When Japan Was "Champion of the Darker Races":

Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism*

by Ernest Allen, Jr.

In late September 1942, in a series of highly publicized raids, federal agents in Chicago arrested eighty-five African Americans. Three women and nine men were charged with sedition; the remainder were accused of draft evasion. Indicted on the former charge were Elijah Muhammad, Linn Karriem, and Pauline Bahar of the Allah Temple of Islam [ATOI]; Mittie Maud Lena Gordon, Seon Jones, William Gordon, and David J. Logan of the Peace Movement of Ethiopia [PME]; Charles Newby (aka Father Divine Haasan) of the Colored American National Organization [CANO]; Stokely Delmar Hart, James Graves, and Annabelle Moore of the Brotherhood of Liberty for the Black People of America [BLBPA], and Frederick H. Hammurabi Robb of the Century Service Exchange.

Several days earlier, five members of the Ethiopian Pacific Movement [EPM] — Robert O. Jordan (aka Leonard Robert Jordan), James Thornhill, Lester Holness, the Rev. Ralph Green Best, and Joseph Hartrey, an Irishman — were indicted in New York City on the more serious charges. Less raucously, back in May, ministers David X (aka David Jones and David Duvon) and Sultan Muhammad of the ATOI's Washington and Milwaukee temples, respectively, were detained on charges of sedition as well. In October the head of the International Reassemble of the Church of Freedom League, Inc. [IRCFL], the Rev. Ethelbert A. Broaster, was arrested in New Orleans. The following January, a second round of indictments occurred in East St. Louis, where Bishop David D. Erwin and General Lee Butler, two leaders of the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World [PMEW], were also charged with crimes against the State. In Newark, seven members of the House of Israel [HOI] — Brother Rueben Israel (aka Askew Thomas), Alfred Woods, Isaiah Cald, Robert Moses, Oscar Rumlin, Dawsey Johnson, and Jeremiah Ardis — were seized as draft evaders.

There had been earlier as well as subsequent arrests for draft evasion, too, including the roundup of 12 members of the Kansas City branch of the Moorish Science Temple of America [MSTA] in July 1942. These accusations against outspoken African American opponents of World War II involved violations of the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940. More to the point: in the eyes of government, the pro-Japanese loyalties of the defendants in the above cases constituted a threat to national security. Indeed, the reported remarks of an ATOI member appeared to give substance to such concerns:

the white devils desire the colored people to die with them in the Army and Navy; we don't want to be with him in the Army or out . . . the time has come when the white devils will be destroyed by dark mankind . . . the eagles seen on United States money and the uniforms of service men is the mark of the beast and if you have that mark the Japanese are going to shoot at it when they come here.

The best known today of all the above groups, the Allah Temple of Islam was an off-
ABSTRACT

When Japan Was “Champion of the Darker Races”: Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism

During World War II, some 125 African Americans were arrested for resisting the draft or for exercising seditious behavior. The twenty or so persons held on the more serious charges included Elijah Muhammad of the Allah Temple of Islam, a religious association; Mittie Maud Lena Gordon of the Peace Movement of Ethiopia, an African repatriation movement in the Garvey tradition; the Rev. Ethelbert A. Broaster of the International Reassemble of the Church of Freedom League, Inc., a black Hebrew organization; and Bishop David D. Erwin and General Lee Butler, leaders of the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World, an emigrationist group. The arrests brought to light the existence of strong, pro-Japanese sentiments among African Americans that the authorities, not to mention black middle-class spokespersons, quickly dismissed as the uttering of a small number of fanatics.

The reality, however, was that pro-Japan feelings among black workers as well as the black middle class had been building since the turn of the century, following Japan’s celebrated victory over the Russian fleet. This mood was given greater impetus during the worst years of the Great Depression by the appearance in Detroit of a Japanese national known as Major Satokata Takahashi, who took command of an association known as The Development of Our Own.

Mr. Takahashi’s initial organizing activities in Detroit, Chicago, and St. Louis, and the “ripple effects” therefrom, led to the messianic expectation on the part of tens of thousands of African Americans throughout the midwest, the upper and lower Mississippi Delta, east-central Oklahoma and the New York-New Jersey region that Japan’s imperial army would free them from the ravages of American racism. Through the employ of newspaper articles, FBI documents, military intelligence reports, and court records the author has reconstructed a history which, up until the present, had been almost completely forgotten.
shoot of the Nation of Islam [NOI], founded in Detroit in 1930 by the legendary W. D. Fard [pronounced Far-ad']. After Mr. Fard departed the midwest in 1934, the NOI became wracked by factional disputes bearing on 1) the propriety of human sacrifice; 2) NOI “disloyalty” to the United States; and 3) whether W. D. Fard should be considered a prophet of God, as he himself maintained, or God incarnate. In the resulting turmoil, one of Fard’s lieutenants, Elijah Muhammad, was forced to flee Detroit for Chicago, where a NOI branch — one ostensibly loyal to Mr. Muhammad — had been in operation since 1932. Mr. Muhammad christened his new association the Allah Temple of Islam; his followers became known as the Temple People. The Detroit NOI was eventually folded into the ATOI, but it was not until the late 1950s that the unified and greatly expanded organization re-established itself as the Nation of Islam.¹

The NOI worldview was dominated by an apocalyptic and prophetic vision which held that the African American, the “original” or “Asiatic” black man, fell into a state of social domination that began with slavery. This situation was a direct result of the machinations of an evil black scientist, Yakub, who grafted white people, also known as “devils,” from original black people a little more than 6,000 years ago. God had granted to whites the rule of the planet for six millennia, after which time a fiery battle was to take place in the sky where they would suffer permanent defeat, and the original sense of order restored to earth. The “devil’s” rule was actually up in 1914, with an additional grace period granted by Allah in order to allow the Nation of Islam to save and convert as many African Americans as possible to their original religion.² This fusion of millenarian and African American nationalist traditions, with Japan’s acknowledged leadership role couched in messianic terms. But the NOI’s now familiar story of the Mother Ship, or Ezekiel’s Wheel,³ was cast in a somewhat different light in the early 1940s. The Mother Ship, it seems, was in the possession of Japan, the blueprints for which had been drawn up “in the Holy City of Mecca and sent to the Japanese government for development”.⁴

Japan has had for many years a monster airplane, known to the Moslems as a “mother airplane”. The “mother airplane” is said to carry 1,000 small airplanes, each of which carries bombs, which will be used against the white man. Each bomb is said to be such size to penetrate the earth’s surface for a distance of one mile, and to destroy an area of fifty square miles when it explodes. The Moslems have also told their people that the Japanese have superior equipment of every kind and description.⁵

A Chicago-based organization begun in late 1932, the Peace Movement of Ethiopia essentially advocated “Garveyism without Garvey” — that is, embraced in its totality the doctrine of the Universal Negro Improvement Association [UNIA] but with neither desire nor need for Marcus Garvey’s personal leadership. Ideologically speaking, the PME came to rely more upon the support of white racists for implementing its “Back-to-Africa” program than had the UNIA, but in truth, that was the very direction in which Mr. Garvey himself had been heading after 1921.⁶ PME head and former UNIA-member Mittie Maud Lena Gordon sought support for African American repatriation to Africa from President Roosevelt in 1933, and, towards the latter part of the decade received initial legislative backing for such from the notoriously anti-black Mississippi Senator Theodore Bilbo.⁷ Intertwined with the PME’s repatriation program was a commitment to Japanese war aims. Among numerous other charges, President Gordon was accused of having declared that “on December 7th, 1941, one billion black people struck for freedom,” a rather unambiguous reference to Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor.⁸

Much less is known of the Colored American National Organization, reportedly founded in Chicago by Charles Newby and Stokely Delmar Hart in 1939.⁹ Newby, who once matriculated at Leavenworth following a conviction for auto theft, was credited with being the originator of the slogan, “Talk Black, See Black, Walk Black and Mind Your Own Black Business.”¹⁰ It was said that at CANO gatherings Japanese General Hideki Tojo “was praised as a coming saviour of the Negro from the American white,” and that “virtually all Negro leaders, including Joe Louis, his wife
and mother, were loudly condemned. The group went so far as to advocate violence against all white people seen on the Southside." Newby was deposed as president following a split in August 1942, immediately after which he and Hart formed the Brotherhood of Liberty for the Black People of America. CANO and BLBPA were also said to be synonymous with the Washington Park Forum (thus called because of its regular meetings held at the park).

