *The Plaindealer*, December 8, 1944. Advertisement, 8

Chapter 5: African American Reactions to the Bombing and Occupation of Japan

The Allies forces accepted Germany's surrender in May 1945 and thereafter turn their sole focus on defeating Japan in the Pacific theater. African American troops were already engaged in battle with the Japanese before the atomic bombings and subsequent Japanese surrender in August 1945. Although some African Americans had admired Japan prior to Pearl Harbor, black troops participated in the bombing of Japan and became a part of the occupational force there. In the waning months of the war against the Japanese, victory for the Allied powers was starting to become a reality. On August 6th and 9th of 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki causing unparalleled destruction and led to the surrender and occupation of Japan by Allied forces. African American journalist S.S. Taylor's article in *The Arkansas State Press* remarked on the surrender of Japan, stating, "the greater responsibility lies upon the victorious nations to lead humanity away from the practices of wholesale killing as a means of settling issues."¹¹⁵ The article suggested that African Americans should be determined to live in peace in their own country regardless of race, just as they had fought together in the war against Japan.

Black Press and African American Soldiers Reflect on the Atomic Bombs

¹¹⁵ S.S. Taylor, "Japan Surrenders, Lest We Forget." Little Rock, AR.: *Arkansas State Press*, August 17, 1945. 1.

Langston Hughes, the celebrated African American columnist, poet, writer, and social activist, gave his opinion on the United States using atomic bombs on Japan.¹¹⁶ His article, published in a Chicago newspaper two months after the bombing, claimed that the United States did not want to use atomic weapons on white Germans, but was quite willing to use them on “colored folks,” since the “Japs is colored.”¹¹⁷ The article went on to explain that the two billion dollars that it cost to make the bombs could have helped build housing for the poor and improve life for black Americans suffering under Jim Crow. It showed that African Americans felt too much money was spent on killing the Japanese when Americans were suffering from poverty.

African Americans began to view their futures after the war to be as bleak as the aftermath of the atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan. Journalist Dan Gardner presented his fears in an article for the *Arkansas State Press*.¹¹⁸ He stated that “the challenge of the darker races as presented by Japan went up in the tragic clouds in Hiroshima.”¹¹⁹ Gardner implied that all hope and success for minority races were diminished by white Americans' ability to level Japanese cities with atomic weapons. He saw the victory over Japan as a “white victory” and not a victory for all Americans. Gardner viewed white Americans as the “haves” and African Americans and Japanese Americans as the “have nots,” inferring that the minority races should establish themselves and prove that they belong with the “haves.” Gardner encouraged his readers to stand tall and called for “radical changes in our leadership front.”¹²⁰ By linking African Americans with the defeated Japanese, Gardner called for his fellow African Americans to show empathy toward all dark races.

¹¹⁶ Langston Hughes, “Column Of The Month Simple and the Atom Bomb.” Chicago, IL: *Headline and Pictures*, October 1, 1945, 19.

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Dan Gardner, “Plain Talk.” Little Rock, AR.: *Arkansas State Press*, February 1, 1945. 6.

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ Ibid

On the other hand, an article in *The Plaindealer* featured the youngest African American to ever receive a Ph.D. in mathematics, and who at age nineteen had helped develop the atomic bombs against the Japanese.¹²¹ Dr. J. Ernest Wilkins left Tuskegee, AL after being recruited by the government to work on the Manhattan Project. The article noted that “military security” prevented Wilkins from disclosing his exact involvement, but also referenced that other African American scientists were involved in the “two-billion-dollar project.”¹²² These highly educated African American scientists were aware of the devastation these bombs could produce and continued to work for the United States. This article, in contrast to Hughes’ earlier article, showed that some African Americans not only supported but also helped develop the atomic bombs that were used on the “dark-skinned” Japanese.¹²³

Interviews with African American soldiers reveal their reactions concerning the atomic bombing of Japan but also provide a variety of impressions about Japan and the Japanese. Robert M. Alexander, who was part of a “labor battalion,” shared his thoughts on the bombing of Japan, arguing that “had it not been for the dropping of the bomb in 1945, I may have been one of those soldiers killed trying to run up on one of those Japanese islands.”¹²⁴ Alexander believed that the bombing was justified, as it prevented many American soldiers from being killed on the Japanese mainland. Alexander did not mention racism as a factor in the bombings in his interview but he conveyed an appreciation for the United States' decision to bomb Japan.

