American Studies as Transnational Practice

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The vast struggle in the Pacific which broke out at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, was merely the logical result of the events which began in Manchuria. The road to World War II is now clearly visible; it has run its terrible course from the railway tracks near Mukden to the operations of two bombers over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

—Henry L. Stimson, *On Active Service in Peace and War*

There is perhaps no greater cinematic representation of the Cold War symbolism of Manchuria than *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), a political science fiction film based on the 1959 best-selling novel of the same name by Richard Condon and starring Frank Sinatra. What this Cold War film represents, among other things, is the “terror” of Chinese communist brainwashing, for which Manchuria, a historical name given to a geographic region in Northeast Asia, stands as a potent metaphor. The film depicts how the Soviets and the Chinese Communists brainwashed American POWs during the Korean War (1950–1953), and in particular how they turned Staff Sergeant Raymond Shaw (Laurence Harvey) into a sleeper agent, or an amnesiac assassin. The brainwashing takes place in a research pavilion decorated with portraits of Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse-tung, in Manchuria, where the captured POWs are flown by helicopter. Following his conditioning in Manchuria, Shaw’s chief mission in the United States is to assassinate the presidential nominee at the Republican National Convention, so that Senator John Iselin (Shaw’s stepfather) is installed as US president. The red-baiting Senator Iselin, a stand-in for Senator Joseph McCarthy, is in fact a puppet—the Manchurian candidate—whose strings are pulled by his wife (Shaw’s mother), who is a communist agent. In the final climactic sequence of the film, Captain Bennett Marco (Frank Sinatra), a brainwashed ex–Korean War POW himself, understands the whole story of the international communist conspiracy: that “the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China conspired with purported American anti-Communists, who linked themselves with fascist tendencies in American life, in order to destroy the American republic.”

1
Manchuria served as the linchpin of modern regionalism in East Asia. In the 1950s, the region gained a new geopolitical valence associated with the neologisms “the Manchurian candidate” and “brainwashing” of the popular Cold War lexicon in the United States. At the end of World War II, the regional order of the Japanese Empire had collapsed. Manchukuo, the Japanese puppet state of Manchuria, was invaded by the Soviet Union—which declared war on Japan on August 8, 1945, two days after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Manchuria subsequently became a site of the civil war fought between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by Mao, and the Kuomintang (KMT), the governing party of the Republic of China under Chiang Kai-shek. As historian Victor Shiu Chiang Cheng observes, Mao imagined China’s “Madrid” in Manchuria. “With its political, strategic, economic, and geographical importance,” Manchuria, though covered by the Sino-Soviet Treaty of August 1945 and hence in the hands of the KMT, was what Mao coveted for the Communists’ expansion. In April 1946, Mao’s army seized Hsinking (Changchun), the old capital of Manchukuo. This military conquest “symbolized the Communists’ control of Manchuria.” “The civil war in Manchuria,” Cheng remarks, “foreshadowed the open general war in China over the next three years,” which would end with Mao’s proclaiming the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in mainland China in October 1949.

We now know—thanks to Bernardo Bertolucci’s epic film *The Last Emperor* (1987)—that somehow the symbolic apogee of the dissolution of Manchukuo was a successful effort by the Chinese Communists to reeducate Pu Yi, the last emperor of the Ch’ing (Manchu) Dynasty and puppet emperor of Manchukuo. The opening set of the film is a train station on the Chinese-Russian border in Manchuria. The scene depicts the repatriation of a trainload of “war criminals,” including the middle-aged and worn Pu Yi (John Lone), from the Soviet Union. Pu Yi, who had been captured by the invading Soviet troops at the end of World War II, is now handed over to the recently proclaimed People’s Republic of China in 1950. The train brings Pu Yi home to Manchuria, which he now has to learn to call the “Northeast” (Northeast China), and to the detention center of the Fushun Bureau of Public Security, otherwise a reeducation camp. After undergoing ten years of rehabilitation as “Prisoner 981,” the ex-emperor is released as a reformed citizen of Mao’s China. As the prison governor (Ying Ruocheng) declares, “As a result of remolding through labor and ideological education during his captivity, he has shown that he has genuinely reformed.” The final scene of the movie shows China during the Cultural Revolution in 1967. In the penultimate episode that appears exterior to Pu Yi’s autobiography *From Emperor to Citizen* (1964–1965), the main source of Bertolucci’s screen-
play, Pu Yi comes unexpectedly upon a parade of Red Guards brandishing pictures of Mao and waving little red books. They herd before them a group of “traitors,” among whom is his former prison governor made to wear a dunce cap and a chest placard reading “counter-revolutionary.” Pu Yi witnesses the humiliation of the governor, his former “teacher,” at the hands of the fanatical Red Guards and his being forced to “kowtow to Chairman Mao”—a command that renders Mao Communist China’s emperor. The Last Emperor ends with scenes of a horde of modern American tourists in China in the 1980s. The tour guide, with her Klaxon emitting the notes of Yankee Doodle, leads the tourists into the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the ancient imperial throne of the Ch’ing Dynasty, where Pu Yi was crowned at age three, and announces that he died in 1967. The film thus leaves the viewer with a question that historian John K. Fairbank astutely frames: wasn’t Pu Yi, the mortal representative of the puppet state Manchukuo, in the end “the world’s champion puppet—first under the Ch’ing court, then under the Japanese militarists, [and] finally under the Chinese Communists”?4

I begin with this brief discussion of post–World War II paradigmatic cinematic representations of Manchuria because they point in the direction of a series of interrelated issues that I want to discuss in relation to W. E. B. Du Bois, the preeminent African American scholar-intellectual who is generally thought to have become a dedicated Stalinist and Maoist in the 1950s. These include the hitherto ignored experiences and responses of Du Bois to Manchukuo, the unsubstantiated rumors in the US Congress that Du Bois was a (puppet) propagandist for the Japanese imperial government, and the ambivalence at the heart of Du Bois’s symbiotic sympathies both for Soviet Russia and socialism and for the Japanese Empire in pre–World War II Asia.5

While Du Bois is known to have become a devoted admirer of Communist China in the 1950s, as Gerald Horne has observed, “Du Bois, a socialist of sorts and a friend of Soviet Russia, sought to reconcile [China] with Japan as this unlikely prospect steadily slipped away in reality.”6

Du Bois’s problem indicated by Horne is succinctly described by Bill Mullen in what he considers to be the problem of “Afro-Orientalism,” which Mullen defines as both emerging from and revising “Marxian analytical contributions on colonialism and imperialism.” Asia played a complex role in the grand arc of Du Bois’s internationalism after Japan’s defeat of Tsarist Russia in 1905, and Du Bois continued to champion the ascent of Japan to power and to colonialism and imperialism. In Mullen’s view, Du Bois’s seemingly radical failure to oppose the Japanese Empire was partly due to the influence of the complex of events of the 1930s and was partly “fostered by selective support for Japanese nationalists in the United States,” among whom was Yasuichi Hikida, “an agent of Japanese expansionism.” The evo-
lution of the political and cultural thought of Du Bois and Afro-Orientalism, however, did not end there. Indeed, argues Mullen, “it was later reflection and rumination on his Japanese ‘mistake’ that moved Du Bois ultimately and decidedly in the firm direction of a materialist analysis of imperialism, race, and capitalism.” Du Bois’s encounter with the Japanese Empire thus moved him in the counter-direction of support for Mao’s China, the right political objective that Du Bois attained in the end.

Compelling though Mullen’s teleological narrative of interpretation is, I would like to rethink this Asian arc of Du Bois’s internationalism over time by teasing out, not so much a discontinuity (and counter-direction) that is obvious, as a continuity that is more subtle but also critically important. The difficulty of seeing the mutual implications of his support both for the Japanese Empire and for Mao’s China and the Soviet Union perhaps means that many of us who work on Du Bois and Asia tend to remain caught in a prevalent (that is, post–World War II) geopolitical map of East Asia—a framework in which Manchukuo (1932–1945), once a regional linchpin and a source of international conflict, is conspicuously absent, erased as it is into the People’s Republic of China (1949–). Based on Du Bois’s actual travel narrative that tells a story of the now-defunct Empire of Manchukuo, this essay proposes to examine a black Eurasian Pacific geography that Du Bois charted.