In the late 1920s Mr. Hammurabi (as F.H. Hammurabi Robb eventually came to be known on Chicago's South Side) had edited a small volume entitled The Negro in Chicago. From the 1930s onward he directed the World Wide Friends of Africa (known also as the House of Knowledge), which some three decades later continued to sponsor weekly activities encouraging African Americans "to know themselves, their nation and the world." In 1956 Mr. Hammurabi screened films on Africa at ATOI's very first national convention; in 1942 he was charged with "speaking in behalf of a Japanese victory and showing motion pictures of the Pearl Harbor attack, obtained secretly from Jap sources, at meetings of the Brotherhood of Liberty."29

Founded in New Orleans in 1936, with an additional chapter located at Chicago, the International Reassemble of the Church of Freedom League, Inc. professed belief in "One God, One King, One Race," an apparent take on Marcus Garvey's slogan, "One God, One Aim, One Destiny" (both probably drawn from the Christian theme of "One Lord, One Faith, and One Baptism"). Appealing to Old Testament "proof-texts" — principally Deuteronomy 28 and Jeremiah 12 — the IRCFL held that African Americans were Jews, that the progeny of enslaved Africans carried to the western hemisphere were the direct descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The group's leader, the Rev. E. A. Broaster, had emigrated to the U.S. from Belize, British Honduras in the early 1920s when he was better known as pugilist Frankie Anslem. During his 13 years in the ring, Anslem reportedly earned "a fair livelihood trading punches with the best boxers the nation had to offer at his weight."30 Arrested on charges of advising members of his group to refuse induction into the army, Rev. Broaster does not appear to have harbored particularly strong pro-Japanese tendencies. Yet he was close to the PMEW in East St. Louis as well as the Chicago-based Washington Park Forum, having addressed both groups during 1941.

Perhaps the most important of all the pro-Japan groups due to its wide geographic influence, the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World was founded in Chicago in 1932 and transported to St. Louis in that same year. From there the PMEW extended its network to Kansas City, the southeastern Missouri Boot Heel region, southern Illinois, the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, and east-central Oklahoma. More so than any of the other associations, the Pacific Movement expressed a fundamental dualism in its ideological perspective. Torn between the demand for full citizenship rights in the U.S. and the desire for political self-determination through emigration, the PMEW's line alternately vacillated between support for a Japanese military invasion of the U.S. with the aim of securing black equality at home, and emigration to Africa, Japan, or Brazil with the presumed help of the Japanese government. From 1934 to 1940 the group was headed by Rev. David D. Erwin, who simultaneously occupied a position of leadership in Triumph the Church of the New Age, a Holiness denomination. By 1939 PMEW membership in East St. Louis was said to be virtually indistinguishable from that of the Triumph Church.31

The House of Israel taught that African Americans were the real Hebrews, that Adam was black, and that the black race was once supreme on earth, having lost its exalted position out of disobedience to God. The group operated schools in which the Hebrew language was taught, and claimed that they were "enslaved by the white race because that language is excluded from the public schools."32 Like the IRCFL, the HOI appears to have been less pro-Japan than anti-American.

Of all the African American organizations charged with seditious activities during the war, the Moorish Science Temple of America was the only one to have been in existence prior to the Great Depression, hav-
ing been started by prophet Noble Drew Ali in Newark, New Jersey, in 1913. Although its early activities remain shrouded in mystery, the Chicago temple was established in 1925. And Chicago remained the organization’s center of gravity throughout the depression, despite the occurrence of serious organizational splits in the wake of Ali’s death from tuberculosis in July 1929. From 16 active temples in 1928, based in cities such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Richmond, the MSTA (or, more precisely, the MSTA faction led by Charles Kirkman-Bey from mid-1929 onwards) had grown to some fifty branches by the early 1940s. Suspected of harboring strong, pro-Japanese sentiments during World War II, the organization became the target of extensive efforts on the part of the FBI to unearth criminal evidence to that effect. But it was only in Kansas City that MSTA members were actually arrested, and then solely on charges of draft-evasion.

And, finally, in 1935 the Ethiopian Pacific Movement was founded in New York City by Robert O. Jordan and Ashima Takis. A Filipino national who represented himself as a Japanese, Takis earlier had played a leading role in the PMEW in St. Louis; he subsequently left the EPM as well. Born in Kingston, Jamaica around the turn of the century, Robert O. Jordan had earned quite a reputation as a street-corner agitator in Harlem during the thirties and early forties. Visitors to EPM Sunday gatherings held at a meeting hall at Lenox and 113th could hear the “Harlem Hitler,” as he was called, regularly expound on his refusal to be drafted, give prayers for an Axis victory, declare his intention to fight on the side of Japan, and express the wish that after the defeat of the Allies, he would have President Roosevelt pick his cotton!

**NATIONALISM AND MILLENNIALISM**

More than anything else, the flowering of pro-Japan tendencies among American blacks in the era of the Great Depression represented a confluence and crystallization of two long-standing trends in African American thought: nationalism and millennialism. As an unassimilated national minority, African Americans from the late 18th century onward had manifested general tendencies towards full inclusion into American society, on the one side, and an equal penchant towards group autonomy, on the other. At times this latter sentiment has blossomed into desires for an autonomous, black nation-state. But due to the demonstrated futility of securing black self-determination within the United States, African American nationalist movements have often tended to exhibit a strong emigrationist character. In the 20th century, of course, the most significant organization of this type was Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association.

An admixture of apocalyptic vision, messianic anticipation, and prophecy belief, millennialism derives from Jewish-Christian religious traditions. Strictly speaking, of course, the Millennium refers to that future time when Christ, having returned to earth and smitten Satan and his minions, shall reign for a thousand years; and after which time Satan shall be released from the bottomless pit into which he had been cast, and defeated once again, forever. In more generalized terms, historian Eric Hobsbawm has characterized the principal characteristics of millenarian social movements in the following way: “a profound and total rejection of the present, evil world, and a passionate longing for another and better one”; second, an ideology of the type embodied in Jewish and Christian messianic forms, where it is foretold that the coming of the Messiah shall bring all suffering to an end, and peace and justice reign forever; and third, “a fundamental vagueness about the actual way in which the new society will be brought about.”

Perhaps one of the earliest recorded manifestations of millenarian sentiment among African Americans can be found in Gabriel’s insurrection which took place in Virginia in 1800, and where the enslaved insurrectionists identified themselves with the Israelites of the Old Testament. Along with the huge social displacements occasioned by the industrializing of American society during the last quarter of the 19th century and into the next, came the flourishing of prophecy belief marked, in African American communities, by the spread of Pentecostal and Holiness churches. During the Great Depres-
tion, millenarian sentiments underwent a second grand awakening among African Americans as well, as attested by the proliferation of prophetic religious denominations such as Daddy Grace's United House of Prayer for All People, Prophet Jones' Church of the Universal Triumph, Father Divine's Peace Mission, and Prophet F. S. Cherry's Church of God.

But the Depression Decade also witnessed the rise of what has been aptly characterized as messianic nationalism, a uniquely African American expression marked by the confluence of secular nationalist and religious millenarian traditions. To be sure, such forms had been witnessed earlier with the appearance of Black Hebrew denominations around the turn of the century, as well as within the Garvey movement, where Marcus Garvey himself was sometimes likened to a Negro Moses. Moreover, apocalyptic references not infrequently colored Garvey's vision of a redeemed Africa. A millennial streak was seen to run through MSTA doctrine as well. Equating Marcus Garvey's relation to Noble Drew Ali as that of forerunner John the Baptist to Christ, the MSTA's Holy Koran held Ali to be "the last Prophet in these days ... who was prepared divinely in due time by Allah to redeem men from their sinful ways; and to warn them of the great wrath which is sure to come upon the earth."40

Messianic nationalism emerged full-blown, however, only during the period of sharp social deterioration marked by the Great Depression. It arrived in the form of Black Hebrew associations such as the International Reassemble of the Church of Freedom League and the House of Israel, and proto-Islamic organizations such as the Nation of Islam/Allah Temple of Islam. A more secular version could be seen in groups such as the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World, the Peace Movement of Ethiopia, and the Ethiopian Pacific Movement. And out of this millenarian envelope, in a fascinating sort of way, Japan arose as the impersonal messiah — and General Tojo as a more intimate one — of tens of thousands of black Americans. The key to this last puzzle may be found by briefly tracing the origins of the pro-Japan movement among African Americans back to the turn of the century.

THE DAWN OF PRO-JAPANESE SENTIMENT

Pro-Japanese sentiment among African Americans dates back to the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905, when the Russian navy suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of Japanese warships. Throughout the Asian continent, Japan's victory produced first astonishment, then euphoria. Sun Yat-sen probably put it best:

Since the rise of the Japanese, the Caucasians dare not look down upon other Asiatic peoples. Thus the power of Japan not only enables the Japanese to enjoy the privileges of a first class nation, but enhances the international position of other Asiatic peoples. It used to be the general belief that the Asiatics could not do what the Europeans could do. Because the Japanese have learned so well from Europe, and because we know we Chinese can do as well as the Japanese, we see the possibility of doing as well as the Europeans.44

Japan had "vindicated the honor of Asia and proved to the world that, given equal opportunities, the Asians are inferior to none — in any sphere of life, military or civil," proclaimed the Indian nationalist Lajpat Rai. Moreover, Japan's new-found prestige gave inspiration to people of African descent as well. The arch-racist Lothrop Stoddard noted that the Russo-Japanese war "produced all over the Dark Continent intensely exciting effects."44 From the columns of the New York Age, Archibald Grimke heaped praise upon the "little brown iconoclasts" in grand Biblical style:

Go ... ye little brown men, conquering and to conquer. Sheath not your terrible sword, lay not aside yet your bloody scourge. Ye shall overthrow ... Ye have thrown Russia down, ye are destined to throw down others than Russia in their pride, in their lust for power, to bring to the dust the mighty of the earth."