Additional evidence suggests that African Americans supported President Truman’s decision to bomb Japan. African American Mortimer Cox, a U.S. Marine, thanked President

¹²¹ ANP, “Race Scientists Aided In Study Of Atomic Bomb.” Kansas City, KS.: *The Plaindealer*, August 24,1945. 2.

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Langston Hughes, “Column Of The Month Simple and the Atom Bomb.” Chicago, IL: *Headline and Pictures*, October 1,1945, 19.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Truman for dropping the second bomb on Japan because he would have had to take part in the invasion of Japan. Thankfully, Cox and his unit, stationed at Sasabo Naval base in Japan, served as occupational forces rather than invading forces. Cox stated that he and his unit prayed “for the second bomb.”¹²⁵ Cox also stated that “historians second-guess Truman about the second bomb, but I thank him for it because we did not [invade] so that when they finally surrendered, we covered the territory that we were preparing to invade.”¹²⁶ Cox valued his safety and his unit over the lives of the Japanese. He did not express empathy in his opinions of Truman ordering the use of a second bomb on the Japanese. He was simply thankful to have lived through his time in the service.

Some African American Marines, however, were sympathetic to the devastated Japanese homeland. Marine Elvyn Davidson stated that he “could empathize with the Japanese. I felt sorry for them. I felt guilty,” and he concluded that he “felt mad that the military would subject their people to this kind of treatment.”¹²⁷ Davidson recalled conversations with Japanese citizens who “realized they were at war, and we are fighting for their country against imperialistic America.”¹²⁸ The Japanese citizens asked, “why did y’all bomb us? We didn’t bomb you.”¹²⁹ Davidson stated that the Japanese thought the African American soldiers were responsible for the bombing, and claimed they were only a threat because they fought for self-preservation. Davidson showed empathy towards the citizens of Japan, yet recognized that the Japanese military was at fault for making ill-informed Japanese citizens the victims of the atomic bombs.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Elvyn Davidson. “Veterans History Project.” Interviewed by G. Kurt Piehler. American Folklife Center. April 4, 2000. Accessed February 4, 2018. <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.30014>

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Ibid

Japanese citizens were ill-informed of other dark races, and their own inherent racism that was very much a part of the war. Rollins Edwards, a black army veteran, attested that Japanese citizens were confused by African American servicemen and believed the atomic bombing was responsible for the color of their skin.¹³⁰ Edwards said that “somebody had told the Japanese that we were black, and the reason we were black is because we had exploded the atomic--we were the ones responsible for the atomic bomb.”¹³¹ The Japanese also believed African Americans had tails, due to radiation. Edwards was appreciative that Japanese citizens realized black servicemen were not directly responsible for the bombing, and he also was appreciative of their hospitality and care while he served in Japan.

After the surrender of the Japanese, some African American servicemen returning home to the United States decided to reside on the west coast instead of going back to the South. According to an article in *The Plaindealer*, one section of Los Angeles attempted to integrate both African Americans and Japanese Americans within the same communities, less than a month after the formal surrender of Japan.¹³² The Common Ground Committee of Caucasians, Japanese and Negroes, an integrated civic group, argued that these joint efforts should be “aimed at acquainting each group with the problems of the other, and educating both to the similarity of their problems rather than emphasizing the differences that divided them.”¹³³ The article stated that “Japanese are returning to the west coast at a rate of about 400 per week.”¹³⁴ The article further referred to how African American children and Japanese American children saw no racial

¹³⁰ Rollins Edward. “Veterans History Project.” Interviewed by Michael Owens. American Folk Life Center. March 19, 2012. Accessed January 31, 2018. <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.28675>

