

# Japan, World War II, and Third World Liberation

**Gary Y. Okihiro**

Growing up in Hawai'i, my friends and I played World War II. We'd swoop down our street, Pilikoa Street, overlooking Pearl Harbor on our skate cars, and pretend we were Japanese pilots strafing and bombing the ships anchored in the calm waters of the bay. I don't know what my father, a World War II veteran and member of the famed U.S. Army unit, the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion,<sup>1</sup> thought about us taking Japan's side, but I grew up hearing my mother's stories of my grandfather, perched on his house roof cheering the Zeros that dipped so low they could see the faces of the pilots. As the fighting got hot that Sunday morning, they all ran for the hills, and upon their return a few hours later and at my grandfather's command, they destroyed and buried Japanese flags, letters, and records in the back garden. Those were my family's secret, hidden past. Like my father, my relationship to World War II, Japan, and the U.S. is vexed at best.

## The "Good" War

American histories of World War II routinely depict it as a break and new beginning for a nation mired in the grips of the Great Depression and its subsequent rise to the leadership of democracies worldwide.<sup>2</sup> A retired Red Cross worker reminisced about World War II. "The war was fun for America," he remembered. "I'm not talking about the poor souls who lost sons and daughters. But for the rest of us, the war was a hell of a good time."<sup>3</sup> That sentiment has led to the phrase, "the good war," in

reference to World War II. One historian even called it “the perfect war.”<sup>4</sup> “World War Two was just an innocent time in America,” recalled Nancy Arnot Harjan who was thirteen years old at the time of Pearl Harbor. “I was innocent. My parents were innocent. The country was innocent.”<sup>5</sup>

A reinscription of that historical memory is underway among Americans. With the thinning of the war's ranks, some still clinging to the reigns of power, we witness an erasure in the public discourse of some of the war's brutalities and its anti-democratic features in an uncritical celebration of “the good war.” “At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure, love, and the lessons of the workaday world,” wrote the journalist Tom Brokaw of “the greatest generation,” “they answered the call to help save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs.” And when the war was over and with democracy triumphant, those men and women “immediately began the task of rebuilding their lives and the world they wanted... They helped convert a wartime economy into the most powerful peacetime economy in history. They made breakthroughs in medicine and other sciences. They gave the world new art and literature... They helped rebuild the economies and political institutions of their former enemies, and they stood fast against the totalitarianism of their former allies, the Russians.”<sup>6</sup>

On the Mall in Washington, D.C., a grateful nation erected a monument to those heroes of the Second World War, and Hollywood cashed in on the war's popularity with award-winning hits. Sanitized memorializations, commented the historian Paul Fussell, miss the real, visceral insanity and terror of war. “The real war was tragic and ironic,” he wrote of World War II, “beyond the power of any literary or philosophic analysis to suggest, but in unbombed America especially, the meaning of the war seemed inaccessible. As experience, thus, the suffering was wasted.”<sup>7</sup>

In reality, racism, according to historian John W. Dower, was a

prominent aspect of World War II, from the blatant racism of the Nazis and their notions of a “master-race,” which is cast as aberrant, to the role of race in the conduct of the Pacific war, which is presented as racism shared equally by Japanese and Americans.<sup>8</sup> At home, anti-Japanese racism, justified as “military necessity,” led to the mass removal and confinement of Japanese Americans. As the general in charge of the defense of the West Coast declared: “A Jap's a Jap. You can't change him by giving him a piece of paper,” referring to the citizenship of Japanese Americans. Race, thus, mattered.

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, enabling the concentration camps for some 120,000 Japanese Americans in Hawai'i and the U.S. West.<sup>9</sup> And over a year later in the midst of the war, a week-long “zoot-suit” race riot, which targeted Mexican, Filipino, and African Americans in Los Angeles, flared up on June 3, 1943. Similar disturbances were reported that summer in San Diego on June 9; in Philadelphia on June 10; in Chicago on June 15; and in Evansville on June 27. Between June 16 and August 1, large-scale race riots occurred in Beaumont, Texas, Detroit, and Harlem. The Detroit race riot of June 20-21 was one of the most devastating of the century: thirty-four persons were killed and property worth hundreds of thousands of dollars was destroyed. The Harlem riot of August 1-2 was the most severe in the history of New York's African American community: five died and approximately 565 received hospital treatment, over 500 arrests were made, and property damage reached an estimated \$5 million.<sup>10</sup>

While serving with valor in the war, accordingly, Mexican Americans were attacked by sailors and soldiers in their nation's uniform, Japanese Americans were held in concentration camps secured by military police, African Americans were victimized by mob violence in U.S. cities, and American Indians were relegated to impoverished reservations. African and Japanese Americans served in racially segregated units, and racial

discrimination was a common feature of military life. And yet, that service provided a powerful argument for claims on democracy by people of color, and those demands would become particularly compelling after the war in the struggle for civil rights during the 1950s and 1960s in which war veterans would play key roles in that movement for social equality.

