

ONE



EARLY VIEWS OF THE JAPANESE

Between 1900 and 1904, African Americans and their press began to take notice of Japan and some of the issues that affected developments in that country. At first, their views of the Japanese were comparable to those of whites; they too made allusions to the uniqueness, strangeness, or ridiculousness of the Japanese as a people and a culture; then, African Americans showed interest in Japanese conduct in China, especially after Japan's decisive victory in the Sino-Japanese War; and finally, they expressed apprehension that the Japanese would arrive in America as competitors in the labor market.

Before 1904, references to Japan in the black media, like those in the white media, were usually comments on the progress or exoticism of the Japanese, but with time the black editors, reporters, and other shapers of opinion began to comment on the Japanese more from a racial angle. Most early references to Japan were presented as boilerplate. Drawing upon the same sources, sharing common attitudes about non-Americans, African American newspaper editors and reporters, when they bothered to look at the culturally remote Japanese, looked through an American cultural prism, not necessarily a black one.

Early writers were drawn to what they perceived to be the

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arcane cultural traditions of the Japanese. Habitual readers of the tidbits about Japan learned many interesting facts along with a fair amount of fiction. They learned that the land of the rising sun was a place founded by "gentle spirits" and that its ruler could trace his imperial pedigree back 2,500 years. It was a country where even sumo wrestlers had lineages more than three centuries long; where bonsai—the cultivation of dwarfed trees—was an art form; where houses were built without the use of nails. In Japan, African American readers learned, fire fighters tattooed their bodies, wives blackened their teeth, and parents put name-and-address labels on their children. Japanese ate pickled plums, made paper toys, and poured cascades of water on the heads of lying boys. The Japanese sold crickets in cages, went fishing not with worms but with diving birds, shod their horses with straw, and ate fish raw. The Japanese cuisine included delicacies such as lily roots and bamboo shoots.¹

In some regards, the Japanese not only appeared to do things differently from Westerners, but also seemed to do them just the reverse. Carpenters pulled planes toward themselves; readers of books read from right to left and footnotes were placed at the top of pages; at funerals the mourners wore white; and the best room in a home was at the rear of the house.²

Some aspects of Japanese culture seemed worthy of emulation. An article which appeared in the *Indianapolis World* touted the mode of living in Japan as especially conducive to good health. In hygiene and preventive medicine, the writer contended, the Japanese were in advance of other nations because of the "national and historic habit of living in the fresh air and sunshine." While Western homes suffered from poor ventilation and impure air, Japanese houses were at all times open to wind and sun. The commentator observed that both the structures of the houses and personal habits of cleanliness contributed to the good health of the Japanese. In this regard, the observer declared that the Japanese were "the most cleanly of body of all peoples." Moreover, the reporter claimed that in Tokyo alone there were approximately eight hundred public baths that were frequented by a clientele that partook in daily, and sometimes twice daily, ablutions.³

At other times, Japanese cultural differences invited the kind of ridicule revealed in a bit of doggerel that appeared in a Portland, Oregon newspaper:

I am a jolly, jolly, little Jap,
Hear my little shoes go clap, clap, clap;

When I go to school I leave them at the door,
Then down I sit on a mat on the floor,
I use these chopsticks when its time to dine,
A silk gown I wear when I'm dressed up fine.

On another occasion, the same newspaper described sleeping practices in different parts of the world. In the piece, the writer reported that the Japanese slept on "matting" laid on the floor and used a "stiff uncomfortable headrest." This, he decided, was a "bed of torture." As condescending as the scribe was regarding the Japanese style of sleeping, he saved his most negative assessment for Africans. "Of all people the easiest to suit in the way of sleeping quarters are Negroes. An African Negro, like a wild animal, can curl up anywhere," he reported.⁴ Carrying an undoubtedly biased evaluation of Japanese and African cultural practices such as this showed a producer of an African American newspaper could share with his white counterparts certain attitudes when looking at peoples of other cultures. Clearly, to the degree that this reportage reflected the shared attitudes of its readers, attitudes and utterances of African Americans regarding other ethnic groups might be as insensitive as any white person's.