It was not without cause that the "defeat of Russia by Japan," as Du Bois later noted, would give "rise to a fear of colored revolt against white exploitation" on the part of the western powers.46

Almost from the very beginning, Japan's attraction to African Americans was twofold: as a model for political and economic development, and as a potential military ally
against U.S. racism. An early example of the former came from Booker T. Washington in 1906: "The Japanese race is a convincing example of the respect which the world gives to a race that can put brains and commercial activity into the development of the resources of a country," proclaimed the Sage of Tuskegee. "Musings of Japanese military intervention could be found in an uncompleted short story begun by black journalist John Edward Bruce in 1912, where the President's earnest call for volunteers to repel an invasion of the U.S. by Japan resulted in a temporary dropping of the color bar. But here the erasure of the color line emerged as an indirect result of Japanese militarism; by the 1930s numerous African Americans were prepared to welcome a more direct route.

Remarkably, the African American embrace of Japan, generally speaking, had developed independent of any direct efforts on the part of the Japanese themselves. If, perchance, black folk had been apprised of the contempt with which many Japanese regarded other people of color, their response might have been more equivocal. In any case, African Americans were duly impressed when Baron Makino, Japan's principal delegate to the 1919 Peace Conference, submitted an amendment (ultimately rejected) to the League of Nations Covenant supporting the principal of racial equality. Conversely, circles close to the Japanese government were becoming favorably aware of African American interest in Japan. At a meeting called in early December 1918 for the purpose of electing delegate-observers to the peace convention at Versailles, Marcus Garvey, an advocate of "Asia for the Asiatics" as well as "Africa for the Africans," warned that "The next war will be between the [N]egroes and the whites unless our demands for justice are recognized. . . With Japan to fight with us, we can win such a war." Coming from the internationally recognized head of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the message was apparently well received in Japan. In his work of fiction, Nichi-Bei senso yume monogatari [Japanese-America War Fantasy] published in 1921, retired Japanese Army General Kojiro Sato gleefully portrayed Japan's destruction of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, the seizure of Hawaii, and the invasion of the United States main-
can Americans, conclusive evidence has yet to surface on that score. But it is nonetheless difficult to believe that the state-side organization, or a branch of one of the many other ultra-nationalist societies based in Japan, did not contribute in some way to Japan’s pre-war intelligence and espionage operations in the U.S. Whatever the case, one will be content, for the moment, with the knowledge that

In America, the Black Dragon Society was a patriotic, ultra-right wing extremist group. Their love for Japan created an ethnocentric frame of thought that Americans found radical and repulsive. Counterintelligence agents noted that the name of the Black Dragon often appeared under names of Japanese patriotic societies and good will institutions raising funds for the Japanese Army. Distinctive robes were part of their ceremonies: the FBI believed that members met covertly, elaborately adorned with black hakamas, or dress kimonos, accented with a circular white crest on the back.

Save for a number of significant exceptions, the techniques utilized by Japan to positively influence African Americans were those which it used in Formosa, Korea, and Manchuria. The following description of their activities in the Philippines is representative:

Delegations of Filipinos are entertained in Japan with the delightful hospitality of that country. Newspapermen, legislators, teachers, business men have fraternized with the members of their respective professions in Tokyo, Yokohama, and Kyoto. Corresponding groups of Japanese have visited the Philippines. Prominent Filipino business men are associated with Japanese business ventures in the Philippines, or retained as lawyers by Japanese interests in the Islands. There has developed in the Islands a small but active “pro-Japanese” group the members of which are aggressively campaigning to hasten the day when a Japanese orientation shall supplant the present connections with the United States. Numerous young Filipinos are learning Japanese and at least one of them has attended the Imperial Military Academy.

Lacking a genuine national bourgeoisie with substantive capital or industrial holdings, African Americans never engaged in economic ventures with Japanese businessmen at the level implied above. Nor is there any record of African Americans’ having learned Japanese in any similar capacity. But by the late 1930s a small but significant number of black American intellectuals and educators such as T. Thomas Fortune, James Weldon Johnson, Robert Russa Moton, and George Schuyler had visited Japan and formed positive impressions. Following his own trip to Japan and Manchuria in early 1937, W. E. B. Du Bois waxed ebullient over the social achievements of Japanese fascists in Manchuko: “...the amount already accomplished in four years is nothing less than marvelous. The people appear happy, and there is no unemployment. There is public peace and order.” Unimpressed by such coercive efficiency, however, was Langston Hughes, who was deported from Japan in 1933 as a result of his contact with Tokyo Leftists, as well as open criticisms of that country’s anti-democratic policies! On the other hand, the proposed marriage in 1934 of Prince Lij Araya Abebe of Ethiopia and Masako Kuroda, daughter of a Japanese viscount, was viewed by some African Americans as heralding the day of an Asian-African global unity. Nor was African American identification with Japan as “liberator of the darker peoples” harmed by the adoption of a fictive, “Asiatic” identity by members of small, mass-based, black organizations such as the MSTA and the NOI/ATOI.

Rumors of war between the United States and Japan had flourished intermittently from the period just prior to World War I through the 1920s. When they re-emerged following the latter’s invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Japanese government embarked upon greater efforts to ascertain as well as to influence African American opinion. Such efforts, according to black journalist Roi Ottley, came to something of a blossom after the Depression, when for the first time they made some inroads with the rank-and-file. They sought out discouraged elements among the teeming thousands of the urban areas. Through the Ministry of Propaganda, they found a few radical nationalists, fiercely anti-white, who would lend an ear to talk of an all-colored utopia. Besides, a number of Japanese of attractive manners and sound knowledge of American affairs came to the United States and posed as menials, seeking social ties with Negro domestics and professing inviolable racial kinship. By assiduously cultivating contacts, these people insinuated themselves into the Negro community, and, in time, some Negroes came to look upon the Japanese as belonging to a messianic race, which would lead black men out of bondage.

One of the most effective of these propagandists was a man known as “Major” Satokata Takahashi. (Although Takahashi’s name suffered a number of variations in spelling by government agencies and the press, the above
is how it appeared on his marriage certificate.) Another was the scholarly Yasuichi Hikida, who arrived in the U.S. in 1920, worked long and effectively among New York City blacks, and was deported following Pearl Harbor. Of the leading pro-Japanese organizations among African Americans in the 1930s, Mr. Takahashi, at one time or another, had assumed the direct control of one, founded two others, and maintained close ties with at least several more — including the NOI and the MSTA. When his “disciples” — direct or otherwise — were indicted on charges of sedition in late 1942 and early 1943, Takahashi had already served three years of what was to become a six-year-plus prison sentence.

Born Naka Nakane in Japan in 1875, Takahashi emigrated to Victoria, British Columbia around the turn of the century, where he married Annie Craddock, an Englishwoman. In 1921 the Nakane family moved from Canada to Tacoma, Washington, but after experiencing severe, financial difficulties five years later, Mr. Nakane suddenly disappeared, apparently abandoning his wife and four children to their own resources. His activities from 1926 through 1931 remain obscure. Adopting the name Satokata Takahashi and spuriously claiming to be a retired Japanese Army major, he resurfaced in the spring of 1932 at a Chicago meeting of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. By the fall the 5 ft. 5 in. “Little Major,” or “Little God of the East,” as he was variously known to his followers, had settled in Detroit. According to Detroit Police detective Lawrence Johnson, who testified before a hearing called by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in September 1933, Takahashi had resided in Detroit for about a year. His activities came to the attention of the INS in early 1933, and complaints from African Americans regarding the content of his speeches were reportedly made at FBI offices from the following October onward.

Later questioned by the FBI, Takahashi claimed that his occupation was “special doctoring, a kind of religion in which he acted as a preacher,” and that after having received instruction in that field at an institution similar to a seminary in Japan, he had become a Shinto priest. FBI analysts surmised that his “special doctoring” activities had something to do with one of the Shinto faith-healing sects of Japan. However, there was “no indication that he was spreading the Shinto faith or was interested in the establishment of a Shinto shrine or temple.” But although Takahashi’s real mission may have been the stimulating of pro-Japanese loyalties among the African American population, such a task was hardly antithetical to the teachings of Shinto. It was assumed by many that Japan and the United States would eventually go to war over the question of Pacific territories. In that context, Takahashi’s attempts to organize African Americans along pro-Japanese lines appear to have stemmed from a desire to facilitate the disruption of economic production and military conscription within the U.S.

One of Takahashi’s early associates averred that the former represented himself as a Japanese official who “had been sent to the United States by the Japanese government to organize the colored people.” Japanese Baron Tanaka, it was said, had prepared a memorial outlining the policy of the Black Dragon Society in Japan. Among other measures, the Tanaka memorial proposed the unification of all the darker peoples of the world by pursuing a policy of “Asia for Asiatics.” Japan would assist such people “to organize themselves and form their own government.” The associate, whose testimony was frequently unreliable, said that Takahashi “claimed to be affiliated not only with the Black Dragon Society but the Japanese Consulate at San Francisco, California.” Japanese “situated in various communities in the United States” were presently working among black Americans, Takahashi affirmed. The moment for organizing was ripe, for “the people of the United States were unsuspecting and would laugh at such propaganda but, in fact, the time was not far off when Japan would take action.”

THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR OWN

One of the “most publicized movements attempted in 1933,” The Development of Our Own was initiated “by George Grimes, a city worker, as a legitimate political organization.” “Through Organization, Education and Co-
operation and otherwise," TDOO's official aim was "to advance the interest of its members along the lines of Cultural, Intellectual, Social, Industrial and Commercial activities and otherwise as deemed necessary by the organization." Takahashi, it was said, "became identified with the group and later succeeded in supplanting Grimes, and used the organization to urge Negroes to join with all other colored people — yellow, brown, and black — against all white people." He collected followers from existing organizations as well. After Nation of Islam members participated in what was reported as a human sacrifice, NOI founder W. D. Fard was instructed by Detroit detectives to leave the city in December 1932. After clandestinely returning to his former residence at the Hotel Traymore, located at the intersection of Jefferson and Woodward near the waterfront, Fard was arrested once again in late May 1933. Given a final warning, he left the Motor City for good. It was around this time, presumably, that a handful of NOI members followed Takahashi into The Development of Our Own. Although Elijah Muhammad's principal loyalties lay with the NOI until his own abrupt departure from Detroit in 1934, he, too, seems to have had nothing but kind words for Takahashi.

Internal changes seem to have preoccupied TDOO during its first several months of existence. Having filed as a non-profit organization in October 1933, TDOO voted out its initial group of officers the following month. Despite the apparent turmoil, the organization quickly established "branches in Mt. Clemens, Roseville, River Rouge, Ecorse, in the 8-Mile road area and elsewhere." The apparent core of the movement was the Birdhurst Center at Eight Mile Road, where membership ranks quickly swelled to 500. One of the largest Detroit units met at the Arion Hall, located at 2131 Chene Street. Another convened regularly at 3404 St. Antoine.

Although the principal organizing took place in the Detroit area, there were also reports of a chapter in Indianapolis built on the organizational ruins of the Moorish Science Temple. By late 1933 TDOO was said to have 14 chapters and some 10,000 members. Apart from acknowledging its working-class base, one can say little else about the organization's constituency at present — including the number of female members. Whether, as in the case of the Nation of Islam, TDOO membership drew mainly from the most recently arrived, and the most impoverished, of Detroit's black southern migrants, or, like the PMEW in St. Louis and East St. Louis, from those who had established urban residency at a time more proximate to World War I, remains to be discovered.

Under Takahashi's stewardship, "Five Guiding Principles" bound TDOO adherents to an overarching code of conduct:

1. To act in accordance with God's will. Thus, there is nothing to fear but God.
2. To be true to ourselves. Those who are not true to themselves cannot be true to others.
3. To help ourselves instead of relying on others. God will only help those who help themselves.
4. To be part of our community and our country. Less talk, more act and self-sacrifice are necessary if a group is to act together. By giving in we gain, by surrender we win.
5. To beautify this world is our final goal. Hence we must first have the beauty of heart within ourselves.

Whether or not these principles were originated by Mr. Takahashi is uncertain, but precedents for such guidelines certainly existed in the first Five Principles of Buddha, also known as the Pansil, the Five Relationships and supplementary Five Norms of Confucian thought, as well as the Five Teachings of the Kurozumi Kyo faith-healing sect of Shinto. In the hands of one of its black minister-leaders, the organization's millenarian appeal could also be readily observed:

The Development of Our Own is a friendly organization for the darker peoples of America. Let us organize ourselves for one aim and one destiny under this organization. We must do this, because we are living in a critical time — a time for dark peoples to organize themselves for one common cause.

Why can't we as a people see the signs of the times? The Bible says, "You shall see the sign in the East, then you will know that the time of the Son of Man is near at hand." He will gather up his elect.

By organizing ourselves under the "five guiding principles," we shall be able and ready to meet Him.

In contrast to the less-tempered public speeches for which he was often known, Mr.
Takahashi’s initial column in Detroit’s premier black newspaper, the Tribune-Independent, fit well within existing, African American, middle-class, “mainstream” thought. Calling for African American unity, Takahashi immodestly attributed a new-found advocacy among Detroit blacks for the “unification of the colored race,” to his own organizing efforts over the previous eight months:

I am pleased to announce to you ladies and gentlemen, that my earnest [effort] in cooperation with you loyal members, has given some effect to our principles, in such a way as to create a new tendency among your people toward racial unity. The greatest obstacles to our desire for unity of race are not so much external barriers, but internal quarrels and discord, due to selfish ambitions, petty jealousies, narrow vision, and what not. “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” We see many organizations wrecked by internal strife, and many nations weakened and held down, by internal divisions and factionalism.

Central to the question of internal, race unity was the need for harmonious relations between men and women. But gender unity could be achieved only on the basis of full political rights for women within the general movement for African American justice:

Men and women should respect each other, and strive to develop harmony with one another, although there [seem] to be peculiar ideas prevailing among a certain group of men, that the women should not hold any office in an organization, nor have voice at the meeting.

Permit me to say to you men, that our international supervisor is a woman, if you please, with whom some of the members of the board of control have already had an interview. She is now in Chicago doing wonderful work among the white people, though different from my work.

This “work among the white people,” for which the international supervisor had “demonstrated herself capable” of carrying out, was “to create a new tendency among the white race for racial equality, that is, to convince them of the fact that they have been creating many enemies for many years, not in the foreign land, but right here [with]in this country’s national boundary.” The population of the “suppressed colored race” was increasing rapidly: “Let colored citizens have their due place, before it is too late. This is our advice to the white race, in the solution of the racial problem.” But Takahashi himself refused to address gatherings where whites were present.

For the most part, Takahashi’s speeches before meetings of organizations such as the Bethel A.M.E. Church, or his writings in the Detroit Tribune-Independent, remained cautionary. But a number of the “Little Major’s” preferred lectures possessed a more flavorful character: for example, “The Sinking Ship and the Lifeboat,” and “White Supremacy and the White Tyrant” — most likely delivered before black, working-class audiences. In his “white supremacy” speech, Takahashi asserted that, by following “Japan’s five guiding principles,” African Americans would succeed in overthrowing white domination:

I come here to promote international unity between the dark people of Japan and the dark people of America to lead them to a better and fuller life.

What Japan has done in the past 70 years, the Negroes, too, can do by accepting Japan’s five guiding principles. The white man will give you little. If you obtain anything it will be done through conquest. You must fight.

Japan has succeeded because everyone worked as a unit. You must work as a unit. Follow Japan’s guiding principles. Japan is a world power equal to Great Britain and the United States and fearing nothing but God.

And what of Japan’s stake in this outpouring of Asian solidarity for Black Americans?

Three-fourths of the world are black people and one-fourth is white, and it is not in accordance with God’s will for one-fourth of the world to rule the three-fourths, which are black. Now that Japan has gained rightful recognition in the world, she is willing to help other dark races. We know that the black people of the United States are citizens thereof, and can not help Japan directly in case of war, but there are other things that can be done. If the white man knew that you sympathized with Japan, he would not allow you to shoulder arms or go near an ammunition plant in case of war. In some parts of this country you have been shot to death or lynched [while] wearing the uniform.

Japan is making overtures to you. If she fails you fail. This is the last chance of the dark races of America to overcome white supremacy and to throw the white tyrants off your backs.

In his lecture invoking western civilization as a “sinking ship,” Takahashi assured his listeners that Japan was the “lifeboat,” the hope of Black America:

You are clinging to an era of Caucasian civilization and psychology because you are afraid to leave the sinking ship. I say the sinking ship because western prestige is doomed. It is pursuing its inevitable course to the graveyard of obscure history.
Here is the Negro's chance to freedom in life. Leave the sinking ship. Civilization's march westward has reached its farthest western shore on the Pacific Coast of America. West of America is what? Hawaii, the Philippines and your friend Japan, the lifeboat of racial love made radiant by the star of the East, Japan."