At the center of this essay is an analysis of Du Bois’s largely neglected 1936 Eurasian continental rail tour that took him from Nazi Germany via Soviet Russia to China. Du Bois landed in Manchuria as the first African American reporter to cover Manchukuo—a new colored nation on the Pacific Rim that had appeared in atlases only four years prior, with demarcated territory bordering the Soviet Union, the Republic of China, and Korea under Japanese colonial rule. My primary texts in this essay are a chapter entitled “I Gird the Globe” from Du Bois’s unpublished, book-length manuscript “Russia and America,” and dispatches that he sent to the *Pittsburgh Courier* from Manchuria. As with *The Last Emperor*, Du Bois’s point of entry into Manchuria is a train station on the Chinese-Russian border (then the Manchukuo-Soviet border). In 1934, writing in his signature editorial “As the Crow Flies” in *Crisis*, the official organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Du Bois had offered his congratulations to Pu Yi on his assuming the imperial title of the Emperor Kang Teh of Manchukuo. In Du Bois’s view, the coronation marked an important step toward the union of the Empire of Japan and the Empire of Manchuria, heralding a regionally integrated Asia. Du Bois writes, “Watch, colored America, with beating heart, the first fateful step toward a new united Asia. When the Emperor, Kang Teh, mounts the imperial throne and
joins Japan and Manchuria in one white world–defying state.”9 However, in Du Bois’s 1936 travel narrative, neither Pu Yi nor the Japanese militarists are central characters of Manchukuo. Instead, Yosuke Matsuoka, Japanese diplomat and president of the South Manchuria Railway (SMR) Company, emerges as the architect of Manchukuo. Against the backdrop of the dominant understanding of Manchukuo as a state created by Japanese militarists with Pu Yi as their puppet, Du Bois offers an alternative Manchurian narrative. My intention in the present essay is to tap the critical potential of this Manchurian narrative that tells about the geopolitical awareness Du Bois gained when he thought he was witnessing the actualization of a new model of government for colored peoples.

**Du Bois and Japanese Imperial Propaganda**

Important recent theoretical work posits the centrality of Asia to Du Bois’s internationalism.10 However, a major problem surfaces when scholars consider the implications of the African American intellectual’s apology for the Japanese imperium that expanded by military dominance in East Asia. As biographer David Levering Lewis has shown, Du Bois issued unnervingly pro-Japanese messages in his newspaper columns and lectures at black colleges in the 1930s.11 As discussed below, in 1939 Du Bois’s actions gave rise to rumors in the US Congress that he was a paid propagandist for the Japanese imperial government. Further, it led to his investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which opened a file on Du Bois in 1942. The FBI found no evidence that Du Bois engaged in subversive activities. Nonetheless, it placed Du Bois on a list of persons to be held in “Custodial Detention” in the event of a national emergency.12 One document included in the file quoted Du Bois as having allegedly claimed that “in the Japanese he saw the liberation of the negroes in America, and that when the time came for them to take over the United States, they would find they would have help from the negroes in the United States”13 when he made a speech during his stay in Japan in 1936.

There is a growing consensus among scholars of Du Bois that his defense of the Japanese Empire in the 1930s is not just an embarrassing anomaly but also a complex result of multiple factors of influence. One notorious example is Japanese propaganda operations that targeted the preeminent black intellectual. In his prize-winning biography of Du Bois, Lewis pointed out that Du Bois’s circle of acquaintances included Yasuichi Hikida, an alleged Japanese agent. In Lewis’s account, Hikida began his approach by making the acquaintance of Arthur Schomburg, a Harlem bibliophile, whose sponsorship enabled Hikida to infiltrate “the inner circles of the Talented Tenth”
of black America. This group included, in addition to Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, George S. Schuyler, Walter White, Claude McKay, Dorothy West, William Pickens, Rayford Logan, Claude Barnett, and Percival L. Pratfis. Du Bois, according to Lewis, was “the outspoken representative of a group mind-set ideally made for Hikida’s purposes” to sway black public opinion. Having established himself in this circle, Hikida drew sufficiently close to Du Bois to facilitate the Asian leg of Du Bois’s tour in 1936, which included five months in Germany sponsored by the Oberlaender Trust and a journey across the Soviet Union to visit China and Japan. Hikida arranged Du Bois’s stay in Japan as a quasi-state guest.14

Lewis’s suggestion that Du Bois’s trip to Japan was partly a product of Japanese “negro propaganda operations” would certainly explain why Du Bois’s trip unfolded so differently from the journey that Langston Hughes undertook three years previously. The poet, arriving in Japan from Moscow in 1933, quickly fell under suspicion of being a communist “international courier” and was expelled from Japan by the Tokyo police.15 In contrast, the Japanese authorities treated Du Bois as an honored guest. Upon entering Japan, he found that special arrangements had been made for his lecture tour around the country. However, I would like to question this suggested relationship between Du Bois and Japan’s “negro propaganda operations.”

A file in Japan’s national archive reveals that a detailed plan for Du Bois’s stay was well in order prior to his arrival. The plan includes both official and nongovernmentally sponsored activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>December 11 (Friday)</th>
<th>A.M.: A ceremonial call at the grounds of the Imperial Palace and Meiji Shrine</th>
<th>Noon: Luncheon at the Pan-Pacific Club</th>
<th>P.M.: Visits to newspaper offices</th>
<th>Evening: A reception hosted by the Information Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs</th>
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<tr>
<td>December 12 (Saturday)</td>
<td>A.M.: A visit to the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum</td>
<td>P.M.: A visit to the Kabuki Theater upon the invitation of the Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai (KBS)</td>
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<td>December 13 (Sunday)</td>
<td>A sightseeing tour to Nikko (KBS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 14 (Monday)</td>
<td>A day trip to Kamakura and Yokosuka (KBS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 15 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>A.M.: A visit to Tokyo Imperial University</td>
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[14] Hikida's purpose was to sway black public opinion.
[15] Hughes's trip was different due to his communist associations.

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REMAPPING THE TRANS PACIFIC TURN
P.M.: A visit to Waseda University
A banquet hosted by the Nippon P.E.N. Club
December 16 (Wednesday)
A.M.: Visits to department stores
P.M.: Lecture at Senshu University
A banquet hosted by kbs
December 17 (Thursday)
Embark from Yokohama

Among the government-sponsored activities in which Du Bois participated (not reflected on this itinerary) was a geisha party for the visiting intellectual hosted by a foreign ministry official. The Ministry of the Navy, moreover, extended to Du Bois the privilege of conducting a tour of “inspection” of Japan’s Combined Fleet at Yokosuka. The fleet at the time included the Nagato, the first battleship in the world mounted with sixteen-inch guns and the most powerful warship in the world at the time of its commissioning in 1920, as well as her sister ship Mutsu. Both the Nagato and the Mutsu had undergone renovation and updating in the year of Du Bois’s visit. In 1941, the Nagato began the Pacific War as the flagship of the Combined Fleet. The order to attack Pearl Harbor was issued from its decks.

Among the nongovernmental organizations—cultural and educational institutions—that hosted Du Bois, the Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai (kbs; Society for International Cultural Relations) honored the black intellectual with a party at the Kabuki Theater, as well as a banquet presided over by “a Count who was educated at Amherst with [Calvin] Coolidge and [Dwight] Morrow,” as Du Bois reports in a dispatch to the Pittsburgh Courier from Japan. kbs also arranged sightseeing tours for Du Bois to Nikko, Kamakura, and Yokosuka. The Pan-Pacific Club had invited Du Bois to attend its monthly luncheon (as it did Hughes), and the Nippon P.E.N. Club invited Du Bois along with two Chinese writers to its monthly dinner party. Du Bois presented lectures at a number of universities, including Tokyo Imperial University, “the largest and most noted in Japan,” where he lunched with the president and “inspected” the library, in the collections of which he “found some of [his] own books.”

However, there is reason to doubt that he was indeed the target of Japanese “negro propaganda operations,” as scholars suggest, despite the obvious privileges and courtesies accorded to Du Bois. Hikida was a clerk in the Japanese consulate in New York from 1938 to 1941 and was an employee of Japan’s Foreign Office in Tokyo after 1942, during which he drafted a proposal entitled “Wartime Negro Propaganda Operations” in January 1943. However, no official or unofficial program that could be termed “negro prop-
“negro propaganda operations,” Japan seems to have shaped Du Bois’s perceptions to elicit a response from the thinker that so deeply supported its cause.