### The Color Line

It seems to me that the remembrance of “the good war” and the forgetting of unsavory aspects of that war serve the interests of those who hold and wield power. As the editors of a book on the Asia-Pacific wars wrote: “memory production...is never simply about the politically disinterested recovery of a pure and undiluted past.... Experience and memory...are always already mediated and their mediation in turn is always shaped by relations of power.”<sup>11</sup> My narration, too, is implicated in that dialectic, and it aspires to work against a given condition and thus it is limited as a response to a previously determined field of contest. Further, because of my “race” as determined by those who have the power to classify, my subject matter, World War II, is in dialogue with my subjectivity.

If the overriding problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line, then World War II must be seen within that light. For racists and anti-racists alike, the twentieth century moved along the color line, which sustained in the African American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois's words, the “greed for wealth and power.” Once the cradles of world civilization, recalled Du Bois, Africa and Asia were conquered, enslaved, exploited, and reduced to European colonies, “slums of the world” and “places of greatest concentration of poverty, disease, and ignorance.” The fall of the Roman Empire led to the rise of acquisitive European states and companies that competed for territory, labor, and resources—possessions.

Modern colonies were built upon “Negro slavery, Chinese coolies, and doctrines of race inferiority,” and as a result “there will be at least 750,000,000 colored and black folk inhabiting colonies owned by white nations,” Du Bois estimated near the end of World War II, “who will have no rights that the white people of the world are bound to respect.” Instead, he insisted, “the majority of the inhabitants of earth, who happen for the most part to be colored, must be regarded as having the right and the capacity to share in human progress and to become copartners in that democracy which alone can ensure peace among men....”<sup>12</sup>

On the other side of the color line, the white supremacist and journalist Lothrop Stoddard lamented the “loss” of Haiti in “the world-wide struggle between the primary races of mankind” or “the ‘conflict of color,’” which is, he wrote shortly before the onset of World War I, “the fundamental problem of the twentieth century....”<sup>13</sup> And writing after the Great War or the “White Civil War,” Stoddard regretted that he wasn't stronger in his warning to the white race over the “perils” it faced. The internecine conflict, he contended, weakened the white world and made it susceptible to subjugation by colored armies. “However, such colored triumphs of arms are less to be dreaded than more enduring conquests like migrations which would swamp whole populations and turn countries now white into colored man's lands irretrievably lost to the white world.”<sup>14</sup> White solidarity, then, was essential for survival against this “rising tide of color.”

The problem of the twentieth century was, in fact, a burden for peoples of color with the transgression of Europeans into the tropical band centuries before the modern period. Appetites whetted by the prospect of Asia's wealth, those expeditions, led by Alexander the Great's thrust to “the ends of the world,” traversed lands and seas in search of a passage to India. And like Alexander's company, the expansion involved armed men but also chroniclers and scientists to locate, name, and classify lands and resources and their plants and animals, including peoples. The knowledge gained

was as important as the loot of American, African, and Asian abundance as sources for Europe's identity, power, and global empires. Port cities were the conduits for exchanges and extractions by which mines followed arteries of gold and silver, the enslaved and indentured were gathered, boarded, and transported, and plantations with their labor produced export crops for external manufacture and consumption. Participants in that emergent world-system included, at the peripheries, European colonial administrators and settlers but also the indigenous elite and masses of colored laborers to cultivate and tend the vast empire of minerals and plants.

An imperial object was the creation of that discursive and material world order in the face of an apparent, at least to some European minds, chaos and hence, conflict. The ancient Greeks assumed that “kosmos” or order prevailed in the universe, including the capacity of climate to determine the natures of lands and their biotic communities. Thus, for instance, Hippocrates theorized that the mild, uniform, and wet climate of Asia yielded soft, inert, womanly peoples while Europe's rough, variable, and waterless stretches bred hard, energetic, manly races.<sup>15</sup> Sixteenth-century scholar Jean Bodin described how men in cooler climates possessed “inner warmth,” which ignited energy and enabled robust activity, while men in the hot tropics lacked that “internal heat” and were, as a consequence, lazy and unproductive.<sup>16</sup> And in 1775, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach published his doctoral dissertation, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, for which he is considered to be the father of physical anthropology. In that first edition, Blumenbach described four “varieties,” later called “races” arranged in a hierarchy of beauty and merit, European, Asian, African, and American, and ascribed to climate the principal role of shaping their “bodily constitution, stature, and colour.”<sup>17</sup> And the Asian, African, and American were “degenerations,” in Blumenbach's schema, from the ideal, the European.