On one occasion, probably around early 1934 when he was out on bail, Takahashi spoke at the Golden Leaf Baptist Church in Flint, Michigan. Describing the talk, Reverend Wilkerson Vaughn later recalled that Takahashi expressed a desire to organize African Americans so that if they needed Japan "they would come to our rescue. He didn’t expect us to fight with them in case they went to war with the United States, but he did [want] it so that they could talk with us in an organization, said they had the second largest navy in the world . . . He asked how many people (colored) were in Flint, he wanted at least 4,000 colored people in this organization, he wanted all of them, but at least 4,000." On yet another occasion, from a speech entitled "Japan’s Divine Mission," Takahashi outlined three steps by which this mission "was to be fulfilled: namely to liberate Manchuria, then already accomplished; to unite Japan, Manchukuo and China into one bloc; and to beautify the world by emancipating all the colored races from oppression." Also extending a Pan-Asiatic lifeline to black Detroiters was Muhammad A. Kahn, an East Indian who warned TDOO audiences that "the white man has been lying to you ever since Lincoln saved you," and that "you dark races had better wake up and organize." At another meeting Kahn affirmed, in part, "that the dark races are tired of being fooled by the white race," and that for anything to be accomplished they must organize against the latter. India was now ready to join Japan in order to secure its independence from England. Not surprisingly, the proselytizing efforts of Takahashi and his lieutenants in Detroit and surrounding communities quickly fell under the surveillance of the Detroit Police Department, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and military intelligence services as well. According to one observer, "The assignment to uncover Takahashi’s local seditious activities was given to two colored members of the Detroit Police Department, Officers Laurence [or Lawrence] Johnson and Alfred Perry. They worked on the case secretly for six months, and attended meetings of the Development of Our Own." The FBI, for its part, unveiled plans to prosecute Takahashi for having impersonated a foreign government official. In early September 1933 the “Little Major” was taken into custody by the INS, which promptly scheduled a hearing to determine his eligibility for deportation. Three months later he was arrested with several other men at the home of a supporter, Pearl Sherrod. "Suspected of Aiming at Overthrow of White Race," rang the caption of a news story devoted to the affair, but government prosecutors eventually narrowed their focus to Takahashi’s immigration violations: entering the United States without inspection, failure to possess a valid visa, and being an alien ineligible to citizenship. The others — Emerson Sherrod, 20; William Johnson, 49, and Chosuke Okhi, 45, also known as George — were released without charge the following day. One of Takahashi’s close associates, Muhammad A. Kahn, 35, a native of India, was subsequently interrogated and set free, after being warned that he could no longer wear his military uniform in public. And Takahashi himself was freed on bond shortly thereafter.

From a political perspective, the marriage of Pearl Sherrod and Satokata Takahashi the following February provided The Development of Our Own with a sense of organizational continuity as well as an event that could be used to mask news of the subsequent deportation of the latter. Mr. Takahashi was forced out of the U.S. on April 20, 1934, but an announcement of the couple’s marriage, which had actually taken place two months earlier in Toledo, Ohio, appeared the following day in the Detroit Tribune-Independent: "Mrs. Pearl B. Sherrod, a graduate of Tuskegee Institute, Ala., and a member of a prominent colored family of Clarksburg, West Virginia," had become "the bride of Major Satokato [!] Takahashi, an influential citizen of Tokio, Japan." The article went on to note that "Major Takahashi, who is highly edu-
cated and apparently possessed of means, left Detroit Friday night, April 13, enroute to San Francisco, California, where he will embark on a steamer for Japan. After transacting important business in Tokio, Major Takahashi plans to return to the United States, within the next three months." For persons unaware of Mr. Takahashi’s deportation proceedings, no better “spin” could have been placed on his involuntary departure.

A curious aspect of this case concerns the supposed fact that Takahashi was a naturalized Canadian citizen, and therefore should have been returned to Canada. Takahashi explained that he was instead deported to Japan because he was going by the name Takahashi although he had become a naturalized Canadian citizen under his birth name, Naka Nakane. Almost true to his word, four months later Takahashi reappeared “at Vancouver, Canada, possessing about $2,000 although,” according to the FBI, “he was without funds when deported four months earlier and without a visible source of income.” Takahashi, however, explained that the funds came from the sale of property in Japan: a house in Oita and some Japanese bonds. Whatever the truth in all of this, from late 1934 through early 1939 he “resided at Vancouver, Windsor and Toronto, Canada, directing the policies of the organization through his wife. . .”

Assuming leadership of the organization following her husband’s departure, Pearl Takahashi took control of his weekly newspaper column as well. “I must say,” advised Mrs. Takahashi,

our minds have been diseased, and we have tried “Mr. White’s” medicine and failed; tried “Mr. Black’s” medicine and failed. Now we must try “Mr. Brown’s” medicine. No doubt he will cure us of the mental disease which was caused from a lack of organization. Then, we can develop ourselves.”

But external as well as internal competition for the organization’s members had already put a test to the medicine prescribed by “Mr. Brown,” underscoring the reason as to why The Development of Our Own had wished to portray Mr. Takahashi’s absence as a temporary matter. Beginning in June, Mrs. Takahashi’s weekly column warned that “a vast number of persons” were circulating “illegiti-

mate” copies of the organization’s “Five Guiding Principles” in violation of the copyright act. That same month, someone claiming Ethiopian nationality and going by the improbable name of Wyxzewixard S. J. Cha-
louehlicziczese, sought unsuccessfully “to reorganize the movement as a means of sending financial support to Ethiopia.” As a result of a schism dating back several months previous, three TDOO officers filed for an injunction against Mrs. Takahashi in July, charging that she had “demanded a salary for being a member” and had “married a Japanese alien who represented himself as a friend and benefactor” of TDOO.

But the ideas Mr. Takahashi was attempting to implant in the minds of Detroit’s black citizens, they maintained, “would ultimately undermine the system of American Government.” The injunction was sought by William Coleman, Samuel W. Grimes, and William J. Fitzpatrick. Following court challenges by the Takahashi’s, the case was dismissed due to “lack of jurisdiction.” Two months following Mr. Takahashi’s departure, and apparently without his knowledge or consent, an amendment to TDOO’s Articles of Incorporation was filed. The new officers listed were William Coleman, president; Samuel W. Grimes, vice pres.; William J. Fitzpatrick (one of the original directors in 1933), secretary; Dr. Wayne W. Williams, treas.; Charles C. Zampty, chair, speakers bureau; and George Wilson, agent. Unable to bear these and other such strains, by 1935 the group reportedly split into three, separate factions; former NOI lieutenant Abdul Muhammad (aka F. D. Abdul) seems to have emerged as leader of one of them, a post he held until his death in late 1938. This also may have been the point where Muhammad reportedly seceded from the NOI and “organized a small Moslem group of his own in which the cardinal principal was loyalty to the Constitution of the United States and to its flag.” The TDOO core group nonetheless survived until the fall of 1938, when the organization was rocked by a marital-political rift bearing upon the quality of Pearl Takahashi’s leadership.

In September a group of dissatisfied TDOO members reportedly called upon Mr. Tak-
In January, and fearing only God, Mr. Takahashi set up house with 26-year-old Cheerber (or Cheaver) McIntyre, then separated from her husband, and who recently had become secretary of the Onward Movement. Apparently in retaliation, Mrs. Takahashi notified the Immigration and Naturalization Service of her husband’s illegal presence in April, but the INS was unable to determine his whereabouts. From further information supplied by his wife, Mr. Takahashi was finally apprehended by two immigration inspectors in late June. After reportedly offering to bribe the inspectors in order to allow his escape, he was arrested on two counts: illegal entry into the United States as well as attempted bribery. Convicted in late September, Takahashi was sentenced to a maximum term of three years imprisonment and a $4,500 fine.

Subsequently “transferred from the Federal Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas, to the medical center for Federal Prisoners [at Springfield, Missouri] as a mental case,” he was initially released in late February 1942. Immediately apprehended as a “dangerous enemy alien” during a period of wartime hostilities, Takahashi was re-interned shortly thereafter. While incarcerated, he had the distinction of being cited as one of the principal causes of the 1943 Detroit “race riot.” In late 1946, at the age of 71, he was once again released from confinement and allowed to rejoin his wife in Detroit. But as to whether Mr. Takahashi ever became aware of the circumstances surrounding his 1939 arrest and imprisonment, the historical record offers not a “clew.”

**IN THE BALANCE**

All evidence pointing to Takahashi’s government ties—at least that available until now—remains circumstantial. Questioned by authorities, Takahashi himself fully admitted to membership in the Black Dragon Society, but claimed that neither he nor the organization possessed connections to the Japanese government.” At one point a dentist, Dr. Isamu Tashiro, was said to have been sent by the Japanese Consul General of Chicago to address the Onward Movement of America group in Detroit, implying close links but not necessarily official ties to “Little God of the

Pearl Sherrod Takahashi was to have the last word, however. Having returned to Detroit in January, and fearing only God, Mr. Takahashi set up house with 26-year-old Cheerber (or Cheaver) McIntyre, then separated from her husband, and who recently had become secretary of the Onward Movement. Apparently in retaliation, Mrs. Takahashi notified the Immigration and Naturalization Service of her husband’s illegal presence in April, but the INS was unable to determine his whereabouts. From further information supplied by his wife, Mr. Takahashi was finally apprehended by two immigration inspectors in late June. After reportedly offering to bribe the inspectors in order to allow his escape, he was arrested on two counts: illegal entry into the United States as well as attempted bribery. Convicted in late September, Takahashi was sentenced to a maximum term of three years imprisonment and a $4,500 fine.