African Americans seemed to be more impressed by evidence of Japan's progress toward modernization than its culture. They were aware that the Japanese succeeded in the transformation of a pre-industrial nation into a modern state through the application of self-help, group solidarity, and determined leadership, a formula that most African Americans saw as necessary for their own advancement. The readers of the black press could envy the record of Japanese progress: in a mere half century, Japanese leaders fashioned a powerful and respected nation from what had been a feudally fragmented and technologically deficient country. This cadre of leaders led in the adaptation of Western industrial technology, expansion of a modern communication system, and development of the strategic industries required of a modern military power. When they dipped into the fountain of Western knowledge, the Japanese infused what had been regarded as the ways of the West with an indigenous vitality born of a oneness of purpose and made Japan a flood plain of perpetual forward motion. As the world, sometimes begrudgingly, rarely wholeheartedly, acknowledged Japanese attainments, Calvin Chase, editor of the *Washington Bee*, seemed particularly impressed with Japan's focus on education as a vehicle in the great leap up from "barbarism." The *Chicago Broad*

Ax also marveled at Japanese educational achievements, but still poked fun at "ludicrous mistakes" such as the shoemaker's sign that read, "Shoes maid and men dead hear."⁵

Sometimes black writers thought of the Japanese as a superlative people. In Oregon, a state where there were not great numbers of either African Americans or Japanese, a writer for the *Portland New Age* characterized Japan as "the hardest nation on earth" and described Admiral Heihachiro Togo, "Japan's fighting admiral," as "the typical Japanese." This typical Japanese, according to the writer, was "short, almost stout, rather reserved . . . cool, keen, alert and determined." He was a rather reticent man who was content to allow his accomplishments to speak for themselves. The *Kansas City Rising Son* credited Japan's success to an ability to wed "the power of originality of the English to the practical intuition of the German." The *Indianapolis World* referred to the Japanese as imitators, but "very clever imitators" who only imitated "proper things."⁶

In Indianapolis, black readers learned that the Japanese set a high standard of citizenship and civic responsibility. One of the great lessons that Japan taught, in the estimation of the *World*, was that a country propelled by "the self-sacrificing patriotism of its citizens possessed a tremendous power." In the opinion of this newspaper, Americans and their government needed to appreciate the view that duties of citizenship must be fulfilled without thought of immediate personal gain. The *World* saw the subordination of personal reward to national interests as behavior typical of the Japanese. The *Indianapolis Freeman*, one of the leading newspapers of its day, shared this view. It told its readers that the notion of self-sacrifice was so strong among them that the Japanese yearned to surrender their lives in the service of their emperor and that families gladly offered up their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons. The *Indianapolis World* corroborated this with a report of a Japanese mother who committed suicide so that she would not be the reason her only son would be prevented from joining the army.⁷

Among the black newspapers of the period, the *Chicago Ax*, in terms of the number of references to Japan, was unmatched in its attention to the Japanese. Julius F. Taylor, its editor and publisher, seemed intrigued by the image of Japan's leadership as the very personification of progress. Emperor Mutsuhito was described as a monarch who had humanized a hoary institution which once required subjects to grovel in the dirt as a demonstration of their awe before a kind of demigod. Quoting a Japanese newspaper, the

Broad Ax told its readers that the emperor of Japan was an ideal prototype of the constitutional monarch; he was "just a plain individual" who had little regard for the ostentatious display of "barbaric splendor." Complementing the model monarch, Empress Manako felt and expressed concern for the woes and afflictions of the downtrodden, the *Broad Ax* noted.⁸

Although the attention paid Japan was uneven, African American reporters, as they observed Japan's involvement in international politics, increasingly began to reveal a racial angle in their writings about the Japanese. Issues such as the participation of Japan in the expeditionary force sent to quell the so-called Boxer uprisings in China, the alliance with Great Britain, even transgressions against the Koreans and Chinese received but scant attention and practically no editorial commentary. What references there were generally occurred as sidebars.