Those discourses, then, justified and indeed decreed the “white

man's (and woman's) burden" of empire and its ostensible uplift of the abject, "fluttered folk and wild" as "a mother leads her child," in the words of U.S. suffragist Anna Garlin Spencer in 1899, paraphrasing the more famous lines of British author Rudyard Kipling penned the year before.<sup>18</sup> And while some white supremacists like Lothrop Stoddard worried over the breaking of the empire upon white shores in a foam of colored immigrants, others like the British historian Charles H. Pearson predicted the awakening of slumbering races in the tropical band through the genius and goodwill of colonialism in prolonging life and introducing technology and science. "The day will come, and perhaps is not far distant," he wrote, "when the European observer will look round to see the globe girdled with a continuous zone of the black and yellow races, no longer too weak for aggression or under tutelage, but independent, or practically so, in government, monopolising the trade of their own regions, and circumscribing the industry of the European...."<sup>19</sup> Two years after that warning of racialized aggression in the abstract, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany exhorted Europe to rise above its parochial disputes to defend "your holiest possession" —Christianity and European civilization— against the impending threat of the "Yellow Peril."<sup>20</sup>

A mere decade after the German Kaiser's naming of the "yellow peril," Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905 prompted a young Oxford lecturer, Alfred Zimmern, to put aside his lesson on Greek history to announce to his class "the most historical event which has happened, or is likely to happen, in our lifetime; the victory of a non-white people over a white people."<sup>21</sup> Insular Japan, in its inability to repulse U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry's iron ships, had learned its lesson well, as was foreseen by Pearson, and its modern army and navy and economy were engineered in the West. W. E. B. Du Bois agreed with Zimmern's pronouncement: "the Russo-Japanese war has marked an epoch," he exulted. "The magic of the word 'white' is already broken.... The awakening of the yellow races

is certain. That the awakening of the brown and black races will follow in time, no unprejudiced student of history can doubt.”<sup>22</sup> Japan's 1905 victory, a historian concurs, broke the myth of white invincibility and influenced a regeneration of Asia generally.<sup>23</sup> And the prospect of colored resistance to white supremacy broadly, as hoped for by Du Bois and others, inspired anxieties and fears of the West's decline among those invested in that global order.

The impending conflict of color, as conjured by European imperial discourse and as provoked by European imperial political economy produced a field of study, race relations, to manage the problem of the twentieth century and forestall the prospect of a “race war.”<sup>24</sup> In the U.S., thus, the Institute of Race Relations was charged with studying “native peoples” to install “effective government” and continue economic subjugation, and the Institute of Pacific Relations, established in 1925, had as its prime objective, “to prevent a possible Oriental-Occidental war arising...out of an increasing bitterness over racial, religious, economic and political differences.”<sup>25</sup> That “bitterness” was not, in truth, generated by “differences,” but by the power politics of hegemony, dependence, and exploitation.

Instead, framed as a “problem,” colored subjects and their deeds were solutions to white masters when useful to them, as in supplying efficient, pliant labor, but they also caused apprehension, even dread when they aspired to full equality and a measure of self determination. “One speaks of race relations when there is a race problem,” declared the U.S. sociologist Robert Park, one of the founding figures of the field. To illustrate, he wrote of the “race problem” in South Africa where “the African does, to be sure, constitute a problem...”<sup>26</sup> Of course, from the “African” perspective, that is, from the San, Khoikhoi, Nguni, or Sotho point of view, the invading European might have been seen as the problem.<sup>27</sup> Race relations as a field thrived in the U.S. especially during the interwar



period of the twentieth century, and it took turns particular to the U.S. and Britain.<sup>28</sup> On the eve of World War II a “state of the field” U.S. race relations conference cautiously diagnosed an obvious condition, “the world seems to be reorganizing to some extent along racial lines.”<sup>29</sup>

## **Decolonization and Anti-Racism**

Race, a history of the World War II Pacific theatre notes, figured prominently in the conflict, and greater than its victory over the Russians, Japan's early advances against European colonies in Asia represented “a blow to white prestige” and “heightened the degree of racial self-consciousness” of a world divided between West and East, white and nonwhite.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, as was pointed out by U.S. historian Gerald Horne, Nazi Germany sustained the idea of white supremacy, while Japan threatened it.<sup>31</sup> And a March 1942 commentary in the *Times* (London) took the “problems” approach to Japan's opposition to white dominance when it declared: “Japan's attack has produced a very practical revolution in race relations.”<sup>32</sup>