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However, a most provocative suggestion of the latter came when Japanese Major Itizi Sugitsa paid a visit to the U.S. in early 1941. Former Assistant Military Attaché to the U.S. and then current Chief of the American Section of the Japanese General Staff ("charged with the management of Japanese Military Intelligence in the United States"), Major Sugita was said to have made inquiries concerning the condition of the incarcerated Mr. Takahashi.10

Evidence linking Satokata Takahashi to the flowering of pro-Japanese activities among a number of African American organizations during the 1930s is, mercifully, somewhat clearer. Following his later arrest by U.S. authorities, Mr. Takahashi claimed that while visiting Tacoma, Washington in 1930 he learned of one Abdul Muhammad, who had written a black minister of that city "requesting that a Japanese work among the Negroes in Detroit."11 Whatever the merits of when and how Takahashi came into contact with Muhammad, knowledge of their subsequent relationship remains equally problematic. One source claimed that "Takahashi resided with Muhammad but left because he considered him a fraud." Another held Takahashi to be the fraudulent party.12 Whatever the case, the initial friendship with Abdul Muhammad appears to have given Takahashi access to NOI members. While Elijah Muhammad does not appear to have followed Takahashi into TDOO, Takahashi assuredly left his mark on him as well. For example, in a speech reportedly given in 1933, Mr. Muhammad stated that "the Japanese had sent a teacher to the black people and that the Japanese were brothers and friends of the American Negroes" — a reference, no doubt, to Takahashi.13 Whether or not the "Little God of the East" ever consulted with W. D. Fard, Nation of Islam founder of equally diminutive physical stature (and affectionately known to his followers as the "Little God of Egypt"), is unknown. Mr. Fard, as noted earlier, once claimed to be the originator of TDOO.

By 1942 The Onward Movement of America had become affiliated with the Moorish Science Temple, casting a pro-Japan imprint on the latter. Takahashi’s earlier rooming together with Cash C. Bates and Herschel Washington, two men who later became prominent in the MSTa, is what is believed by the FBI to have sparked the pro-Japan ideological tendencies that then flourished within the majority of MSTa branches.14

In the early 1940s the practices of the Gary, Indiana chapter of The Development of Our Own had evolved in such a way as to embrace NOI symbolism. Led by Central Pope (aka Joseph Gibson), the group awaited the day that the "Five Guiding Principles," recast here as Freedom, Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Honor, would be theirs under Japanese rule. The organizational banner — bearing a red background with a white star and crescent positioned near the lower left-hand corner, and the letters F, J, L, and E (denoting the first four principles) inscribed at each of the corners beginning counter-clockwise at the upper right — was said to have been sent from Tokyo!15

By the late 1930s both the MSTa and the NOI were considered important institutional sources of pro-Japan sentiment in many African American communities. But although pro-Japan sentiment was apparently rife within the MSTa, no substantial case was able to be made by authorities — a situation no doubt aided by the organization’s highly decentralized character.

In early 1932 Madame M. L. T. De Mena of the Universal Negro Improvement Association enlisted the speaking services of a Filipino by the name of Policarpio Manansala. Posing as a Japanese and employing the name Ashima Takis, Manansala began speaking under UNIA auspices throughout the midwest. That spring, following a UNIA-sponsored meeting in Chicago, Mr. Takis and his partner, a Chinese by the name of Moy Liang, were approached by Takahashi, who indicated his intentions to found a pro-Japan organization to be known as the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World.16 Promptly signing on, the organizing activities of the three took them to Indiana Harbor and then back to Chicago’s south side.17 Some three months later they traveled to St. Louis, where the most significant, early center of PMEW activity was established.18

The affairs of the PMEW also became intertwined with those of Mittie Maud Lena
Gordon, a staunch, former Garveyite who had become disillusioned with the policies of the UNIA. After having worked with the PMEW in Indiana Harbor, Gordon had a falling out with Takis. Withdrawing her supporters from the organization in late 1932, she formed the Peace Movement of Ethiopia, a pro-Japan, African repatriation movement. Finally, in 1935 Takis came into contact with West Indian-born Robert Jordan. Prior to parting company, the two formed the Ethiopian Pacific Movement in New York City.109

It was thus that Satokata Takahashi begat a handful of pro-Japan organizations among African Americans: The Development of Our Own, Pacific Movement of the Eastern World, and the Onward Movement of America. The PMEW in turn begat other pro-Japan associations such as the Original Independent Benevolent Afro-Pacific Movement of the World, the Peace Movement of Ethiopia, and the Ethiopian Pacific Movement. TDOO and its spinoff, OMA, also greatly influenced the Nation of Islam, its direct successor the Allah Temple of Islam, as well as the Moorish Science Temple of America. Together these organizations influenced, at the very least, tens of thousands of working-class blacks from the early 1930s through World War II, those South as well as North, rural as well as urban. They divided and multiplied until things came to a head in the fall of 1942, after which time most of the principal organizers of these groups were hustled off to prison. In 1942 five TDOO chapters, with no more than 170 members total, were said to be still in operation, including groups in Detroit and Gary, Indiana, and one headed by Harry Ito in Chicago.110

The actions of U.S. blacks favoring national liberation found echoes in the short-lived and poorly conceived 1935 Sakdalista uprising in the Philippines, where adherents were told, and apparently believed, that their struggle against U.S. neo-colonialism would be joined by a Japanese invasion of the islands. One might cite as well the efforts in India of Subhas Chandra Bose and his supporters to assemble a liberation army against the British with the material assistance of Japan.111 It is thus important to understand that black identification with a more powerful Japan nonetheless contained a rational kernel — however politically misguided the overall vision.

Until the bombing of Pearl Harbor in late 1941, most black Americans, it seems, continued to view Japan as a positive model for political and economic development, with a smaller number favoring that country’s direct military intervention in the racial affairs of the United States. Following the attack on Hawaii, Japan’s military campaigns against the West continued to be viewed by many African Americans — even staunch “patriots” — as “payback,” for white underestimation of the capabilities of peoples of color. And as the U.S. plunged into the war, leading spokespersons for the black middle class sought to utilize the Japanese threat as a wedge to exact greater concessions in the realms of political and civil rights for African Americans, arguing persuasively that the full fighting potential of the black population could not be attained until African Americans were made to feel like full-fledged citizens. (Shades of John Edward Bruce!) Most African Americans were either “indifferent to or reacted negatively toward the outbreak of World War II in September, 1939.” Some were bitter because neither the governments of the United States nor Great Britain had made any effort to forestall the Italian conquest of Ethiopia. Others did not wish to see the United States become involved in an imperialist war. Still others “viewed the fighting in Europe as a divine act of retribution” visited upon the unrighteous.112 And there were many who supported Japan — at least until the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Pro-Japanese thoughts among African Americans during the war, then, were hardly confined to a mere handful of “crackpots,” as the popular press, black as well as white, strove hard to maintain. In early 1942 the Office of War Information commissioned a private survey among African American residents of New York City in order to gauge their attitudes towards Japan. The results indicated that eighteen percent of the respondents expressed the belief that, in the event of a successful invasion of the United States by Japan, the conditions of African Americans would improve; another 31 percent that things would remain the same; and a significant 26 percent were noncommittal.113 Whether an indication of anti-American or pro-Japanese sentiment,
these results could not have been reassuring to the Roosevelt administration.

Within the African American community, only the black Left fully and consistently perceived from the early 1930s onward the growing danger of Japanese fascism, and the consequent folly of African American identification with those who portrayed themselves as "liberators of the darker races." Although an unquestioning supporter of Japan's cause during the earlier days of the African Blood Brotherhood, Cyril V. Briggs was among the first to raise the alarm in 1932 in the pages of the Negro Worker. In the late 1930s Briggs and Harry Haywood collaborated in the writing of a small pamphlet, Is Japan the Champion of the Colored Races?, a work which, as a matter of policy, was assigned a collective authorship that included other black CPUSA luminaries. While the pamphlet's main purpose was to undermine the pro-Japanese influence among blacks fostered by the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World and other, like organizations in the U.S., its authors deliberately limited their scope to the discrediting of Japanese foreign policy in Asia.

It is time to revise the viewpoint long held by many activists and scholars (the author included) that the Depression Decade witnessed a strengthening of class consciousness within the African American national community virtually at the full expense of group consciousness and nationalist sentiment — notwithstanding the existence of "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" movements that sprung up in a number of cities. The older view recognizes the Great Depression primarily for the sharpening of class tendencies as well as the growth of millennial religious movements within black communities. Examples of the first can be found in the founding of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma; the organizing of the Sharecropper's Union in Alabama; struggles of the CIO in the auto, steel, mining, and packing-house industries; the Scottsboro and Angelo Herndon campaigns; the campaigns of local unemployed councils, and the like. But as time goes by, and evidence percolates upward from heretofore buried or obscure sources, a growing number of researchers are beginning to view the decade as one where African American nationalism flourished perhaps as much as in the Twenties — a perspective to which a recent study of black American movements for the defense of Ethiopia eloquently contributes.

Although a rather dismissive and superficial account of the wartime arrests appearing in Time magazine was misleading in many respects, its title, "Takahashi's Blacks," contained at least a semblance of truth. To African Americans coming into direct contact with him in the 1930s, or who learned of his existence through others, Satokata Takahashi represented a personification of the notion, prevalent throughout Asian countries (without the first-hand experience of a Japanese occupation) as well as black America at the time, that Japan, as "champion of the darker races," would liberate them from the yoke of world-wide white supremacy. As it turned out, of course, and all for the better, our erstwhile sepia samurai prepared in vain for a mainland invasion of the U.S. which never arrived. But despite the messianic aura created around his person, those organizations which followed Mr. Takahashi or his ideas were, for the most part, founded or run by African Americans themselves, fulfilling needs present in their own communities.