The answer to this question lies not in Japan’s interest in the ostensibly central fact of Du Bois’s identity as black but rather in his status as an influential visitor from the West. It is for this reason that Du Bois’s primary host in Japan was KBS.21 Founded in 1934 under the auspices of the Foreign Ministry to coordinate Japan’s cultural diplomacy, KBS was charged with making systematic use of the “soft power” of culture and values to influence foreign public opinion. Under H.I.H. Prince Takamatsu (a brother of Emperor Hirohito) as its honorary president and Prince Fumimaro Konoye (and future prime minister of Japan) as its president, KBS counted among its advisers Japan’s prime minister, minister of the imperial household, minister of foreign affairs, and minister of education, as well as “more than 130 representatives of the people” from the political, economic, social, and scholarly world who served on its body of councilors.22 Thus, coordinated by both state and nonstate actors, KBS directed Japan’s cultural diplomacy at influential statesmen, businessmen, scholars, thinkers, novelists, artists, and, in particular, journalists from the West. The efforts of KBS to “enlighten” foreigners on Japanese civilization, and courtesies that it extended to them, such as free train passes, were intended to influence these people of influence to spread favorable views of Japan via lectures, radio, or books in their home countries.23 Du Bois received a complimentary first-class train pass in Japan and was taken to see expressions and demonstrations of both Japan’s ancient traditions and its modern technological achievements. These included Kabuki performances; the Shinto shrines, temples, and Buddhas; and warships. These courtesies were a measure of his status as a press representative of the Pittsburgh Courier and a professor at Atlanta University. Notably, many of the institutions that hosted Du Bois’s tour in Japan were headed by KBS councilors.24

Beyond the self-described objective of KBS to “introduce and encourage interest in, and study and knowledge of, Japanese culture based upon the ideal of furthering worldwide exchange of cultural relations in the cause of international peace and better understanding,”25 Japan’s exercise of soft power was imperative in the context of the diplomatic crisis that Japan faced in the early 1930s. The military occupation of Manchuria, known as
the Manchurian Incident, marked a new phase of Japanese imperialism in its continental thrust. It led Japan into direct conflict with the US Open Door policy in China, affirmed as international law in the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–1922. Subsequently, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations (in which Japan had been a charter member and one of four permanent league council members) in 1933. Japan needed new channels to influence international public opinion. KBS, founded as such a channel in 1934, was thus linked ideologically to Japan’s continental advance in Manchuria. The ultimate aim of the agency, to borrow the words of historian Tomoko Akami, was “to show that Japan was a civilized and sophisticated country, and was capable of ‘guiding’ its puppet state” of Manchukuo.26

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the successive presidents of the SMR Company served on the board of councilors for KBS, and that Yosuke Matsuoka, Japan’s chief delegate to the League of Nations who pulled the nation out of the league, was installed in 1935 as president of SMR and as a KBS councilor. SMR was far more than Japan’s railway company in Manchuria. Founded in 1906, the company was a giant conglomerate that propelled the development of southern Manchuria, crown jewel of the Japanese Empire. In addition to running freight and passenger services, SMR owned coal mines and wharves and controlled diverse subsidiary corporations in Manchuria. In the railway zone under its control, SMR acted as an alternative administration to the local Chinese government, providing health care, education, and employment to Chinese as well as Japanese. It also managed schools, hospitals, libraries, museums, and a large research institute. With a president—who was Matsuoka at the time of Du Bois’s visit—appointed by the Japanese government, SMR was, moreover, a quasi-state organ whose activities in Manchuria were directed “in accordance with foreign policy and national security aims.”27 After the provocation of the Manchurian Incident and the subsequent Japanese establishment of the puppet regime of Manchukuo, SMR served as the brains trust for Manchukuoan development, while also assuming management of Manchukuo’s state railways.

In this light, the active role of SMR—rather than of Hikida—in the Asian leg of Du Bois’s world tour emerges to demand our careful attention. As disclosed in a letter from Du Bois to Chih Meng of the China Institute in the United States, the African American intellectual had originally planned to travel from Europe across the Soviet Union “by way of the Trans-Siberian Railroad” and to proceed directly to Peiping (Peking), China, via Mukden in Manchukuo.28 Meng, associate director of the China Institute in New York, and spokesperson for the Republic of China, had denounced Japan’s establishment of Manchukuo in his book China Speaks, asserting that “the Chinese people have been colonizing Manchuria peacefully for centuries”
and that “the Manchus in Manchuria today are somewhat in the position of Indians in the United States, except that the Manchus have been entirely assimilated into Chinese culture.”29 At the suggestion of the Japanese personnel of the SMR Company,30 however, Du Bois altered his itinerary, adding a weeklong tour to “inspect” the new state of Manchukuo. SMR employees arranged a package tour of sorts for Du Bois along SMR’s Manchurian rail lines, with accommodation provided by the Yamato Hotel chain that the company operated. SMR thus functioned in the role of unofficial publicity agent promoting Manchukuo through tourism and exercised soft power to influence international public opinion. This tour, as I shall discuss further, was a defining experience for Du Bois. It shaped his perceptions and understanding of Manchuria, becoming what we might call a black Manchurian narrative.

A Week in Manchuria

In his unpublished “Russia and America,” Du Bois included a chapter entitled “I Gird the Globe” in which he relates his experiences during his Eurasian continental trip in 1936. Du Bois traveled the international trunk lines, riding the rails to national borders and traversing these borders to follow the steel rails onward. The lines he followed traced the divergent paths of the major socioeconomic systems on the continent—those of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and Manchukuo. International railway links provided a connection between these divergent paths for the traveler. Through his grand tour, Du Bois came to imagine Manchuria radically as a testing ground for “some form of socialism.”31

The new colored state of Manchukuo on the Pacific Rim, with territory bordering the Soviet Union, first appeared in atlases in 1932. Its presence redrew diplomatic relations across the Eurasian continent—a development that would have interested Du Bois, the international tourist, in 1936. While in Berlin, Du Bois was able to obtain a visa to Manchukuo through a “Manchukuo trade mission office” that had been established there as a result of a “Germany-Manchukuo trade agreement” concluded in the spring of that year.32 This agreement, a trilateral arrangement between Germany and the economic bloc of Japan and Manchukuo (the yen bloc), amounted to Germany’s “de facto recognition of Manchukuo” and set the stage for the Anti-Comintern Pact that Germany and Japan would conclude on November 25, 1936,33 only days following the end of Du Bois’s tour of Manchukuo. The Soviet government, meanwhile, denied Du Bois a visa to make extended stops in Soviet Russia. Du Bois recalls in his travel manuscript “I Gird the Globe” that Moscow “was not welcoming visitors, especially from the United States and en route to Japan.” However, he was granted permission for “pas-
sage through to Manchuria,” which he undertook on a ten-day-long ride on the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow to Manchouli, the station on the frontier of Manchuria (RA, 102–3).

The principal effect of the establishment of Manchukuo on international relations was to alter the balance of power in the Far East, sharply straining Japanese-Soviet relations in particular. In response to the strategic threat of Japan bringing northern Manchuria—formerly a buffer zone—under its armed control, the Soviet Union had concentrated its energies on strengthening its military forces. These were deployed along both the Manchukuo-Soviet border and the border between Manchukuo and the Mongolian People’s Republic, a satellite state that the Soviet Union had established in Outer Mongolia in 1924. In his travel manuscript, Du Bois recalls the prolific military activity—“soldiers, arms, factories, all for war preparation”—that he witnessed as his train passed through Siberia and approached Manchuria. He reports feeling “the earth beneath [his] feet smoldering and quaking with the flames of coming war.” However, the thinker “could not believe it” and “would not,” perhaps because, in 1936, “next to Russia, Japan intrigued [him] as holding the destiny of the darker [workers in] its hands.” For Du Bois, Soviet Russia was “a state seeking to replace private profit with public welfare” and the Japanese were “leaders of the world fight against white imperialism” (RA, 126–27). Du Bois’s sympathies thus were divided between two states whose spheres of influence were encroaching on one another, creating an explosive situation on the continent.

Du Bois’s travel manuscript records a tension-ridden border between the Soviet Union and Manchukuo at Manchouli, which he reached on November 12. When his train stopped at the “fatal border,” Du Bois and his fellow travelers from Europe had to change to a different train on the Manchukuoan side, passing through both Russian and Manchukuoan customs inspections en route (RA, 128). In 1936, Manchouli was no longer the quiet frontier station on the Chinese Eastern Railway connecting Russia with China that it had been. After the establishment of the puppet state, border clashes had taken place. Consequently, the Soviet government decided to sell its interests in the Chinese Eastern to Manchukuo. The sale of these railway interests in March 1935 represented Stalin’s de facto recognition of Manchukuo. On the Manchukuoan side at Manchouli, customs officers were posted to secure the border, and entry into the country was not always guaranteed. Du Bois reports that as a guest of SMR he was courteously ushered into “the station-master’s private parlor” but that he saw an English lady struggle with a rough Manchukuo inspector who rummaged through her luggage, fingering the negatives of some films. The woman turned to Du Bois with pleading eyes and said, “For heaven’s sake don’t leave me” (RA, 129).
Following his account of the border crossing in “I Gird the Globe,” Du Bois offers a descriptive map of Manchukuo based on his travels along the rails that crisscrossed the country. He intended to probe not only the geography but also the meaning of Manchukuo, a colored imperium in imperio, on his tour—its arrangement with SMR, unofficial publicity agency for the (puppet) state, notwithstanding. In his journey along the rail lines as both traveler and passenger, Du Bois traced the paths of Manchuria’s coloniality and its modernity, which created contingent national and transnational forms of community in that region. Manchukuoan Manchouli served as his point of departure; he described the settlement as “a straggling town on a dusty plain, with Russian and Chinese signs” (RA, 129), and a much smaller town in proportion to its railway station than most because the station was built first and the town developed around it. Du Bois reported Harbin, the next stop, to be a thriving city that had developed with the Russian construction of the Chinese Eastern and was “the only remaining center of Czarist Russia on earth” (RA, 130).