Even before the war, Japan had championed the cause of peoples under European colonial rule, despite its own expansions into Manchuria and north China in the 1930s, which mimicked the European formula for national greatness. At the Treaty of Paris (1918-19) and the formation of the League of Nations, Japan proposed an amendment to the League's covenant that would ensure “equal and just treatment in every respect, making no distinction, either in law or in fact, on account of their race or nationality.” The colonial powers rejected that challenge to white supremacy, but Japan gained the esteem of Asian and African anti-colonialists as the “logical leader,” in the words of Du Bois, of “all coloured peoples.”<sup>33</sup>

The spread of zeal for national self-determination across the colonized world was hastened by the wartime reliance of the colonial

powers upon the reinforcements supplied by their colonial subjects. As British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan recalled, “what the two [world] wars did was to destroy the prestige of the white people. For not only did the yellows and blacks watch them tear each other apart, committing the most frightful crimes and acts of barbarism against each other, but they actually saw them enlisting each of their own yellows and blacks to fight other Europeans, other whites. It was bad enough for the white men to fight each other, but it was worse when they brought in their dependents.”<sup>34</sup>

During the Second World War, Britain, accordingly, worried over sending black troops from its Caribbean colonies to help defend India, and Indian nationalists were divided in their defense of British colonial India against a Japanese army allegedly fighting to liberate colonized Asia. The contradiction for Indian nationalists was heightened, reported Jawaharlal Nehru, when the Defence of India Act was used widely to suppress everyday activities and arrest and imprison Indians without trial. “So instead of the intoxication of the thought of freedom which would unleash our energies and throw us with a nation's enthusiasm into the world struggle,” remembered Nehru, “we experienced the aching frustration of its denial. And this denial was accompanied by an arrogance of language, a self-glorification of British rule and policy....”<sup>35</sup>

Although sharply divided on the war, the anti-colonial Indian National Congress passed on August 8, 1942 the Quit India Resolution, which called colonialism degrading and enfeebling of India and an offense to world freedom. The next day the British made numerous arrests and, in response, acts of mass resistance increased throughout India. “As the war developed,” Nehru observed, “it became ever clearer that the western democracies were fighting not for a change but for a perpetuation of the old order,” and both the Allied and Axis powers shared a common war interest—the preservation of white supremacy and the colonial status quo. Both sides, he noted, embraced legacies of “empire and racial

discrimination,” and in affirmation after the war, “the old imperialisms still functioned....”<sup>36</sup>

Beyond India's borders, the Japanese advance was simultaneously condemned and cheered by anti-colonial leaders. In British, French, and Dutch colonies in Asia, recalled Mahatir Mohamad, Malaysia's prime minister, “most Asians felt inferior to the European colonisers and rarely did we even consider independence a viable option.” The colonies, he explained, were structured “to serve the European demand for raw materials and natural resources,” and were thus dependencies. But Japan's expulsion of the British “changed our view of the world,” showing that “an Asian race, the Japanese” could defeat whites and with that reality dawned “a new awakening amongst us that if we wanted to, we could be like the Japanese. We did have the ability to govern our own country and compete with the Europeans on an equal footing.” So despite the suffering under Japanese wartime occupation and the “tremendous disappointment” over the return of the British after the war, Mohamad wrote, the shackles of “mental servitude” had been broken.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew testified that Japan's defeat of the British “completely changed our world,” and Gay Wuan Guay saw that the British “were not superhuman, supermen, as we used to think.”<sup>38</sup>

For the colonizers, Japan threatened their material and discursive possessions with which they were slow to part. Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill declared that Pearl Harbor was “a staggering blow” and “our prestige suffered with the loss of Hong Kong,” and he called India a necessary jewel in the British crown.<sup>39</sup> As he reassured the House of Commons in early 1942 amidst widespread, mass resistance to colonialism in India, the Atlantic Charter's provisions were not “applicable to [the] Coloured Races in [the] colonial empire, and that [the phrase] ‘restoration of sovereignty, self-government and national life’...[was] applicable only to the States and the Nations of Europe.”<sup>40</sup>

Reporting on that blow to British prestige on the “loss” of Hong Kong, a U.S. journalist expressed the humiliation of defeat along the color line: “They [the Japanese] paraded us, the hungry, bedraggled two hundred of us, through the crowded Chinese section” for all to see. “We were the perfect picture of the Fall of the White Man in the Far East. A white man lying disemboweled in the dirt, a white woman snatched naked and gang-raped...these pictures delighted the Jap heart...” And, she added, “if you in America could see your own people being marched by those little monkey men with the big bayonets, you would realize what the Japs intend to do to all the white men...”<sup>41</sup>