When the black press did choose to address such issues at more length, it was usually in order to pursue some racial angle. Commenting on the plight of China in 1900, the *Broad Ax* depicted China as the "richest of all fields for conquest" over which all the powers of Europe and Japan clamored "after the choicest bits." Yet, as they looked abroad and analyzed the maneuverings of the imperialist powers in China, black journalists concluded that the Japanese were less predatory, even empathetic toward the Chinese. When the Japanese army led in the capture of Tientsin (Tianjin), a city southeast of Peking (Beijing), the *Indianapolis World* reported that there were Chinese who, at the time of the city's surrender, offered the soldiers of Japan cakes, fruits, and tea as a gesture of appreciation for the exemplary conduct of those troops. The *Savannah Tribune*, citing as its source the Associated Press correspondent in Yokohama, reported that in Japan there was increasingly "a revolution of sentiment in favor of China." According to the dispatch, this expression of sympathy which originated among the general population swelled to such proportions that the government was forced to take cognizance of it and aligned itself with those powers advocating "the most moderate terms possible in the negotiations with the Chinese court."⁹

Some African Americans, on the basis of such incidents, surmised that a natural affinity existed between the Japanese and the Chinese. The *Portland New Age* was certain that the Japanese sincerely desired the fostering of friendly relations with China. Claiming that missionary incursions into China were "tantamount to filibustering expeditions," the *Savannah Tribune* suggested, "The

Japanese are naturally asking what they would have done under similar provocation."¹⁰

Not all African Americans were uncritical of Japanese imperialism in China because they believed a natural affinity occurred between the East Asian neighbors. Some African Americans because of their own basic contempt for the Chinese tended to view Japanese predation as an improvement over what the Chinese might achieve themselves. Besides, if bullying neighbors gained Japan recognition as an imperial powerhouse, a great many found that acceptable as proof that a colored nation could operate at the level of the leading nations in the world. The attitude that African Americans had regarding Chinese was partially rooted in the traditional American anti-Chinese bias. Their disdain, however, became particularly acute when African Americans measured the cultural heirs of Confucius against the accomplishments of their more modernized island neighbor. The *Denver Statesman* contrasted "filthy Peking" and the frightfully unsanitary conditions of China's capital to the "gayety of Japan" with its tea houses, gardens, and polite and cheerful citizens. To go from Japan to China, according to the *Statesman*, was comparable to a descent into "Avernus," a mythical reference to hell. One black educator described the difference between China and Japan to be "as marked as though an ocean and two continents were between them." In the experiences of the Chinese and Japanese, according to this particular writer, could be seen "the inclinations and disinclinations of people springing from a common stock and the same proclivities." A president of the National Association of Colored Women cited China as "one of the brilliant examples of impeded progress."¹¹

One black observer credited the Japanese with bringing a new zest to the Orient. According to this view, the "magic touch" of the Japanese spurred East Asia "into new life." Thanks to Japanese initiatives, the writer enthused, there was "a drowsy stir, a rubbing of sleepy eyes, a shaking off of ancient lethargy" which ultimately would result in a "great awakening" of "new hopes of freedom from Western dominance."¹² The belief that Japan would lead peoples of color from under the yoke of white imperialism was the key reason African Americans were so tolerant of Japan's transgressions against China's sovereignty. They were convinced that Japan's efforts were positive in three respects: they meant the diminution, if not the outright expulsion, of white influence in East Asia; a less exclusive grouping of imperial powers opened the possibility for developing the potential of other heretofore repressed colored

nations; and a Sino-Japanese coalition might become the forerunner of a greater combination of non-white peoples. China, in this view, only had to learn from Japan to bring about the renovation necessary to move "the sleeping tiger" into the ranks of the greatest modern nations. Control of China by the Japanese, in the minds of some, was a prerequisite to Japan's completing its self-appointed task of "directing the destinies of the Orient." The Japanese, some observers pointed out, were setting up schools in which young Chinese students were "exalted and imbued with new Japanese ideas."¹³

The idea of a Japan leading a fight against the white imperialism movement had appeal among African Americans. Even a conservative follower of Booker T. Washington looked upon Japan's rise as "A Colored Man's Dream." When Japan imposed its Twenty-one Demands, a clear abuse of China's sovereignty, the *Baltimore American Ledger* merely reported that China had agreed to accept officers of the Japanese army to train Chinese troops and other Japanese experts to help reorganize financial and police affairs. The *Broad Ax* chose to interpret this to mean that China was "preparing to become a fighting nation."¹⁴