Du Bois then describes the urban cityscape of Hsinking, which burst into sight as the train rode out of the northern desert. “The whole scene changed as if by magic,” Du Bois writes. Hsinking was a crossroads of international traffic where the Chinese Eastern and SMR converged. A small riverside town only a few years before, Hsinking was in the process of growing into the capital city of Manchukuo. From his room in the SMR-operated Yamato Hotel in Hsinking, Du Bois saw to the right the old Chinese town, “huddled and crouching, with its strange signs and ancient insignia,” and to the left, “the beginning of the new Japanese city, or the city of the new Manchoukuo, planned by the Japanese.” Highlighting the differences between the Chinese and Japanese districts of the city that represented pre- and post-1932, Du Bois, whose language is encoded with what might be termed a black Orientalist or colonial discourse, justifies Manchukuo—proxy imperialism—as a modernizer in Asia. “Clearly this colonial effort of a colored nation is something to watch,” Du Bois concludes (RA, 130).

Indeed, with a new SMR station as its focal point and center, Hsinking was being built according to a geometrical plan, with state-of-the-art roads radiating out from the station, and with monumental state buildings, public offices, and the palace of the emperor Pu Yi lining them in various stages of completion: “some finished, some yet building, some only projected” (RA, 130). As one historian describes it, the architecture of public buildings in the capital of Manchukuo was, characteristically, “stark but imposing modernist bodies made of reinforced concrete, topped with Chinese or Japanese-inspired ornamental roofs”—a touch of Manchukuo’s “Pan-Asianism.” Du Bois also may have observed that Hsinking was furnished with city parks,
botanical gardens, and decorative lakes, as well as a modern public hygiene system with water closets installed in all residential, commercial, and industrial buildings—the first such system in Asia. Planned and constructed as a “futuristic cityscape,” the capital of Manchukuo was intended to project “the power of the colonial state as the agent of modernity,” in the words of historian Louise Young.39

Speeding southward in “Japanese cars better than Pullmans” on SMR’s streamlined super-express train, the Asia Express, Du Bois traveled to Mukden, the ancient capital of the Manchu Dynasty. In Du Bois’s accurate description, the Manchus “for 267 years ruled China” until the 1911 Revolution (RA, 130). The Chinese revolution culminated in the establishment of the Republic of China and the abdication of the last Manchu emperor, Pu Yi—the same being installed twenty years later as the emperor of Manchukuo. Thus, two modern states in East Asia, the Republic of China and Manchukuo, branched off separately from the trunk line of the Chinese Empire. Du Bois found Mukden “a singular city,” divided into “an ancient walled town, three hundred years old”—with a dignified palace and two royal mausoleums—and “a new Japanese city, broad and square, busy and beautiful” in the SMR zone. A war memorial had been erected in the Japanese district to commemorate the battle of Mukden in the Russo-Japanese War—a war that enabled Japan to take “her place among the Powers.” Recently added to this memorial were the names of soldiers who had fallen in the Manchurian Incident,40 in which the Japanese Kwantung Army burst from the SMR zone to occupy Manchuria, enabling the creation of Manchukuo under the (nominal) rule of Pu Yi. In reflecting on Mukden during his stay, Du Bois decided, “This is surely the place to pause and ask what is this Manchurian venture of Japan, and what does it mean?” (RA, 130–31).

His grappling with this question eventually led Du Bois to write two bold, provocative dispatches for the Pittsburgh Courier in which he justified Japan’s Manchurian venture. He sent these dispatches, which were published in 1937, from Dairen, which was not only the final stop on his tour of inspection and the terminus of the SMR trunk line but also the location of the headquarters of SMR. In Dairen, the Manshu Nichi-Nichi, Manchuria’s biggest SMR-affiliated newspaper, reported on Du Bois’s arrival and published a photograph of the visiting dignitary.41 Du Bois delivered a lecture on “the Problem of Race Segregation in the United States” to the SMR Club (the conference room of which was packed to overflowing with an audience of a hundred and several tens). At a dinner in the club following the lecture, Du Bois led a round-table talk on the “Future of the Black Race” and other racial matters.42 Du Bois noticed that “graduates of several American universities were present” at this event.43 These were most
likely Japanese Americans. As historian John J. Stephan observes, Japanese Americans sometimes fled the racial tensions that afflicted them in America, the land of opportunity for whites, and sought “a multi-ethnic land of opportunity” in Manchukuo. In Manchukuo, “equal treatment” among the so-called quinque racial makeup of the populace (Han Chinese, Japanese, Manchus, Mongols, and Koreans), in addition to “people of other nationalities who wish to reside permanently” within the territory, was established as a principle—though not a practice—in the declaration of the founding of the state issued in 1932. Ethnic diversity was thus a defining feature of Manchukuo; there were also communities of Germans, Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, and Crimean Tartars, as well as British, American, French, and Italian expatriates, let alone White Russians. The SMR Company employed dozens of such Japanese Americans seeking a multiethnic land of opportunity in Manchukuo during its existence from 1906 to 1945.

The first of the dispatches that Du Bois sent to the Pittsburgh Courier during this visit, captioned “Yosuke Matsuoka,” describes an interview Du Bois conducted in Dairen with Matsuoka, president of SMR. Matsuoka was also a graduate of the University of Oregon in the United States. While his dispatch leaves out many details of his conversation with Matsuoka—at the time one of the best-known Japanese personages in the world, having recently pulled Japan out of the League of Nations—Du Bois’s text clearly represents Matsuoka as the architect of Manchukuo. Du Bois reports that Matsuoka “ranks as a viceroy and premier,” holding “the destinies of thirty millions [the inhabitants of Manchukuo] in his hands,” and shouldering “the responsibility of proving to the world that colonial enterprise by a colored nation need not imply the caste, exploitation and subjection which it has always implied in the case of white Europe.” In the declaration of the founding of Manchukuo on March 1, 1932, the “will of thirty million people” had been offered as grounds for the establishment of the state and its secession from the Republic of China.

Du Bois’s symbolic coupling of Matsuoka and Manchukuo is significant, implying that Du Bois understood Japan’s Manchurian venture to be a project of the SMR Company, not of Japanese militarists. Indeed Du Bois’s account contains no mention either of the Chinese resistance or of the sometimes tense collaboration of Chinese local elites with the Japanese authorities. Partly, this may reflect how the Japanese—rather than the Chinese—controlled the means of representation of Manchukuo that affected Du Bois while in Manchuria. In Du Bois’s view, which was clearly influenced by his dialogue with Matsuoka, the prime force for “the development and independence of the colored peoples” in Manchukuo was SMR—Japan’s half state-owned and half privately owned corporation that had long acted since
1906 in Manchuria as an alternative administration to the local Chinese government. Because SMR worked to break down the boundaries between metropole and colony, between industry and culture, and between private capital and public welfare, the state of Manchukuo that it had helped build, albeit an *imperium in imperio*, seemed to him to disrupt the exploitative racial and social order forged between Western maritime empires and their colonies beyond oceans.

Thus, in the second of his dispatches to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, captioned “Japanese colonialism,” Du Bois compares the “colonial situation” in Manchuria with “colonies in Africa and the West Indies, under white European control” in this light. He enumerates five constituent elements that make the former different from the latter: (1) “Absence of racial or color caste”; (2) “Impartial law and order”; (3) “Public control of private capital for the general welfare”; (4) “Services for health, education, city-planning, housing, consumers’ co-operation and other social ends”; and (5) “The incorporation of the natives into the administration of government and social readjustment.” Du Bois thus made a strong case for empire—that is, liberal empire—in East Asia. With these advantages in view, Du Bois brushes aside as “immaterial” the question of whether Manchukuo is an independent state or a colony. He then broaches what he deems “the main question,” that is, “What is Japan doing for the people of Manchuria and how is she doing it? . . . Is she reducing the mass of the people to slavery and poverty? Is she stealing the land and monopolizing the natural resources?”