Japan's war intention involved a break from Western dependence, as was advocated by intellectuals during the 1930s in the cultural sphere as a flight from bankrupt Western traditions, which had been eagerly pursued since the Meiji restoration, and a return to Asian values as a source for national greatness. Crucial to the nation's survival amidst rampant Westernization was that regeneration and a pan-Asian solidarity under Japan's lead articulated as a new order for East Asia in resistance to European imperialism. U.S.-educated Matsuoka Yosuke as foreign minister issued his “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” in August 1940, even as Japan was economically dependent upon the West and was engaged in imperial expansion in East Asia. Still, the idea of decolonization resonated with Asians widely because, in the words of former U.S. president Herbert Hoover in 1942, “universally, the white man is hated by the Chinese, Malayan, Indian and Japanese alike...”<sup>42</sup>

The December 8, 1941 Imperial Rescript described Japan's war aims: to ensure Japan's integrity and to remove European colonialism from and bring stability to East and Southeast Asia. As Japan's army advanced into Southeast Asia, its generals proclaimed “Asia for Asians,” and General Yamashita Tomoyuki announced his intention to sweep away the arrogance of British colonizers and share the “pain and rejoicing with all coloured

peoples....”<sup>43</sup> And as its fortunes on the warfront diminished, Tokyo called a Great East Asia Conference in November 1943 that included representatives from Southeast Asia—Burma, the Philippines, and Thailand. There, Prime Minister Tojo Hideki declared that Japan was waging a war against “Anglo-Americans” who sought to perpetuate their colonial hold over Asia, and the conference concluded by urging cooperation based upon principles of co-existence and co-prosperity, respect of national sovereignty and cultural diversity, the economic development of all, and an abolition to all systems of racism.<sup>44</sup>

I have no intention to serve as an apologist for imperial Japan and its brutalities in this recounting of its anti-colonial appeal.<sup>45</sup> (Nor do I see as far distant the hypocrisy of Japan's declared union with “all coloured peoples” and the Allies' Four Freedoms and Atlantic Charter.) I simply observe the genuine opposition Japan posed, discursively and militarily, to the color line of the twentieth century, positioned as it was by its creators between the essentialized and yes, contrived racialized poles of white and nonwhite. As historians have shown, even close allies Britain and the U.S. held competing interests in the pursuit of the war, and although largely “white” as a nation in the global arena, the U.S. as I've shown at the beginning of this essay is significantly “nonwhite” in the composition of its peoples. Likewise Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans—peoples of the Third World—are patently not undividedly “nonwhite.” Those are fictive inventions of “self” and its “other,” and must be seen as such. And yet, those imagined communities acquire purchase in their actualization by human agents who make and write history.

If the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line, it was so because both sides of the divide observed and violated it on its terms. Japan's wartime achievement was to capitalize on that partition and the aspirations for transgression it stirred especially amongst the still colonized in Asia and Africa. And although Japan lost the war, a

British colonial officer predicted, it created conditions in Southeast Asia so revolutionary that there would be no easy return to white rule.<sup>46</sup> The mutually constituting shams of white superiority and Asian inferiority, along with the colonialism they bred, had been fatally bruised. B. V. A. Roling of the Netherlands, one of the eleven judges presiding over the Tokyo War Crimes Trial, conceded: “It was quite different in Japan [referring to the Tokyo and Nuremberg trials]. The Japanese defended the action of Japan in this Asian land and in the world, to liberate Asia and to change the world. And they had a case, in this respect...” Whereas, “Nuremberg was a clear case of aggression to dominate the European continent.”<sup>47</sup>

### Third World Liberation

There is a tendency within European historiography, critics have noted, to deny significance to the anti-colonial struggles of the Third World. Such histories credit Europeans with gifting independence to their former colonies and providing them the infrastructures for modern nation states. And they belittle the postcolonial efforts at nation building, and reference tribalism, ethnic and religious conflicts, corruption, and ineptitude as some of the consequences of decolonization.<sup>48</sup> A nostalgia for colonialism and the order it imposed over unruly, untutored, and racialized subjects pervades some of those writings. The era of European colonial rule in Asia, an author claimed, was “the most peaceful and stable period the East had ever known,” and without the “stabilising” influence of the West, Asia achieved so-called “freedom” and “independence” [author’s quotes] while sinking into “a morass of debt” and communist insurgencies.<sup>49</sup>

Those defenders of colonialism slight anti-colonialism’s efficacy along with the racism, which endorsed white expansion and rule. In fact, a scholar observed, while a crucial aspect of the white identity, race and racism are virtually ignored in academic discourses such as international

relations although European and American imperialists had few inhibitions about speaking in racist terms. “The greatest influence on racial thinking,” he continued, “was the emergence of resistance to Western domination” and fears of Western decline.<sup>50</sup> The anti-colonial, nation-building movement, which long preceded World War II and which white supremacists painted as anti-white, crested during that war both as discourse and strategies of resistance. Japan and nationalist leaders in Asia played key roles in that confrontation on both fronts, and they punctuated the contradiction between the West’s rhetoric of equality and freedom and its practice of colonial and neo-colonial subjugation.