If there is a political lesson to be learned from pro-Japan movements among blacks during the Great Depression, it is perhaps that the waters of self-determination continue to run deep within the African American national community even during times of significant class conflict, and that progressive strategies for social change which ignore the existence of the former, remain as doomed as those mired in extreme myth-making and ultimate mystification.
Acknowledgements

*It was from Harry Haywood some twenty-five years ago that I first learned of the existence of pro-Japanese organizations among African Americans in the 1930s and early 40s, and hence it is to him that the present essay owes its greatest debt. I am especially grateful for assistance provided by the following individuals and institutions: firstly, the library staff at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst — Edla Holm and her indefatigable Interlibrary Loan crew, and librarians Paula Mark and Barbara Morgan in particular; archives technician Scott M. Forsythe of the National Archives — Great Lakes Region; John E. Taylor, archivist, National Archives — Washington DC; and Linda Kloss of the FBI’s FOIA/PA section, also in Washington. Robert Chrisman, John E. Higginson, and Joy Ann James graciously suggested improvements to the original draft.

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NOTES

1. By the 1950s the preferred English spelling of the surname Mohammed changed to Muhammad (and that of Moslem to Muslim). For the sake of consistency, the latter spelling has been adopted for relevant individuals mentioned in this study. For the same reason one will find here the traditional Western order of given name/surname imposed upon Japanese individual names, since that is the form ordinarily present in cited newspaper reports and government documents.


4. “Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States” (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1943) [NHyF], 209, 578. A 714-page report presented by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the fall of 1943, the survey contains an indispensable summary of the black press, race relations programs, independent black organizations, as well as Socialist, Communist, and pro-Japanese tendencies among African Americans. Based upon raw FBI field reports, but unlike similar materials obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, the (indexed) copy located in the Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park is free of redaction.


8. “Survey of Racial Conditions,” 361, 574. Florence Murray, “The Negro and Civil Liberties During World War II,” Social Forces, 24: 2 (December 1945): 211-12, reported that some 125 African Americans were convicted in such cases. See also American Civil Liberties Union, Freedom in Wartime (New York: ACLU, 1943), 32-33; and American Civil Liberties Union, In Defense of Our Liberties (New York: ACLU, 1944), 32.

9. 50 U.S.C.A. §§ 33, 34 and 50 U.S.C.A. Appendix §§ 301, 302, 311. The first set of amended codes was based on the Espionage Act of 1917 (40 Stat. 217), which, under conditions of wartime, applied to the issuing of false statements with intent to interfere with the operation or success of the armed forces, willful obstruction of recruitment into the same, as well as conspiracy to commit such violations. The second, on the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 (54 Stat. 885) which, among other measures, provided for the punishment of those who evaded draft registration or military service, or who counseled or aided others along such lines.

10. Report of [agent name deleted], Washington, DC, June 19, 1942, FBI file 100-6582-[37F]. Save for the document, “Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States,” all Federal Bureau of Investigation records used in this study were obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

17. (1988): 8; “Intended Voodoo Victims’ Number Still Mounting,” Detroit Free Press (November 27, 1932): 1; 4; “Cultists Riot in Court; One Death, 41 Hurt,” Chicago Tribune (March 6, 1935): 1; Ted Watson, “The Rise of Muhammad Temple of Islam,” Pittsburgh Courier (April 7, 1956): 3 (magazine section) and “Beginning of Muhammad!,” Pittsburgh Courier (February 22, 1958): 8. Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, Any Place But Here (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 222, give the date of inception of the Chicago branch as “1933 or early 1934,” which may have been true with regard to the ATOI, but not the NOI, which Detroit police reported to be in existence in Chicago as early as 1932. Essien-Udom, Black Nationalism, 64, notes that the Allah Temple of Islam was organized in Chicago in latter 1934, but also fails to note the early formation. The question as to whether or not Mr. Muhammad converted the early Chicago branch NOI to the ATOI seems material, since Essien-Udom reports that the latter was so small at its inception that it met at members’ homes.

12. This vision remains unchanged for Minister Louis Farrakhan’s NOI, founded around 1978.


16. Report of [agent name deleted], Chicago, October 8, 1943, FBI file 100-6582-139.


25. “Survey of Racial Conditions,” 178; Vernon B. Williams, Jr. to NAACP, December 17, 1942, NAACP Papers, Section II, Box 12 [DLC] [I am indebted to John H. Bracey, Jr. for providing me with a copy of this document]; “Negro A Jew” Leader to Seek New Converts Here,” Chicago Defender (March 14, 1942): 3; Chicago Defender (October 31, 1942): 3.


27. Elmer T. Clark, The Small Sects in America (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1949), 164, confused NOI doctrine with that of the MSTA, the ideals of which he believed were identical. Furthermore, it was not the “Abyssinian” language, as he claimed, but the use of the Hebrew tongue which the group but the use of the Hebrew tongue which the group identified. See also report of [agent name deleted], St. Paul, March 2, 1943, FBI file 65-40879-286; and “Survey of Racial Conditions,” 559.

28. For general but somewhat flawed information on the MSTA, see Arna Bontemps and Jack Conroy, Any Place But Here (1945; revd. New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 205-208. In their highly informative Mission to America: Five Islamic Sectarian Communities in North America (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), historians Wonne Yabezek Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith tend to treat the MSTA primarily as an Islamic organization. Peter Lamborn
31. John Edgar Hoover, Director, FBI to the Attorney
29. Ali's official cause of death was "Tuberculosis Bron-
37. See Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, African-Ameri-
36. See, for example, Arthur Huff Fauset, Blade God:
35. See especially the confessions of Ben (aka Ben Wool-
34. E.J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic
33. See, especially, the Book of Revelation, but also
32. In certain fundamental respects, the historical situa-
29. Ali's official cause of death was "Tuberculosis Bron-
28. The best overall analysis of pro-Japan sentiment
27. Randall K. Burkett, Garveyism as a Religious Move-
26. Wendell P. Willkie, "The Afro-American and the
25. See especially the confessions of Ben (aka Ben Wool-
24. E. J. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic
23. See, especially the Book of Revelation, but also
22. African American religion has been little different
21. The relationship of American blacks to Japanese im-
20. See Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, African-Ameri-
19. See especially the confessions of Ben (aka Ben Wool-
18. See Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, African-Ameri-
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16. Wendell P. Willkie, "The Afro-American and the
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13. See, especially the Book of Revelation, but also
12. African American religion has been little different
11. Ali's official cause of death was "Tuberculosis Bron-
10. The best overall analysis of pro-Japan sentiment
9. See Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, African-Ameri-
8. See especially the confessions of Ben (aka Ben Wool-
7. The best overall analysis of pro-Japan sentiment
6. Wendell P. Willkie, "The Afro-American and the
5. African American religion has been little different
4. The best overall analysis of pro-Japan sentiment
3. See especially the Book of Revelation, but also
2. The best overall analysis of pro-Japan sentiment
1. The best overall analysis of pro-Japan sentiment


57. Historian Reginald Kearney, "Afro-American Views of Japanese," 118n, seems to doubt any such connection. On the other hand, as noted earlier, a similar ultra-patriotic society, Gyochoisa, made indirect contact with Marcus Garvey in 1925.


62. However, the future bride was also quoted as saying that "Japan is over populated and I would like to lead a move for colonization of our race in Africa." The marriage was later called off. "Daughter of Japanese Peet Wed Negro," *St. Louis Argus* (January 26, 1934): 1; "Prince Advertises for Bride in Japan," *New York Times* (February 18, 1934): IV, 8; "Duce Forces African Prince to Jilt Jap Mail Order Bride," *Detroit Free Press* (April 3, 1934): 3; "Survey of Racial Conditions," 150-51. Intermarriages between upper-class Ethiopians and Japanese had been proposed in the early 1930s by a fraction of the Ethiopian ruling strata known as the "Japan-izers," who sought to modernize Ethiopia along the lines taken by Japan since the Meiji Restoration. (I am grateful to John E. Higginson, who provided me with this historical context.) A nephew of Hailie Selassie, Abebe attended a New York City meeting of the Ethiopian World Federation [EWF] in 1943, and thereafter became involved in its internal politics; "Survey of Racial Conditions," 146. For general information on the EWF see William R. Scott, *The Sons of Sheba's Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1941* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 176-77.


Takahashi was reported to have worked as an agent for the New York Life Insurance Company at Tacoma, Washington from January 1923 through December 1927, "having disappeared some months prior to this discontinuance." It was charged that he had misappropriated loan and cash vendor checks prior to his departure from the company. Report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, March 20, 1940, pp. 22, 33, FBI file 65-562-43.

68. Interrogated by the FBI, Takahashi claimed to have settled in Detroit in 1930. But in an article published in April 1934, he stated that his arrival in Detroit was 8 months previous, which would have placed the date as August 1933 — still a year later than that claimed by Detroit police. Report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, March 20, 1940, pp. 3, 12, 18, FBI file 65-562-43; report of [agent name deleted], St. Louis, April 3, 1942, FBI file 65-40879-66; S. K. Takahashi, "Development of Our Own," Detroit Tribune-Independent (April 21, 1934): 1.