The answer that Du Bois offers in this second *Courier* dispatch from Dairen is based on his understanding that “Japanese colonialism” in Manchuria is an integrated industrial and cultural system in which capitalism is carefully controlled for the public good. Du Bois observes:

The people appear happy, and there is no unemployment. There is public peace and order. A lynching in Manchoukuo would be unthinkable. There are public services to improve crops, market them and increase their prices. Manchoukuans are in the police force and the schools and public services. . . . The Japanese hold no absolute monopoly of the offices of the state. The new housing and new cities take account of the Chinese as well as the Japanese. There has been private investment of capital on a considerable scale; but the railroads are partially owned by the state; electricity, water, gas, telegraph and telephone are public services. The largest open cut coal mine in the world is in Manchuria. . . . They have schools, library, hospital, water, sewage and parks. Electricity for a large part of Manchuria is made here—a total of 130,000 kilowatts. Yet all this is not only half owned by the government, but the private employer is under strict government control and regulation.
In concluding his *Courier* dispatch, Du Bois argues that although the Manchukuo government was not “controlling capital for the benefit of the workers” as he thought it should, “neither, so far as that is concerned, is Japan. There is, however, no apparent discrimination between motherland and colony in this respect. Nowhere else in the world, to my knowledge, is this true.” Du Bois suggests that the Manchurian venture aims not at unilateral dominion but at a contiguous regional community that transcends nationalism. He ends his dispatch with an affirmation of the venture, declaring that “no nation should rule a colony whose people they cannot conceive as Equals.”

In accordance with Du Bois’s view, an anti-laissez-faire ideology was indeed at work in the state-planned and state-controlled economy in Manchukuo. As Young describes, the SMR Company was staffed with Japanese leftists and Marxists who were politically marginalized at home in Japan. In Manchuria, they “tried to turn the new empire into a kind of social laboratory, a controlled environment in which to test out theories of social transformation.” The *Economic Construction Program of Manchukuo*, drafted by the SMR Company and issued by the Manchukuo government in 1933, stipulates that, in view of “the baneful effects which capitalism when unbridled may exert,” the government of Manchukuo will “apply a certain amount of national control” and “prevent any exclusive class of people from monopolizing the natural resources and the development of industries, thus enabling all to enjoy such benefits.” Following the example of Soviet economic planning, SMR issued a draft proposal for the first Five-Year Industrial Development Plan for Manchukuo in October 1936, a month before Du Bois’s visit, to be implemented in 1937.

What lies at the heart of Du Bois’s sympathy with the Manchurian venture is his affirmation of Manchukuo’s socioeconomic experiment of departing from a capitalist development. In “I Gird the Globe,” Du Bois demarcates four power nuclei in the world of 1936: Great Britain and Western Europe, Italy and Eastern Europe, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the Japanese Empire (RA, 132). Precisely because he looked upon Japan as “the hope of the colored world” (RA, 101), Du Bois was “curious to know just how far” Japanese imperium in Asia would “follow the western model,” or alternatively would “follow some form of socialism.” For Du Bois, the future course of Asia had grave implications for the future of the darker “workers.” As he toured Manchukuo, Du Bois speculated that “for historic and other reasons,” the Japanese Empire in Asia would not pursue the model of the Soviet Union on the Eurasian continent but that at the same time, “there was at least equal reason for refusing the lead of Great Britain or France or the United States,” that is, Western maritime empires (RA, 132).
His interview with Matsuoka enabled Du Bois to envision an alternative to both the Soviet Russian and Western models—a “third way” toward which the Manchurian venture pointed.

In the most crucial passage of his travel manuscript (portions of which were published in the aforementioned dispatch captioned “Yosuke Matsuoka”), Du Bois recalls that he and Matsuoka “talked of industry, capitalism and communism.” This conversation led them to share a stunning theory that, in Du Bois’s account, framed Matsuoka’s understanding of the Japanese Empire: “In some ways Japan [is] the most communistic of modern states.” What Matsuoka had in mind, of course, was not communism as a social or political system but rather communism as a deeply rooted aspect of Japanese culture. As Du Bois reports Matsuoka to have explained it, “In Japan there had never been that strong sense of individual ownership of property that characterizes so many people[s]. There was, on the contrary, through the family and clan a strong sense of common ownership of all wealth, of willingness to give to others and sacrifice for the common good” (RA, 133). In Matsuoka’s view, the Japanese—whose society was grounded in the sense of communal ownership and the common good—were morally communistic.

Embracing this idea, Du Bois “ventured boldly to add” that perhaps the Japanese could evolve, without revolution, into a state capable of replacing private profit with public welfare: “You Japanese, by your marvelous national discipline, were able without revolution to transform Japan from Feudalism to Industrialism. May it not be possible, again without revolution, and with that same discipline and sacrifice, for Japan to make that further inevitable change from private profit to public welfare?” (RA, 133).

Perhaps to protect Matsuoka (the advocacy of communism—which was tantamount to endorsing the overthrow of the emperor system—was a criminal offense under Japanese law), Du Bois chose not to mention in the Courier dispatch that “Matsuoka expressed agreement with [him].” However, Du Bois asserts in his travel manuscript that Matsuoka did agree with him, and Du Bois concludes, “I think he was sincere” (RA, 133).

In any case, Matsuoka quite clearly restated what he said to Du Bois five years later, to Joseph Stalin. As Japan’s foreign minister in 1941, Matsuoka described the common ground that Japan shared with Soviet Russia to Stalin with the resonant phrase “moral communism” in the course of concluding the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact. The pact was intended to establish the partnership and ensure the mutual territorial integrity of the two states and their respective territories of Manchukuo and the Mongolian People’s Republic. Stalin’s de jure recognition of Manchukuo and a formation called the Eurasian Continental Bloc (discussed in the last section of this essay) were a result. As if anticipating and endorsing this continental bloc, Du Bois describes
gazing from a hill at Port Arthur out across the Yellow Sea and concluding that “Manchuria is the natural mainland of the isles of Japan” (RA, 131).58

In his travel manuscript, Du Bois thus comes to regard Manchukuo as a state developing through the agency of SMR toward “some form of socialism” rather than as an autarchic regional empire under Japanese militarists, functioning as a cornerstone for new regionalism in East Asia. His journey onward to the Republic of China, and in particular a luncheon meeting with a group of Chinese at the Chinese Bankers’ Club in Shanghai (arranged through Chih Meng and “the American-supported University of Shanghai” [RA, 138]),59 only strengthened Du Bois’s conviction that the Manchurian venture offered hope for darker workers in Asia. Du Bois’s encounters with the elite in the Republic of China—represented at the luncheon meeting by the editor of the China Press, the secretary general of the Bank of China, the general manager of the China Publishing Company, the director of the Chinese Schools for Shanghai, and the executive secretary of the China Institute of International Relations—convinced him that they were trying to extricate themselves from the snares of European capital “by the method of establishing [their] own capitalistic control.”60 The Chinese elite, Du Bois gathered, “proposed to out-capital capital” rather than to displace capitalism (RA, 140).

The luncheon meeting also gave Du Bois a sense of the indignation that the Chinese felt toward the Japanese (they “hate Japan more than Europe when [they] have suffered more from England, France, and Germany than from Japan”), which he believed to derive partly from a Chinese sense of cultural superiority. In Du Bois’s view, the Chinese felt that Japan, which they regarded as “the culture child of China,” was arrogantly trying to “show China the way of life” (RA, 139–40). However, such sentiments, presupposing Japan’s cultural inferiority to China, did not sway Du Bois, perhaps due to the subsequent influence of the cultural diplomacy of KBS, which fostered his appreciation of both ancient and modern Japanese civilization from the time he landed in Japan after leaving Shanghai, as we have seen. Upon returning to the United States and lecturing in Harlem “to an eager audience, which overflowed the Y.W.C.A. auditorium,” Du Bois concluded that “the Japanese were creating an incredibly fine state out of the conquered territory” in Manchuria—thus assuming the role of unofficial publicity agent promoting Manchukuo in his home country as KBS may have hoped he would.61

The Battle of Shanghai

A major ramification of the Manchurian venture, in historical actuality, was a full-fledged war that broke out between the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan in July 1937, six months after Du Bois’s return from Asia.
Initially a small military clash at the Marco Polo Bridge in the suburbs of Peking, the conflict became a full-scale (though undeclared) armed conflict between the National Revolutionary Army of the Republic of China and the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy, spreading rapidly to Shanghai. The war acted as a catalyst for the formation of an anti-Japanese alliance between the KMT and the CCP, in which the Red Army became the Eighth Route Army of the National Revolutionary Army in a united Chinese front. Nonetheless, the Japanese gained control of Shanghai after a fierce three-month battle. The rapid development of hostilities in Shanghai complicated Du Bois’s black Manchurian narrative significantly.