And within the U.S., “the good war” of popular appeal neglects the racial fault lines and upheavals surfaced by the war, and denies the proficiency of anti-racist struggles, which connected white imperialism and its consort, racism abroad with the condition of nonwhites at home. As in the colonies, it was disloyalty, even sedition to point to the duplicitous nature of the war, allegedly pursued by the Allies for the preservation of democracy, and when African Americans praised the anti-racist, anti-colonial aspects of Japan’s conquests in Asia, they came under surveillance, attack, and censure. Even calls for equality and justice at home drew fire from those who profited from the “perfect war.”<sup>51</sup>

World War II alerted African Americans to a resurgent internationalism and solidarity with peoples of color based upon their common condition of subjugation and exploitation along the color line.<sup>52</sup> Walter White, NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) executive director during the war, testified: “World War II has given to the Negro a sense of kinship with other colored—and also oppressed—peoples of the world,” and the realization that “the struggle of the Negro in the United States is part and parcel of the struggle against imperialism and exploitation in India, China, Burma, Africa, the Philippines, Malaya, the West Indies, and South America.”<sup>53</sup> Such sentiments enabled

the postwar creation of the Third World and its non-aligned movement, which descended not from the immediate context of the Cold War but from anti-colonial, anti-racist struggles that long preceded the contest between capitalism and communism.

World War II, like World War I, revealed a fracture in the color line drawn by white supremacy, ascendant since the European and U.S. age of empire. Expansion was informed by “a consciousness of white solidarity,”<sup>54</sup> as was called for by Wilhelm II in the noonday of European imperialism, despite national rivalries and conflicts. A discursive field of race relations empowered that edifice of white privilege and nonwhite subjection, and resistance from below underscored the imperative for unity against the rising tide of color. In addition to the anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa throughout the twentieth century, Japan's embrace of modernity and its claims to equality posed a powerful threat to the empire of order, constituted as it was on white supremacy and race. Revealingly, an influential text in U.S. sociology during the 1920s likens race conflict to nationalism and the drive of subject peoples for liberation and self-determination.<sup>55</sup>

As others have pointed out, World War II was fought for, in the main and from worldview, the preservation of European and U.S. national sovereignty and their colonial possessions. Instead of marking discontinuity, the conflict was a link in an unbroken chain of relations centuries in the making. Equally longstanding were the decolonization, anti-racist movements, which were aided during the war by the idea and spectacle of colored troops and Japanese undermining of white supremacy's conceits. Those real prospects for the “colored races” and “majority of the inhabitants of earth” raised expectations for national liberation, a derivative idea from Europe and the U.S. to be sure, and fractured the myth of the color line. Of course, those too represented continuities as well as changes in the global order as witnessed in the dependency, which carried over from the



colonial to postcolonial condition. The nation-state was not the fulfillment of the rights and sovereignty promised by the Four Freedoms and Atlantic Charter, nor was Third World nationalism within the U.S. ultimately influential in securing full equality and membership under the law.

But for a brief moment, in the euphoria of independence struggled for and gained, twenty-nine nations of Asia and Africa assembled in 1955 at Bandung on the island of Java at the invitation of Indonesia's prime minister, Ali Sastroamidjojo. To open the conference, President Ahmed Sukarno welcomed the delegates. His nation having just emerged from 300 years of colonial servitude, Sukarno outlined their task: "Let us not be bitter about the past, but let us keep our eyes firmly on the future. Let us remember that no blessing of God is so sweet as life and liberty. Let us remember that the stature of all mankind is diminished so long as nations or parts of nations are still unfree." And recalling U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, Sukarno added, "Let us remember that the highest purpose of man is the liberation of man from his bonds of fear, his bonds of human degradation, his bonds of poverty—the liberation of man from the physical, spiritual and intellectual bonds which have for too long stunted the development of humanity's majority."<sup>56</sup>