If they failed to comprehend Japan's offenses against the Chinese, African Americans understood, all too well, European transgression against the Japanese. Both the *Portland New Age* and the *St. Paul-Minneapolis Afro-American Advance* commented on the "apparent reluctance of Germany and Russia to consent to a Japanese commander" for the expeditionary force in China. The *Advance* thought that despite the military successes on behalf of the international community, Japan still had "to win the confidence of the powers and avoid acts likely to generate suspicion." William H. Logan, an enlisted man of the ninth United States Cavalry, treated the readers of the *Savannah Tribune* to an African American's firsthand impression after seeing soldiers of "every [major] nation of the world" while on duty in Beijing. While stationed in the Philippines, he wrote a letter to the editor expressing his opinion that "the colored race have [sic] many of them bested." He told of an incident in which European and Japanese soldiers were supposed to carry out a coordinated assault. The maneuver must have been less than successful, for Logan wrote that the Japanese soldiers found "many gold bricks" among the Allied forces. By this, Logan clearly meant that the European troops failed to fulfill their responsibilities in the operation.¹⁵

While there was relatively little editorializing about the

Japanese prior to the Russo-Japanese War, an issue which did evoke some editorial commentaries was immigration. These commentaries were at times hostile. There were three fundamental reasons for expressions of hostility toward the Japanese: African Americans sometimes shared the general anti-Asian prejudice common to Americans; they inherited a degree of insecurity being black in a white society, and occasionally the Japanese made antiblack remarks that invited retaliation. When the Japanese began to come to the United States in appreciable numbers, African Americans increasingly felt threatened and expressed feelings of anger toward the new Orientals who loomed larger as potential competitors likely to enter the marketplace of unskilled and agricultural labor. The hysterically inflated, jingoistic rumors of "coolies" flooding into the country were bound to unnerve black workers even more than white ones. Since about 90 percent of the black labor was unskilled at the time, the bottom-runged African Americans were most likely to meet the new Asian threat face-to-face.

In large measure, much of the negative comment of African Americans reflected their anxiety over their own status in this country. Howard S. Taylor, a writer for the *Chicago Broad Ax*, feared that the pending struggle between Americans and Asians would be intense because the Oriental was accustomed "to living upon mere fragments of the slightest and cheapest character" while the colored man aspired to live as whites did. Another writer who was candidly biased against both Japanese and Chinese, labeled them "obstacles to Negro progress." Nicholas H. Campbell, a sailor in the U.S. Navy, described Asians as "unclean in their habits," but, he claimed, they concealed it with "oriental duplicity." In his mind, the Asian interlopers were two heads of the same menace. Campbell complained that as soon as East Asians learned some English they received preference in advancement, while more was expected of Negroes. By "more," Campbell meant that African Americans were expected to be "polite and submissive." Clearly, he was more anxious about the status of African Americans in the navy than he was concerned with the welfare of Asians.¹⁶

The fear of job competition from Asians, at times, generated in the black press as well as the white media fantastic statistics about supposedly "swarming millions of Asiatic coolies." Before the anti-Japanese movement grew full-blown on the Pacific Coast, Howard S. Taylor, writing for the *Broad Ax* and echoing the *crie de coeur* used during the persecution of the Chinese, asked, "Must the Japanese go too?" Then on the front page he urged readers to cast

their votes for William Jennings Bryan and Adlai E. Stevenson precisely because the Democratic party was "opposed to having cooley subjects, cooley labor, and cooley immigrants."¹⁷

This same newspaper, however, also could express sympathy with the position that Japan needed an "outlet" for its surplus population. Although it expressed relief that the Japanese government had taken action to restrict the emigration of laborers to the United States, the *Broad Ax* hoped that this action would offset what it perceived to be the "danger of a demand on Congress for a Japanese exclusion law."¹⁸

Although the *Broad Ax* saw the likelihood of an exclusion law aimed at the Japanese as a potential danger, Ernest Hogan, a celebrated ragtime composer, singer, playwright, and actor, saw it as an opportunity for the introduction of black American agricultural workers into the sugar fields of Hawaii. The audacity of the Japanese in the defense of their perceived rights caused considerable consternation among white planters. During one labor dispute, Japanese workers imprisoned the whites who opposed their strike. Another time, plantation managers complained that they had yielded "everything asked for" only to find the laborers still unsatisfied. Planters were most aggrieved, however, because they believed that they were being denied some of the best sugar fields in Hawaii partially due to land acquisitions by Japanese.¹⁹