More broadly, in the African American community, the Battle of Shanghai was represented in multiple and conflicting ways. The *New York Amsterdam News*, Harlem’s leading black weekly, reported that the Sino-Japanese conflict divided public opinion. In Harlem, “a soap-boxer” on a street corner damned Japan for being “just as Fascist-minded as can be,” while elsewhere “a trio of curbstone debaters” applauded Japan for showing the white world that “if they can gobble up China and everywhere else, Japan can do some gobbling, too.” According to another black weekly, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the situation was “seriously argued in Aframerican gatherings.” On one side, pro-Japanese blacks believed that Japan was “fighting the battle of the colored peoples of the world against a China backed by white imperialists.” On the other, pro-Chinese blacks “fiercely resent[ed] Japanese aggression and the effort to destroy Chinese independence so laboriously created after twenty-six years of revolution and counter-revolution.”

The disparate conceptions of the Battle of Shanghai are directly reflected in the African American representations of China and Japan. On the left of the spectrum of black political thought, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Paul Robeson regarded the CCP-led China as fighting an anti-imperialist war. Hughes published his poem “Roar China!” in September 1937, shortly after the outbreak of the Battle of Shanghai. Opening with a direct address, the imperative to “Roar, China! / Roar, old lion of the East!,” the poem calls for resistance to Japanese and Western imperialists, for which the foreign concessions of Shanghai were the historical symbol. Wright was Harlem Bureau editor of the *Daily Worker*, the newspaper of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA)—a capacity in which he served for over a year from 1937 to 1938. He reported in September 1937 on a massive Harlem rally “to protest Japan’s undeclared war against China.” Staged by Harlem workers—“Negro, Chinese, and white”—under the auspices of the American Friends of the Chinese People and the American League against War and Fascism, the rally included as speakers black American leaders James W. Ford, organizer of the Harlem Division of the CPUSA, and
Ashley L. Totten of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Similarly, the singer-activist Robeson “openly declared his support for China in her heroic struggle against Japanese imperialism.” Steadfast in his support of Chinese aspirations for self-determination throughout the Sino-Japanese War, Robeson and Liu Liang-mo, secretary of the Shanghai YMCA, would eventually release an album in the United States in 1941, entitled Chee Lai! (Arise!), to aid the Chinese war of resistance. Robeson performed the title song—the future national anthem of the People’s Republic of China—in English and Chinese, calling upon the Chinese masses “who refuse to be bond slaves” to “stand up and fight for liberty and true democracy.” Proceeds from the sale of the album were donated to “the China Aid Council of United China Relief.”

During the Battle of Shanghai, the mainstream US media discourse adopted the theme of humanitarianism. The October 4, 1937, issue of Life magazine, founded by Henry Luce, printed images of the Japanese bombing the civilian population from the air. In one heartbreaking photo, which Life estimated was seen by 136,000,000 people around the world, a Chinese baby, wounded by a bomb, bawls pitifully amid the ruins of Shanghai’s South Station, Nan-tao. Demonstrating the strength of public interest in the Sino-Japanese War, this famous photo was selected by US newsreaders and reproduced in Life early in 1938 to represent one of the top news stories of 1937. In concert with such interest in the mainstream, on October 5, President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave what came to be called his “Quarantine Speech” in Chicago, calling for the international containment of aggressor nations guilty of spreading “the epidemic of world lawlessness”—thus taking a step away from the traditional US foreign policy of neutrality and nonintervention. In this speech, Roosevelt, obviously referring to Japan, described its war in criminal terms: “Without a declaration of war and without warning or justification of any kind, civilians, including vast numbers of women and children, are being ruthlessly murdered with bombs from the air.” In a survey conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion (the Gallup poll) a month earlier, 43 percent had responded that they were “pro-China” as opposed to only 2 percent who were “pro-Japan.” The “pro-China” figure rose to 59 percent in October.

Du Bois resisted such a rising trend of public opinion. In his weekly column “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” in the September 25, 1937, issue of the Pittsburgh Courier, he contended that “what we as American Negroes must understand is the broad outline of the whole thing, and not be unconsciously misled by the propaganda current in America.” In October, when Harry F. Ward, chairman of the American League against War and Fascism, wired an appeal to Du Bois to endorse the pro-China People’s Congress for Democracy and Peace slated for Pittsburgh in November, Du Bois delib-
Du Bois did not accommodate himself to public opinion. Instead, in a column in the October 23 issue of the Courier, captioned “China and Japan,” he wrote that “Japan fought China to save China from Europe, and fought Europe through China and tried to wade in blood toward Asiatic freedom. Negroes must think straight in this crisis.”

This seemingly proimperialist narrative of the Sino-Japanese War in Du Bois’s Courier column has featured prominently in the scholarship as an illustration of his radical failure of vision with regard to Japanese imperialism. However, pending the eventual sublation of such a narrative, I would like to here examine what Du Bois called “the broader outline of the whole thing”—an outline by which he urged African Americans to make sense of the war and make political choices relating to it. From the perspective of Du Bois, an understanding of the war requires that African Americans move beyond the facile explanations of hostilities as fascism versus antifascism, or war versus pacifism, to take a broader, better-integrated historical view of modern regionalism in East Asia. In his Courier column of September 25, Du Bois observes that “it would have been magnificent providence of God if Russia and China could have made common ground for the emancipation of the working classes of the world.” For Du Bois, the ideal scenario would have been that after the Chinese and Russian Revolutions to end the Chinese Empire and the Tsarist Russian Empire in 1911 and 1917, respectively, a new regional order emerges based on the continental contiguity and solidarity between the Soviet Union and the Republic of China. Such a union would have been possible, according to the black thinker, because the program of Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Republic of China, was essentially “Communism; not the complete Russian line, but an extreme socialism which envisaged division of the land, control of industry, ownership of capital in heavy industry, and the welfare state” (RA, 142). If a Sino-Soviet alliance had come to pass, Du Bois claims in the same Courier column, “the salvation of China then would not have rested upon Japan, and two-thirds of the world would have been arrayed against the industrial imperialism of Europe.” However, as Du Bois observes, “after losing her great and far-sighted leader, Sun Yat-sen” (who died in 1925), the Republic of China “turned in reality toward the leadership of modern industrial imperialism as represented in China, especially by England.” This happened in China under “a greedy, crafty man of no ideals or integrity”—namely, Chiang Kai-shek. In accordance with this outline, Du Bois concluded that Japan hence “fought Europe by attacking China, and that is the reason of the present war.”

From our vantage point, East Asian regionalism in 1937 was indeed marked by intersecting developments: the crisis of the centuries-old Sinocentric world in continental Asia; the crisis of the international system in mar-
itime Asia (that had occurred on Western terms, first under the British-led treaty ports system and then under the US-defined Washington system that affirmed the Open Door policy in China); and Japan’s aspiration both to be “the middle” of the Sinocentric world and to break the international Anglo-American hegemony. Du Bois seems to have understood the Battle of Shanghai in this regional context. The root of the Sino-Japanese conflict, he explained to his Courier readers on October 23, lay in “a mad muddle of motives.” As Du Bois explains, the Republic of China “preferred to be a coolie for England” (to remain integrated in the international system based on unequal treaties) rather than to “acknowledge . . . the leadership of Japan,” thereby allowing Japan, a country that had long been on the periphery of the Sinocentric world, to take the place of the “middle kingdom” in East Asia. This political choice was, as Du Bois writes, motivated by the “supercilious disdain” that the Republic of China or “young China”—a modern state that denied the imperial past but inherited from it the sense of Sinocentricism—heaped on Japan, “a parvenu.” Thus, “licking the European boots,” China “taught her folk that Japanese are devils.” Du Bois concludes that “the straight road to world dominance of the yellow race was ruined in Asia by the same spirit that animates the ‘white folks’ nigger’ in the United States.”

Remarkably, the most important context in which Du Bois understood the Battle of Shanghai was during his recent trip to Manchuria. The seemingly proimperialist narrative of the conflict in his Courier column of October 23 was not only informed by his interview with Matsuoka and his approval of the Manchurian venture. (Du Bois defines Japan’s mission as follows in “I Gird the Globe”: “Japan is called . . . to lead world revolution, and lead it with the minimum of violence and upheaval. . . . In the twentieth century she is called to save the world from the slavery to capital” [RA, 146].) The column was also a supportive response to a public statement that Matsuoka had issued from Manchuria a fortnight previously. Published in the New York Times on October 10, Matsuoka’s statement rebutted the anti-Japanese propaganda in America that was disseminating the claim that “Japan is fighting for loot and profit.” According to the president of SMR, “this fight-for-loot theory” was “an insult to plain arithmetic,” let alone to Japan, as the billions of yen that Japan was spending on the war in China would clearly yield no return, and Japan knew it. “No treasure trove is in her eyes, only sacrifices upon sacrifices,” declared Matsuoka, because Japan was “fighting simply for her conception of her mission in Asia,” that is, to keep Asia from turning into “a crazy quilt of European colonies” and “becoming another Africa.” Having walked out of the League of Nations to keep Manchuria from the international control the league proposed, Matsuoka in his New York Times statement once again took a stand before
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the world to defend Japan’s continental expansion as an attempt to reintegrate East Asia as a contiguous regional community. In this regard, Du Bois’s *Courier* column of October 23 amounted to the African American intellectual’s effort to stand with Matsuoka in Manchuria across the Pacific.