American writer Richard Wright who rushed to witness the proceedings staged the setting: "Day in and day out these crowds would stand in this tropic sun, staring, listening, applauding; it was the first time in their downtrodden lives that they'd seen so many men of their color, race, and nationality arrayed in such aspects of power, their men keeping order, their Asia and their Africa in control of their destinies.... They were getting a new sense of themselves, getting used to new roles and new identities. Imperialism was dead here; and as long as they could maintain their unity, organize and conduct international conferences, there would be no return to imperialism...."<sup>57</sup>

Bandung, in fact, stood in a long line of such gatherings, beginning

with the Inter-American Conference of 1899 and Pan-African Conference of 1900, and others would follow it in turn.<sup>58</sup> And on September 24, 1946, as vice premier and foreign minister in the last British colonial government in India, Nehru charted a policy, which would guide the group called the non-aligned nations that crystallized around Bandung. India, he declared, “will follow an independent policy, keeping away from the power politics of groups aligned one against another. She will uphold the principle of freedom for dependent peoples and will oppose racial discrimination wherever it may occur. She will work with other peace-loving nations for international cooperation and goodwill without the exploitation of one nation by another.”<sup>59</sup>

Bandung, nonetheless, was, in Sukarno's stirring words, “the first international conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind,” and it would be the first articulation of a vision, which united the nations of the Third World and which offered to solve the problems created by Europe and its diaspora. Asians and Africans, Sukarno contended, “are united by more important things than those which superficially divide us. We are united, for instance, by a common detestation of colonialism in whatever form it appears. We are united by a common detestation of racialism. And we are united by a common determination to preserve and stabilize peace in the world.”<sup>60</sup> In that way, Wright observed, Bandung encompassed “the totality of human life on this earth.”<sup>61</sup> And the resonance of that dream of a new dispensation, a “new humanity...a new humanism” as deployed by Frantz Fanon,<sup>62</sup> of human rights and the equality of all races, sovereignty, cooperation, and world peace as was subscribed to as principles by the representatives at Bandung in their final communiqué was particularly poignant and sobering in the light of “international tension with its danger of an atomic world war.”<sup>63</sup>

“Free from mistrust and fear, and with confidence and goodwill towards each other,” the “Final Communiqué” resolved, “nations should

practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours....”<sup>64</sup> Tragically today that legacy of World War II and its aftermath is seldom acknowledged, rarely celebrated, and hardly observed.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> My father's mother and father and his siblings were in Hiroshima at the time. His family members served in Japan's military, and his father died of radiation sickness from the atomic bomb. On the nisei soldier, see Thomas D. Murphy, *Ambassadors in Arms: The Story of Hawaii's 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1955).

<sup>2</sup> For a critique of that literature, see Richard Polenberg, “The Good War? A Reappraisal of How World War II Affected American Society,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 100:3 (July 1992): 295-342.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Studs Terkel, *“The Good War”: An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Perret, *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph: The American People, 1939-1945* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 441.

<sup>5</sup> Terkel, “Good War” , 561.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998), xix, xx.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 268.

<sup>8</sup> John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> On the Japanese American experience during World War II, see Roger Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); and Gary Y. Okihiro and Joan Myers, *Whispered Silences: Japanese Americans and World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> CareyMcWilliams, *Brothers Under the Skin*, rev. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964), 3.

<sup>11</sup> T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, “Introduction,” in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, eds. T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>12</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1945]), 241, 246, 248-49, 252, 280. See also, B. L. Putnam Weale [pseudo. B. Lenox Simpson],

*The Conflict of Colour: The Threatened Upheaval throughout the World* (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

13. T. Lothrop Stoddard, *The French Revolution in San Domingo* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), vii. See also his preface in Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), v-vii.

14. Stoddard, *Rising Tide*, vi. See also, Weale, *Conflict of Colour*, 98-99, on the colored "invasion" of the white world for work.

15. *Hippocrates*, vol. 1, trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 105, 107, 109, 113, 115. See also, Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought From Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 80-115.

16. John Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), ix, xi-xiii.

17. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, ed. Thomas Bendyshe (New York: Bergman Publishers, 1969), 71-81, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 104, 110, 111, 113.

18. As quoted in Elizabeth Mary Holt, *Colonizing Filipinas: Nineteenth-Century Representations of the Philippines in Western Historiography* (Manila, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2002), 60. And Rudyard Kipling's *Verse, 1885-1926* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1927), 373-74. For an able summary of European expansion and racism, see Jane Samson, *Race and Empire* (Harlow, Britain: Pearson Education, 2005); and on U.S. imperialism and racism, see Rubin Francis Weston, *Racism in U.S. Imperialism: The Influence of Racial Assumptions on American Foreign Policy, 1893-1946* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972); and Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987).

19. Charles H. Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 13-14, 32-47, 67-68, 88-90. See also, Weale, *Conflict of Colour*, 299-302.