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² ANP, “End of War Creates Rift Between Japs and Negroes on The Pacific Coast.” Kansas City, KS.: *The Plaindealer*, October 19, 1945. 1.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

biases when enrolled in educational programs together. The black press used this article to show that African Americans and Japanese Americans were beginning to understand one another's plights, rather than clashing against each other. The article speaks volumes regarding how African Americans preferred to live with Japanese American citizens, rather than returning to southern parts of the United States.¹³⁵

African American Servicemen During the Occupation of Japan

Many African American service members did not return to the United States right away but rather became a vital part of the Allied occupational force in Japan. A statement from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) ran in the *Negro Star*, a Wichita newspaper, on August 13, 1945. The statement expressed joy that the war was over, but also concern about when African American service members would return home.¹³⁶ A point system developed by the U.S. military to determine when military personnel were eligible for discharge did not work to the benefit of black soldiers. Since most African American service members were not designated as combat soldiers, the point system put them far behind white service members in the line to be discharged. African American servicemen “were kept from combat service through no fault of their own,” according to the NAACP, and so “white troops with one-fourth the length of service are discharged” before them.¹³⁷ The unfair point system thus kept African Americans in Japan longer than their white counterparts.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ ANP, “Discharges For Negroes V-J Day Shows Up Unfair.” Wichita, KS.: *The Negro Star*, September 7, 1945.

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¹³⁷ Ibid

During the occupation of Japan, black civic leaders were touring Japan to reinforce morale among African American service members. Correspondent Dr. W.H. Jernagin spoke to over “50 thousand Negro Soldiers” during his tour of Japan in the latter part of 1945.¹³⁸ Jernagin observed and interviewed African American soldiers who were part of the occupation force while offering “counsel and guidance” to them. He also discussed strategies to end segregation in the military and promoted his group “The National Fraternal Council of Negro Churches in America.” This organization was comprised of “1000 pastors,” and similarly vied for the end of segregation.¹³⁹ Jernagin encouraged the soldiers to “make good at any job which they were assigned to so that their good records would speak for themselves.”¹⁴⁰ He also urged the African American servicemen to think about their futures and to remember their faith, reminding them to “do unto others as you would them do unto you.”¹⁴¹ His encouragement to cease hatred and treat “all men” as equals resonated with the current circumstances in Japan, given that African American service members were responsible for Japanese prisoners and worked with white service members.

Oral histories indicate that African Americans were trusted to guard Japanese P.O.W.s and were less aggressive towards the Japanese prisoners during the occupation. Nathan Walker, an African American Marine, recalled that “they could put some of us over those Japanese prisoners,” because “white marines” could not be trusted to guard Japanese prisoners.¹⁴² Of white Marines, Walker remembered, “any little thing would turn them” violent and “they would beat them to death and all that.”¹⁴³ Walker believed that the Bataan death march, during which

¹³⁸ Robert Penn, “Report of Dr. Jernigan’s Overseas Tour.” Wichita, KS.: *The Negro Star*, December 21, 1945. 1,7.

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

many marines died, was the cause of this aggressive attitude and mistreatment from white marines. Walker recalled the many conversations he had with one Japanese prisoner who was “American educated” and a “UCLA graduate” and related to the “hypocrisies of America” regarding race relations. Although these men were enemies in wartime, Walker’s memories suggest that African American service members were able to put their hatred of the Japanese aside at least enough to have intellectual conversations with them. Walker and the prisoner agreed that the internment of Japanese Americans in the United States was the true definition of “hypocrisy in America.”¹⁴⁴

Dr. Elvin Davidson, an Army veteran, agreed about the hypocrisy of race relations in the United States.¹⁴⁵ Davidson felt it was a “tremendous disgrace the way the country treated” Japanese Americans. He argued that Japanese Americans were fighting alongside them to “protect our country, and yet we had them interned in some kind of stupid camps.” He “felt this was just disgraceful” and that “these guys had demonstrated heroic activities, and there was not anything they would not do” for America.¹⁴⁶ Davidson acknowledged that Japanese Americans fought for the United States as valiantly as all other servicemen. He saw the Japanese as the “enemy” before his tour in Japan in that he primarily associated his disdain of the Japanese with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. However, during the occupation of Japan, Davidson observed that Japanese citizens were accommodating and “courteous.” Davidson was enlightened to the fact that the average Japanese citizens were not the evil warmongers that had bombed his country.