*When Stalin Enters*

Du Bois’s black Manchurian narrative endorsed Matsuoka’s vision of instituting a regionally integrated Asia. It represented the African American thinker’s imagined socialist internationalism encompassing Japan’s Manchurian venture. A challenge to Du Bois’s internationalism soon came in December 1937, however, when the Sino-Japanese War’s theater shifted to Nanking, about 170 miles inland from Shanghai on China’s eastern coast, and the progress of the war apparently became derailed from Japan’s war aim proclaimed by Matsuoka in the *New York Times*.

On December 13, 1937, the Japanese army seized Nanking, the capital of the Republic of China under the KMT. The central episode of the Sino-Japanese War, the Nanking Massacre or Rape of Nanking as it is commonly known, that followed the fall of Nanking, is the most potent symbol of the genocidal character of the conflict. (The incident has entered the political consciousness of Americans as a genocide recently with the success of Iris Chang’s bestseller *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* [1997]. Chang claimed that the death toll in Nanking far exceeded that of atomic bomb victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. 80) The atrocities perpetrated in China’s Nationalist capital by Japanese troops became widely known almost immediately in the United States.

Firsthand reports of the massacre appeared in the *US* press less than a week after the fall of Nanking, dispatched by American journalists who remained in the city during the siege and the first few days of the Japanese occupation. 81 Under the headline “Nanking Massacre Story: Japanese Troops Kill Thousands” on the front page of the *Chicago Daily News* of December 15, 1937, Archibald T. Steele reported that “Japanese brutality at Nanking is costing them a golden opportunity to win the sympathy of the Chinese population, whose friendship they claim to be seeking.” 82 Arthur Menken, a newsreel cameraman for Paramount, radioed an account of the capture of Nanking to the Associated Press (AP) in which he observed that the city was strewn with hundreds of uniforms shed by Chinese soldiers “substituting civilian garb” to escape death at the hands of the Japanese. Menken wrote, “All Chinese males found with any signs of having served in the army were herded together and executed.” 83

C. Yates McDaniel, an AP correspondent, wired a firsthand account, pub-
lished in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on December 18, of a Chinese man with his hands tied, who broke away from a long line of war prisoners en route to an execution ground to beg McDaniel to save him from death. “I could do nothing,” wrote the AP correspondent. “My last remembrance of Nanking: Dead Chinese, dead Chinese, dead Chinese.” Frank Tillman Durdin, a correspondent for the *New York Times*, reported that slaughter, looting, and rape by the Japanese had “turned Nanking into a city of terror.” After the fall of the city, according to Durdin, scattered crowds of civilians, relieved that the siege was over, cheered the columns of Japanese troops marching into the city. However, their “feelings of relief and of welcome soon gave up to terror.” The “barbarities” of the Japanese had the effect of creating hatred of the Japanese among the Chinese population, Durdin observed, rather than of gaining the “‘cooperation’ for which [the Japanese] profess to be fighting China.”

Moreover, contemporary magazines carried images of the Japanese atrocities that matched the eyewitness accounts. The January 10, 1938, issue of *Life* magazine included a four-picture spread of “the worst holocaust in modern history” entitled “The Japanese Conqueror Brings ‘A Week of Hell’ to China’s Nationalist Capital of Nanking.” One image presented the decapitated head of an “incorrigibly anti-Japanese” Chinese man that had been mounted on a barbed-wire barricade—frightening evidence of Japanese cruelty. With anti-Japanese sentiment rapidly mounting as a result of the Japanese sinking of the US Navy gunboat *Panay* on the Yangtze River on December 12, 1937, the sympathies of Americans clearly lay with the Chinese as the media coverage of the Sino-Japanese War unfolded.

Did the prevailing mood in the mainstream US media reflect the sentiments of black America? In December and throughout the first few months of 1938, the African American press actively promoted the debate over Japan’s war in China. In its editorial (January 15, 1938), the Baltimore *Afro-American* issued an equivocal endorsement of Japanese continental expansion to “set up an Asiatic ‘Monroe doctrine.’” The editorial declared, “The *AFRO-AMERICAN* believes that Japan is fully justified.” It sparked a flurry of letters to the editor and heated exchanges between its readers over the ensuing weeks. The contentious nature of the Sino-Japanese conflict made it also a topic of debate for African Americans in church and literary clubs as well. The African American community sought out both sides of the story—Chinese and Japanese—in attempting to understand the true import of the war.

The contrast between the representations of the Sino-Japanese War in the mainstream United States and those in black American forums underscores our need to consider the social significance and political implications of the diversity of frames of reference within which African Americans in general
and Du Bois in particular addressed the conflict. Having moved beyond the
binarisms of fascism versus antifascism and war versus pacifism, the Afri-
can American community significantly situated the war in the interaction of
regional and global processes. As we have seen, Du Bois based his argument
on the case of Manchuria and East Asian regionalism. William Pickens, field
secretary of the *NAACP* and contributing editor for the Associated Negro
Press, who emerged in the vanguard of advocates of the pro-Japan position
in the Sino-Japanese War, argued in the context of Ethiopia and the inter-
national security system that became increasingly volatile after the Italo-
Ethiopian War (1935–1936).

Indeed, on both sides of the debate, the critical lens of Ethiopia afforded
black America a view of the Sino-Japanese conflict as not just a regional
process but part of a global process.90 Cyril Briggs, a black member of the
*CPUSA*, wrote in the January 20, 1938, issue of the *Philadelphia Tribune* that
he regarded the wars in East Africa and East Asia as continuous. In Briggs’s
account, the two wars taken together constituted a narrative of how the
Japanese Empire “joined with Europe’s imperialistic nations.” Briggs relates
that in 1935, many African Americans “eagerly turned their eyes toward the
Far East in the belief that Japan would aid, in one way or another, the
beleaguered East African nation” against Mussolini’s fascist aggression.
However, “Japanese imperialism did not lift a finger to help the Ethiopian
people, either materially or morally,” but rather, as Briggs describes, Japan’s
rulers “treacherously stabbed [Ethiopia] in the back” by “extend[ing] dip-
lomatic recognition in Italy’s ‘Ethiopian Empire.’” The Sino-Japanese War
only brought into clearer focus what the war in Africa had revealed: that
Japan’s posture as the “champion” of the world’s darker races was a fa-
cade.91 Japan’s recent signing of an anti-Comintern protocol with Italy and
Germany on November 6, 1937, may have also offered more evidence, in
Briggs’s view, that Japan had joined the fascist ranks.

By contrast, in Pickens’s view, published in the December 18, 1937, issue
of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, it was not Japan that had “joined with Europe’s
imperialistic nations” in the present crisis but rather the Republic of China,
in seeking Western aid and intervention by the League of Nations. Pickens
observes that Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie had pursued a similar course
of action in the Ethiopian crisis, only to precipitate, rather than prevent, the
fall of the Ethiopian Empire. Chiang Kai-shek, Pickens asserts, “ought to
send for Haile Selassie,” for the Ethiopian emperor “can give him some fine
points on the matter of magnanimous and altruistic help from Europe and
America.” Pickens writes, “These [white] nations, with their own axes to
grind, kept shouting for Selassie to ‘hold Mussolini!’ until they could make
up their minds and pass a few more resolutions. ‘Hold him, Selassie! We
are standing at your back!... Haile stood until it was almost too late to run away with a few personal belongings.” Selassie’s departure for exile in England as his nation fought on cleared the way for Mussolini to proclaim the Ethiopian Italian Empire in May 1936. The lesson of the Italo-Ethiopian War for Pickens is, then, that China should “deal directly with Japan... and settle their own differences” and “keep those European and American Lions and Eagles and Bears [England, the United States, France, Holland, and the ussr] out of the Oriental business.”92 Chiang, advises Pickens, “had better stop waitin’ on de Lord and on the white folks and deal directly with Japan, or pretty soon he will be where Haile Selassie is, cooling his heels on the Thames, or on the Seine—or on the Potomac—or more riskily still on the Moscow river.”93