20. As represented in a commissioned painting, see *Review of Reviews* (London), December 1895, 474-75.

21. Quoted in Hugh Tinker, *Race, Conflict and the International Order: From Empire to United Nations* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 39.

22. Gerald Horne, *Race War: White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 45.

23. Christopher Thorne, "Racial Aspects of the Far Eastern War of 1941-1945," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (London) 66 (1980): 336. See also, Frank Füredi, *The Silent War: Imperialism and the Changing Perception of Race* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 29-30; and Horne, *Race War*, 251-53.

24. Tinker, *Race, Conflict*, 12-14; and Füredi, *Silent War*, 2, 27-28, 34.

25. Füredi, *Silent War*, 34, 50, 86-87.

- <sup>26</sup> Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1950), 82. For a "state of the field" affirmation of Park's views specific to the U.S. South, see Edgar T. Thompson (ed.), *Race Relations and the Race Problem: A Definition and Analysis* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1939).
- <sup>27</sup> As put properly by Fanon, the Third World must solve the problems for which Europe has no answers. Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (Paris: François Maspero, 1961), 241.
- <sup>28</sup> See e.g., Michael Banton, *Race Relations* (New York: Basic Books, 1967); and Robert Miles, *Racism After "Race Relations"* (London: Routledge, 1993).
- <sup>29</sup> Thompson, *Race Relations*, vii; Tinker, *Race, Conflict*, 12-14, 42-48; and Füredi, *Silent War*, 2, 7.
- <sup>30</sup> Thorne, "Racial Aspects," 341, 342. See also, Thorne, *Issue of War*, 119-20, 125-31, 135-36; Dower, *War Without Mercy*; Füredi, *Silent War*, 18; Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Horne, *Race War*.
- <sup>31</sup> Horne, *Race War*, xiv. See also, Tinker, *Race, Conflict*, 42-48.
- <sup>32</sup> Thorne, "Racial Aspects," 377.
- <sup>33</sup> As quoted in Füredi, *Silent War*, 42-43, 44.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.
- <sup>35</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (London: Meridian Books, 1956), 443, 448. See also, Leo Mates, *Nonalignment: Theory and Current Policy* (Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Economics, 1972), 46-48, 57-62.
- <sup>36</sup> Nehru, *Discovery*, 488-89, 492, 495-96, 498-502, 584.
- <sup>37</sup> Mahatir Mohamad, *A New Deal for Asia* (Tokyo: Tachibana Publishing, 1999), 15-17, 68.
- <sup>38</sup> Horne, *Race War*, 189, 196. See also, Thorne, *Issue of War*, 155, 156.
- <sup>39</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 4, *The Hinge of Fate* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 206.
- <sup>40</sup> As quoted in Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 26.
- <sup>41</sup> As quoted in Horne, *Race War*, 77, 78. For another overdrawn assessment of a British defeat at the hands of the Japanese, see James Leasor, *Singapore: The Battle That Changed the World* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968).
- <sup>42</sup> Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 4-10, 34-35, 49-50, 64-65; Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 192, 214-15, 217; and Thorne, *Issue of War*, 154.
- <sup>43</sup> Thorne, *Issue of War*, 144, 145-46, 148.

44. Iriye, *Power and Culture*, 97-98, 118-19; and Thorne, *Issue of War*, 113, 115.
45. For a similar tact, see Horne, *Race War*, viii-x.
46. Thorne, *Issue of War*, 153. See also, Horne, *Race War*, 198, 219, 279, 288-89.
47. As cited in Horne, *Race War*, 312.
48. Frank Füredi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1994), 272.
49. Leason, *Singapore*, 5, 306. See also, Thorne, *Issue of War*, 47, 201-03.
50. Füredi, *Silent War*, 1.
51. See e.g., Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 83-124; Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 22-43; and Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 117-21, 122-38, 141-42.
52. Conversely among the U.S. ruling class, that consciousness raised concern of a black insurrection. See e.g., Füredi, *Silent War*, 161; and Horne, *Race War*, 115-24.
53. *Chicago Defender*, March 3, 1945. As quoted in Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 7-8.
54. Füredi, *Silent War*, 29.
55. Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), 578.
56. As quoted in George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956).
57. Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (New York: World Publishing, 1956), 133-34. On African Americans and Bandung, see Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 167-73.
58. See Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007).
59. Mates, *Nonalignment*, 48.
60. Kahin, *Asian-African*, 11, 43.
61. Wright, *Color Curtain*, 208.
62. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), 246.

<sup>63.</sup> "Final Communique of the Asian-African Conference," Bandung, April 24, 1955, in Kahin, *Asian-African Conference*, 76-85.

<sup>64.</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