Hogan saw Hawaii as a place where white people and black could achieve a more mutually beneficial relationship than was possible within the continental United States. He was prepared to work toward getting black workers for white planters in the islands. White planters in Hawaii when compared to their southern counterparts seemed more forward-looking, Hogan thought. If his efforts proved successful, Hawaiian sugar planters would acquire a docile labor force and African American agricultural workers would acquire a compatible work environment. Hogan claimed that there was considerable sentiment among sugar growers for bringing African Americans to the islands to replace the Japanese if Negroes in sufficient numbers could be induced to make the move. This was "a splendid opportunity for the betterment of the condition of the American Negro," Hogan argued. Hawaii, he believed, offered African Americans a change of scenery, good wages, excellent treatment, and a chance to "stand as men among men."²⁰

An enthusiastic supporter of Hogan's scheme was George Knox, publisher and editor of the *Indianapolis Freeman*, one of the top black newspapers of its day. Labeling Hogan's scheme "fairly

Utopian," the *Freeman* concluded that the transplantation of black agricultural workers into Hawaii was an idea to be "looked upon with much favor." "With the inducements held out," the *Freeman* surmised, "Mr. Hogan will have no trouble at all in securing thousands who will gladly try that country." A physician who wrote a regular column for the *Freeman* added the "push factor." "The Negro," he advised, "cannot injure himself by going to Hawaii to work on sugar plantations" inasmuch as he "does the very same work in Louisiana and gets lynched there to [sic]."21

Hogan's scheme even found some support among strategic thinkers in the War Department. They asked T. Thomas Fortune, journalist and longtime editor of the militant *New York Age*, the leading black newspaper of the period, to investigate the feasibility of replacing Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, and Puerto Ricans in Hawaii with black field hands from Georgia and Mississippi. In 1902, Fortune concluded that while African Americans lacked the "persistence, frugality, and ethnic adhesiveness" of the Orientals, they were superior to both Chinese and Japanese when it came to "intellect, morality, and industrial force."²²

One important voice raised in opposition to Fortune's mission to Hawaii (and the Philippines) belonged to William Monroe Trotter. The fiery editor of the *Boston Guardian* denounced it as "political chicanery" and accused Fortune of being the "dupe of Senator [John T.] Morgan of Alabama, who had urged the project on the War Department." Trotter believed that the real stumbling block to colonizing the Hawaiian islands with African Americans was that the Negro had had "too long a taste of independence" and was "not as docile or abject as the coolie."²³

Although he used the term "coolie," Trotter made a point of informing his readers that he did not include the Japanese within its meaning: the Japanese were "not half so backward as we are accustomed to think." What particularly impressed him was their "readiness to resent a slur on race at any and all times." This, he thought, ought "to serve as a lesson to all non-Caucasian people."²⁴

Trotter's observation was substantiated by reports about the Japanese fighting in places ranging from Hawaii to British Columbia. The Japanese were involved in strikes and disputes over labor conditions, fishing rights, and seal hunting. Periodic mention of the possible arrival of this class of competitor in the domestic help industry, as pullman car porters, or as agricultural workers reminded African Americans that trends in immigration might have some bearing on their future well-being.

However, economic issues were not crucial in shaping African American attitudes toward the Japanese. The demographic reality prevented any serious economic friction. In the regions where the Japanese were most conspicuous—in Hawaii and on the Pacific Coast—the numbers of African Americans were most negligible. Often the criticisms of the Japanese found in the black press had nothing to do with economic issues. They were just as likely to be about self-interest or even jealousy. Certainly, African Americans thought it unfair that Japanese might be accommodated at hotels from which African Americans were barred or were accorded other privileges denied Negroes. Occasionally, African Americans became angry because some Japanese person made a disparaging remark. Such affronts, naturally, elicited retaliatory barbs from African Americans. The *Washington Bee* became quite agitated when an envoy of Japan was quoted as having said that the American Negro was inferior and should be treated as such.²⁵

When a Japanese student allegedly refused to sit next to a black woman at the Park Theater in Indianapolis, the incident prompted the *World* to characterize it as "an instance when the 'yellow peril' was afraid of the 'black peril.'" When the World's Fair was held in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1904, some of the black ladies of the city requested permission to invite Japanese and Chinese to their homes, parties, and balls. A member of Japan's World's Fair commission declined the invitation by means of a letter to the editor of the white-owned *St. Louis Post Dispatch*. The commissioner, claiming to speak on behalf of the refined and educated Japanese who were visiting the fair, explained that they preferred to associate exclusively with white people and hoped Negroes would leave them alone.²⁶