72. Ulysses W. Boykin, A Handbook on the Detroit Negro (Detroit: The Minority Study Associates, 1943), 46 [I am indebted to Tyrone Tillery for calling my attention to this publication]; Articles of Incorporation of The Development of Our Own, October 5, 1933, Michigan Department of Commerce.

73. Boykin, A Handbook on the Detroit Negro, 46. The name of George Grimes, however, is nowhere to be found in any TDOO corporate papers filed in Michigan. Although it is possible for Grimes to have been eased out of the leadership prior to TDOO's having been incorporated, it is perhaps worth noting that a Samuel W. Grimes became vice-president in 1934, following Takahashi's deportation.


75. TDOO's initial directors were George R. Wilson, William J. Fitzpatrick, Walker Williams, E. S. Stewart, Sam Williams, and Walter Warren. The following month, George C. Jones was elected president; William Pharr, secretary; Issiah TaBoard, trustee chairman; Euanmell Pharr, advisory chairman; John Cooke, treasury chairman; Ava M. Vance, recording secretary; and A. N. Scott, sergeant-at-arms. Articles of Incorporation of The Development of Our Own, October 5, 1933; Certificate of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation, January 30, 1934, Michigan Department of Commerce; "Survey of Racial Conditions," 542.


77. "Survey of Racial Conditions," 100; report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, March 20, 1940, p. 18, FBI file 65-562-43; "Mysterious Japanese Held; No Mystery About Disposal," Detroit News (December 3, 1935): 5. In 1936 an organizational branch, with headquarters located at Springfield, was incorporated in Illinois. The Board of Directors included William Thompson, Ernest Fulton, Ethel Fulton, Goldie Merriweather, and Helen L. Miles. The chapter lasted a few years at most, and was legally dissolved in 1939. Report of [agent name deleted], Springfield, II., April 3, 1940, FBI file 65-562-49.

78. With the economy on a war footing in 1941, TDOO's direct successor, the Onward Movement of America, reportedly had a large number of its members working at Ford's River Rouge plant. P. E. Foxworth to J. Edgar Hoover, December 2, 1941, FBI file 65-562-62.

79. A follow-up investigation that might have revealed such information was abruptly cancelled in April 1940 by the FBI Director, with indications that the order had come down from the Office of Secretary of State. A request by the Detroit Bureau's SAC (Special Agent in Charge) to reopen the investigation in December of that same year was subsequently denied. John Edgar Hoover, Director, FBI to SAC, Detroit, April 6, 1940, FBI file 65-562-43; John Edgar Hoover, Director, FBI to Adolf A. Berle, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State, April 6, 1940, FBI file 65-562-43; John Edgar Hoover, Director, FBI to SAC, Detroit, March 1, 1941, FBI file 65-562-58.


82. Willie Jenkins, "Development of Our Own," Detroit Tribune-Independent (May 19, 1934): 1. "Do you know why Japan quit the League of Nations?" inquired this same official on another occasion. "It was because the League failed to measure up to racial justice and racial equality, because God told them to do so and establish a league of nations among the dark peoples of the earth. Don't you know that Japan is acting in accordance with God's will?" Detroit Tribune-Independent (June 2, 1934): 2.


84. Ibid.

85. Ibid. The "international supervisor" may have been Fay Watanabe, mentioned in several FBI intelligence reports. See report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, March 20, 1940, p. 81, FBI file 65-562-43.

86. The speech is reconstructed from the following

87. St. Louis Post-Dispatch (March 7, 1942): 1, 5.

88. Statement of Reverend Wilkerson Vaughn, Flint, Michigan, November 23, 1942; in Enclosure to FBI file 62-25889-136. It is unclear from the context whether African Americans’ fighting “with them” meant fighting against or on the side of Japan.


92. Report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, March 20, 1940, p. 17, FBI file 65-562-43. Takahashi’s INS records, which fall under the purview of the Freedom of Information Act, have been reported missing from the agency; Corea L. Socey, FOI/PA Officer, INS to Ernest Allen, Jr., December 21, 1993.


94. “Local Woman Weds Japanese Officer,” Detroit Tribune-Independent (April 21, 1934): 1; St. Louis Post-Dispatch (March 7, 1942): 1. Mrs. Takahashi, whose maiden name was Barnett, had three children from a previous marriage. Her brother was a Professor Barnett of Tuskegee Institute.


99. Mrs. P. T. Takahashi, “Development of Our Own,” Detroit Tribune-Independent (June 9, 1934): 2. Interestingly, a U.S. Fifth Army report noted that the head of the NOI, “W. D. Ferald” [W. D. Fard], claimed to be “the originator of the Development of Our Own and the Moslem Temple of Islam cult and cited as proof a book, which had been copyright- ed by him, in the US Library of Congress, entitled ‘Five Guiding Principles’.” Cited in Correlation Summary of Wallace Don [Dodd] Ford, January 15, 1958, p. 17, FBI file 105-63642-15. No date is cited for this remark; however, since Fard left Detroit involuntarily on May 26, 1933, it was presumably made prior to that time.


101. The Development of Our Own v. Pearl T. Takahashi, No. 23029 civ. (Wayne County Circuit Court Chancery, filed July 3, 1934), cited in report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, March 20, 1940, pp. 49-50, FBI file 65-562-48; Articles of Incorporation of The Development of Our Own, October 5, 1933; Certificate of Amendment of the Articles of Incorporation, June 8, 1934, Michigan Department of Commerce; “Survey of Racial Conditions,” 542. The FBI report listed the name of “William J. Fitzgerald,” but this appears to be in error. Charles C. Zampy may have been the same person as the Detroit-based Garveyite, John Charles Zampy. For an interview of the latter, see Jeanette Smith Irvin, Footsoldiers of the UNIA (Their Own Words) (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1989), 36-52.


106. Its officers were Alexander Long, Bartie Alsobrooks, and Gladys Long; Articles of Incorporation of Producers and Consumers Market Co., Inc., May 15, 1939, Michigan Department of Commerce. By 1942 the organization had relocated to a nearby spot in the vicinity of Eight Mile Road at Majestic Avenue in Ferndale; Report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, November 12, 1942, FBI file 62-25889-30.


110. A contribution of $100 was also reportedly made by OMA to the families of Japanese soldiers. SAC, San Francisco to SAC, Chicago, August 7, 1940, FBI file 65-562-53; “Survey of Racial Conditions,” 543.


112. SAC Chicago to Director, FBI, October 30, 1957, FBI file 105-63642-6; report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, March 20, 1940, p. 58, FBI file 65-562-43.

113. Abdul Muhammad’s wife reportedly confided in Ousha Appacanis, a member of The Development of Our Own, that “Muhammad had taken one Satakata Takahashi into his home when Takahashi was ill at which time Takahashi learned the principles of Muhammad’s organization and when he was well,
approached Muhammad, with the thought in mind that the two of them could utilize the organization to make a great deal of money. Muhammad’s wife related that Muhammad refused this approach. Presumably the break between Takahashi and Muhammad occurred prior to the formation of TDOO, and if that is so, Muhammad’s organization at the time was most likely the NOI. SAC Chicago to Director, FBI, October 30, 1957, FBI file 105-63642-6; report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, March 20, 1940, p. 58, FBI file 65-562-43.

114. “Survey of Racial Conditions,” 578. In his recent Report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, November 12, 1942, FBI file 62-25889-30, pp. 12, 24. Associated with Takahashi in the early 1930s, Herschel Washington (-El) later became Grand Sheik of the Mt. Clemens, Michigan MSTFA. Cash C. Bates (-Bey), a “national liaison man” of the MSTFA in the 1940s, was incorporator-director of the Onward Movement of America in 1939 and became its Acting Chief Director when Takahashi was incarcerated that same year. United States Naval Intelligence Service, Ninth Naval District, B-7-0, “Topical Study Memorandum on Moorish Science Temple of America,” May 28, 1943, in FBI Indianapolis file 100-4094-58.

115. Report of [agent name deleted], Detroit, November 12, 1942, FBI file 65-562-105; report of [agent name deleted], Indianapolis, September 9, 1943, FBI file 65-562-139. Those familiar with the c. 1960s NOI flag will note the similarities: red background, white star and crescent in the center, and the corresponding letters F, J, E, and I [Islam].


123. Office of Facts and Figures, The Negro Looks at the War: Attitudes of New York Negroes Toward Discrimina-
tion Against Negroes and a Comparison of Negro and Poor White Attitudes Toward War-Related Issues, 1942; and Office of Facts and Figures, Survey of Intelligence Materials No. 25, “Negroes in a Democracy at War,” 1942, RG 208, Records of the Office of Facts and Figures, Alphabetical Subject File, 1939-1942 [Washington National Records Center – Suitland]. Myrdal, An American Dilemma, 1400n, distorted the findings, claiming in a curiously constructed sentence that the “highest proportion of Negroes, of all Negroes interviewed, who have admitted pro-Japanese inclinations, in a confidential poll conducted by Negro interviewers, is 18 per cent.”


126. Scott, The Sons of Sheba’s Race. See also Claude McKay, Harlem: Negro Metropolis (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1940); and Bontemps and Conroy, Anyplace But Here.