During the occupation, some African American servicemen also gained a better cultural understanding of the Japanese. Charlie Odom, a native of south Mississippi, recalled his

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Elvyn Davidson. “Veterans History Project.” Interviewed by G. Curt Piehler. American Folklife Center. April 4, 2000. Accessed February 2, 2018. <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.30014/>

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

experiences with Japanese citizens and their customs during his six-month tour of occupation of Japan.¹⁴⁷ As a soldier in charge of a Japanese work detail that maintained American trucks, Odom was advised not to “give them candy or give them a cigarette or anything.” However, working around the labor force, he began to develop “feelings for them like they were human beings.”¹⁴⁸ Odom ignored the advice he was given and developed relationships with the workers who ultimately invited him “to their home for dinner during the Christmas period.”¹⁴⁹ The experience surprised Odom because of the cultural differences, but he found it enjoyable. Odom stated that he did not “hold no grudge against nobody” and reiterated that if “we” were put in the same situation, there would have been the same reaction.¹⁵⁰ Odom’s experiences working with the Japanese as well as developing friendships with them suggests that he did not hold grievances against Japan. Odom dined with the Japanese, a luxury he was not afforded with whites in parts of his own country due to the color of his skin.¹⁵¹ Not all African American servicemen in Japan felt the same as Odom. Charles Ferguson, an army veteran, when asked in a post-war interview about his opinion of Japan and its culture, responded, “I did not like it too well there.”¹⁵² Ferguson went on to tell the interviewer that he “stayed on the post” and “took no chances.”¹⁵³ Ferguson had the outlook that the Japanese were still the enemy and so he preferred the safety of the military base. Unlike Odom, Ferguson was not interested in learning about Japan and its culture.

¹⁴⁷ Charlie Odom. “The University Of Southern Mississippi Center For Oral History & Culture Heritage.” Interviewed by Pic Firmin on February 4,2003. Accessed April 5,2017. https://digitalcollections.usm.edu/uncategorized/digitalFile_0cc3b08a-90fb-4a62-a21b-cb70ad3020de/

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Charles Ferguson. “Veterans History Project.” Interviewed by Joel Beeson. American Folk Center. June 6,2005. Accessed February 10,2018. <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.3385>

¹⁵³ Ibid.

As already shown, most African Americans understood that Japan had to be stopped and therefore supported the use of the atomic bomb that led to the surrender of Japan. However, African American service members ultimately empathized with the Japanese. During the occupation, black service members were able to work with and share cultural experiences with the very people they had once demonized. African American service members treated Japanese prisoners with respect and worked alongside them. Because of these experiences and their sympathy for the devastation caused by the atomic bombs, African American service members were able to put aside their hatred for Japan. They came to respect the Japanese, despite the effects of the Japanese government's war on the United States.

Conclusion

In summation, World War II significantly changed the way African Americans viewed Japan and Japanese citizens. The bombing of Pearl Harbor, as well as the atomic bombings of Japan, caused African Americans' perceptions of the Japanese to range from a desire for revenge to a feeling of sympathy by the war's end. Previous scholarship was correct in its findings about the attitudes of African Americans about the Japanese but failed to appreciate the variety of viewpoints from African Americans. By focusing primarily on the northern black press and its tendency to be more open with concerns and arguments rooted in American racism, prior research failed to recognize that southern blacks were more fearful in their attitudes concerning the war. The southern black press allowed African Americans to publicly present their issues and concerns while allowing an avenue for them to express their opinions about the Japanese, as well as the war. Many African American communities' primary source of information came from black produced periodicals. These demonstrate that some African Americans held distaste for the Japanese throughout the war, but their attitudes evolved after black troops witnessed the utter devastation put upon brown-skinned people by an openly racist, segregated country.

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