At least one reader of the black press understood and sympathized with the position of the impolitic fair commissioner. James S. Stemons, a resident of Philadelphia but a reader of the *New York Age*, felt compelled to put the St. Louis incident in context. He believed it was unnecessary to upbraid or criticize the position of the Japanese; on the contrary, Stemons rebuked the black ladies of St. Louis for extending the invitation. In Stemons' opinion, these women had committed an indiscretion which humiliated the entire race. This action of the women, coming at a time when anti-Negro sentiments were abnormally high, he contended, had forced "a people who had always maintained a friendly attitude toward African Americans" to array themselves against Negroes. As far as he was concerned, the Japanese were merely trying to avoid the ostracism

that would result from association with African Americans. Stemons did not fault them.²⁷

Stemons' appraisal touched a sore point and hit upon a reason those born black in America found it most difficult to relate to other nonwhites in unambiguous ways: African Americans were ambivalent about themselves. The Japanese, in his view, were little different from fair-skinned Negroes who shunned darker members of the race or denied their ancestry in their efforts to escape "the odium which ignorance and bigotry attaches to the Negro race."²⁸

Better than Stemons, however, the women of St. Louis seemed to understand that, for African Americans who suffered from the lack of a self-image in America, cheering for the Japanese had therapeutic value. Japan was acknowledged as one among the world powers. Among the colored peoples of the time, the Japanese stood forth as the best and the brightest. Before the world they had demonstrated that they could play at what had been thought of as an exclusively white man's game—international power politics—and win.

The manner in which some African Americans tried to identify with the Japanese reflected the psychic lift they achieved through Japanese accomplishments. The *Indianapolis Freeman* described the Japanese as "people whose skins are dark almost to blackness." The *Colored American Magazine* depicted them as "sleepy-eyed-looking, black-haired men with non-Caucasian complexions." A black minister from Troy, New York, the Reverend James Boddy, in a letter to the *New York Age*, went further and extolled "the Asian Negroes . . . the most progressive Asian wing of the Negro race, the Japanese." Boddy, a graduate of Lincoln University, the Princeton Theological Seminary, and Albany Medical College, cited several ethnographic studies, including one by the Smithsonian Institution, as his authoritative sources.²⁹

In black communities about the country, the popularity of the "Asian Negroes" seemed to shape and encourage Japanese themes in a whole range of activities, gift giving, and entertainment. Black socialites held a great many "Japanese" activities in order to raise money for churches, orphanages, homes for the elderly, assorted social events, and special projects. While their white counterparts might have held "Martha Washington teas," African Americans from Boston to Chicago to Savannah listed Japanese bazaars, Japanese socials, Japanese drills, or Japanese teas among the coming events of the social world. The Japanese functions easily were more popular than the occasional Egyptian, Chinese, or Gypsy theme.

Groups such as the Wide Awakes, the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Club of the FBB Church, the West End Quintette, the Young Adelpia Aid and Social Club, the Crispus Attucks, Love and Charity, the Silver Cross Circle, the junior branch of King's Daughters of the AME Zion Church, and the Phyllis Wheatley Woman's Club all used Japanese themes for their fund raisers. These affairs were quite elaborate and sometimes lasted for ten days or more. They seemed uniformly profitable as social and financial projects. The programs commonly included music, dancing, and refreshments. The halls were decorated with Japanese-inspired accoutrements, and ladies wore Japanese "costumes." Of course, these activities were usually church related, and at times even interdenominational. In Savannah, Georgia, for example, the St. Philips Episcopal Church teamed up with the First African Baptist Church for an all-day rally. Participants were divided into two teams, either "the Japs" or "the Russians." A total of \$460 was collected, not including the table collection of \$28.³⁰

The proliferation of such activities among African Americans strongly suggests that these themes grew out of their intellectual identification with the Japanese. It even influenced fashions. The *Kansas City Rising Son* reported that ivory toilet sets, which had been replaced in popularity by first silver-backed and then gold-backed ones, after many years, were again popular. The piece concluded that the trend occurred because of "the interest we feel in the Japanese at this moment."³¹

Culturally, too, a Japanese theme had broad appeal in the black community. When the black citizens of Indianapolis decided to put on the opera *The Mikado* for the benefit of the St. Philips Episcopal Mission building fund, the event was acclaimed as "one of the most successful from the standpoint of merit and attendance ever given by the colored people of the city." People from Marion, Muncie, Anderson, and Evansville joined "the city's representative colored people" in making the event a success. Tickets for the opera were to go on sale at eight o'clock on a Monday morning at Pink's drug store, but an irritated music lover complained that she and several other ladies had arrived before the appointed time only to find that others had queued up from midnight of the previous night, and 75 percent of the tickets already had been sold.³²

The interest in Japan even influenced the kinds of gifts that were given on special occasions. When the Chicago couple, Joseph S. Tandy and his wife, celebrated their twentieth wedding anniversary, among the long list of presents from friends and relatives were

a Nipponware berry set, a Moriwagi ornamental vase, a Japanese chocolate set, a Japanese chocolate pot, a Japanese plaque, Japanese cups and saucers, two Japanese teapots, and one dozen Japanese bread-and-butter dishes.³³

The Japanese touched the black community in a variety of ways. They flavored the taste in fashions, and aromas of sandlewood and flowers enriched the social atmosphere. Members of a baseball team called themselves the "Japs." The Beach Institute in Savannah, Georgia, began its commencement exercises in May 1905 with a Japanese march titled "Kimona [*sic*] Girl." The Bethel church in Chicago had had a Mr. Kimura as a guest speaker and concluded that he was "an ardent lover of the gospel."³⁴

The attention African Americans paid the Japanese was more than a mirror of the general American middle-class interest in Japan during that time. African Americans seemed to appreciate the Japanese more the more white interest soured. In their attempts to offset negative self-images, a by-product of living in a hostile white society, African Americans' identification with the Japanese offered the same kind of solace as identification with Africa—a broader, more global frame of reference. It actually offered a more satisfying connection since it put them in harness with proven winners. It placed African Americans in a context in which people of color determined their own destinies, built their own institutions, and drew upon their own heritage. It provided more of a basis for criticism of the conventional wisdom of white people.

As Marcus Garvey would in a later period, the Japanese allowed African Americans to turn the white value system upside down. An issue which sorely upset African Americans was the notion among whites that marriage across racial lines or interracial sexual activity menaced the "purity" of their race. A castelike feature of the American racial system was the idea, comparable to the Hindu concept of 'pollution', that a relationship between nonequals was always to the detriment of the supposedly "superior" race. The upper element was made impure or polluted, but the lower could never be made clean; thus, the offspring of such a union in America invariably was considered black. When an obscure white actress and a nephew of J. Pierpont Morgan married Japanese, African Americans had two chances to speculate as to which partners would be considered inferior in Japan. From time to time, white Europeans and Americans sometimes accused the Japanese of being "swell-headed" and even condescending toward non-Japanese, meaning whites.³⁵

On another level, the Japanese provided grist for those who bridled under a white assertion that one of the racial characteristics of black people was a peculiar animallike body odor. The *Washington Bee* summed up the white attitude: whites believed that the odor emanating from Negroes was "the reverse of pleasant" and "almost unbearable" in hot weather. With undisguised satisfaction, the *Bee* reported that a Japanese doctor found that there was nothing so malodorous as "the pungent and penetrating emana proceeding from the western nations," especially where there were "traces of garlic, cheese, and evidence of overabundant dietary habits." Although the doctor was saying that cultural and dietary habits determine body odor, this message might have been lost on those pleased to read expert testimony that colored olfactory organs found the scent of white people offensive. Even while liking what the Japanese doctor said, the reporter at the *Washington Bee* was himself rather condescending in explaining the reason for the doctor's expertise. "Primitive races" had a keener sense of smell than "civilized races," and since the Japanese experience with civilization was of such short duration, the qualities of a "people living in a state of nature" might not be completely lost to them, he reasoned.³⁶

At the beginning of this century, African Americans had but little interest in Japan. Comments made by them were often ambivalent, sometimes negative. This was less so when African American reporters, editors, journalists, and other members of the elite viewed the position of Japan in the world as analogous to their own circumstances within America society. It took a distant war between the Japanese and the Russians to sharpen the African American focus on Japan.