The aforementioned editorial in the January 15, 1938, issue of the Baltimore Afro-American captured this perception succinctly in declaring, “The Chinese have become a kind of ‘Uncle Tom’ of Asia.” The editorial concluded that the leaders of the Republic of China “have kow-towed to the white exploiters, licked their boots and allowed themselves to become the footstools of Western conquerors.” In a cartoon accompanying the editorial, a man with an old Manchu queue labeled “China” is thus depicted kowtowing to the Western members of the Pacific Community (England, the United States, Holland, and the ussr) while a soldier in uniform labeled “Japan” is, as the editorial describes, “kicking China in the pants to make it stand up straight and be a man.” Yet conspicuously absent from the cartoon depicting Japan standing alone are the figures of Mussolini and Hitler, the worst enemies of black people, with whom Japan chose to form the Anti-Comintern Pact. In trying to explain away this offensive alliance, the Afro-American editorial gave the following reason: “Since most of the democratic nations have their hands in China’s pie, there were no other alliances for Japan to make.”94

The Sino-Japanese War shuffled and reshuffled the partnering of nations across the color line in a manner that was, from a racist perspective, unthinkable at the time of the Ethiopian crisis. China’s partnering with Western powers in the Pacific Community (the United States and Great Britain) and Japan’s partnering with fascist powers on continental Europe (Italy and Germany) during the Sino-Japanese War gave rise to coalitions that would eventually become the Allies and the Axis in World War II. With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and America’s entry into the war, the Chinese Nationalist government would issue a declaration of war on Japan on December 9, 1941, formally announcing that China, “a peace-loving nation,” had been at war with Japan since 1937. The Sino-Japanese War, even as it was finally declared, was no longer simply a war between China
and Japan. The declaration read, “After her long and fruitless attempt to conquer China, Japan . . . has treacherously launched an attack on China’s friends, the United States and Great Britain,” thereby “making herself the arch enemy of justice and world peace.”95

However, this reference in China’s declaration of war to the United States and Great Britain as “friends” did not reflect a straightforward outcome of the long-term, deliberate coalition making through which the Republic of China sought victory in the Sino-Japanese War. The Soviet Union’s involvement in the conflict created significant complications for both China and Japan. (Although the Soviet Union joined the Allied powers, it did not go to war against Japan in World War II until after an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, just before the end of the war.) On August 21, 1937, in the immediate wake of the outbreak of the Battle of Shanghai, the KMT government concluded the Sino-Soviet Nonaggression Pact with the Soviet Union, which provided a political basis for Stalin to supply material to Chiang Kai-shek and possibly to intervene directly in the war against Japan.96 In response, on November 6, the Japanese imperial government signed the anti-Comintern protocol in Rome with Italy and Germany. This move increased the threat to the Soviet Union of a two-front war on its European and Far Eastern frontiers. In the Far East, in accordance with the Sino-Soviet pact, “Soviet pilots were fighting Japanese aircraft in China’s skies, Soviet advisers [were] drafting military operations on Kuomintang staffs, [and] Soviet aircraft, tanks, artillery, small arms, ammunition and other military equipment [were] flowing into China in an unending stream,” as historian Boris Slavinsky observed.97 It was as if the Soviet Union and the Japanese Empire had undertaken a (proxy) war to compete for regional hegemony in East Asia. In the meantime, along both the Manchukuo-Soviet border and the border between Manchukuo and the Mongolian People’s Republic, sharp military clashes between the Soviet Union and Japan were developing into the Battle of Lake Khasan (July–August 1938) and the Battle of Khalkhyn Gol or the Nomonhan Incident (May–September 1939), the latter evolving into a decisive (though undeclared) border war fought between the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People’s Republic, on one side, and Japan and Manchukuo, on the other. For Du Bois, Stalin’s entry into Asia’s war threatened the integrity of his socialist Manchurian narrative, as I will discuss further below.

The Eurasian and the Pacific in World Geopolitics

As represented by its opponents such as black members of the CPUSA, the Japanese Empire’s alliance with Hitler and Mussolini presented an antiblack pact
“sealed upon the basis of predatory aims and hatred of democracy common to all three partners.” Yet Du Bois deliberately mapped the theme of Japan’s alliance not onto antiblack race ideology but onto the modern regional system in the Pacific that had undergone a substantial change since World War I. In 1922, the Washington Naval Conference abrogated the Anglo-Japanese alliance, cornerstone of the international order in maritime Asia, and reintegrated the Pacific region instead under “us-British hegemony.” Du Bois contends, in his address entitled “The Meaning of Japan” delivered in black colleges in 1937, that when “the race prejudice of England and America . . . refuses Japan fellowship as an equal, she has been forced almost into the lap of Fascist Germany and Italy who represent today war, tyranny, reaction and race hate on the most dangerous scale.”

Not surprisingly, such criticism by Du Bois of the us-defined Washington system aroused suspicions in Congress that he was a paid propagandist for the Japanese imperial government, which had proclaimed a “New Order in East Asia” (November 1938) in defiance of the international Anglo-American hegemony. Du Bois received a letter dated February 13, 1939, from Waldo McNutt, a supporter of the NAACP’s efforts to secure the passage of federal antilynching legislation. McNutt conveyed the concerns of a number of liberal members of Congress who were interested in the legislation that Du Bois was rumored to be “receiving funds for Japanese propaganda work” in the United States. The rumor did not seem groundless, McNutt put to Du Bois, in that Du Bois’s utterances regarding the Sino-Japanese War “coincided with” the propaganda of official Japanese agencies. McNutt furthermore wrote that in China, the China Weekly Review had named Du Bois “a suspect in the dissemination of Japanese propaganda.” McNutt requested that Du Bois issue a statement indicating his “official position on the Sino-Japanese conflict” so as to put these “ugly rumors” to rest. Du Bois responded forthrightly, declaring, “I have never received a cent from Japan or from any Japanese and yet I believe in Japan.” Du Bois did not falter in his belief in an East Asian regionalism, concluding, “I believe in Asia for the Asiatics and despite the hell of war and the fascism of capital, I see in Japan the best agent for this end.”

Du Bois also received a letter in January 1940 from Henry L. Stimson, former secretary of state, who was to be installed secretary of war in July. Stimson was mobilizing public opinion in support of economic sanctions against Japan, because Japan’s intention of expanding into Southeast Asia under European and American colonial rule was now clear. In February 1939, Japanese troops fighting in China had moved down to take over the island of Hainan to strengthen the blockade of the South China Sea. In March, Japan assumed jurisdiction over the Spratly Islands that had for-
merly been claimed by France. The United States notified Japan in July 1939 that it would terminate the Japanese-American commercial treaty six months later. Stimson wrote that America’s abrogation of the commercial treaty, which would take effect on January 26, 1940, would free the Roosevelt administration to take “prompt measures” but that such measures as the government could and would take in its foreign policy would be constrained by public opinion. As honorary chairman of the American Committee for Non-Participation in Japanese Aggression, Stimson invited Du Bois to support the organization’s campaign for an embargo on exports of use to the Japanese military machine. In Stimson’s view, the Sino-Japanese conflict was essentially a clash of “two types of civilization,” one “pacific and evolutionary” and the other “militaristic and aggressive,” and the US regional policy in the Far East required a strong, independent China to ensure the stability and security of the Pacific Community, now under threat from Japanese expansion. In a public reply to Stimson in his weekly column in the New York Amsterdam News, Du Bois voiced his suspicion—and indeed predicted correctly—that the measures short of war that Stimson was proposing for the United States would “lead to virtual and even open war with Japan,” and the black thinker protested that, to achieve this end, Stimson “wishes my cooperation and support.” Du Bois announced, “He will not get it.”

Beyond the Pacific, the Eurasian continent spanned a fault line in the shifting geopolitics of the world, providing Du Bois with another convoluted context. The diplomatic earthquake of the Nazi-Soviet Pact struck in Europe in August 1939, with aftershocks extending across the continent to the conflict in the Far East between the Soviet Union and the Japanese Empire; the latter had concluded the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany against the Soviet Union three years previously. In a column in the Amsterdam News entitled “As the Crow Flies” (November 18, 1939), Du Bois responded to news of the Hitler-Stalin pact by forecasting an imminent international realignment of nation-states across the Eurasian continent. He entertained the possibility of a Nazi-Soviet-Japanese rapprochement across the continent arising from America’s anti-Japan foreign policy in the Pacific area. As Du Bois writes, the United States once “broke” the Anglo-Japanese alliance in the Pacific and thereby “threw Japan into the arms of Germany and Italy” in Europe. Du Bois reasons that “analogous tactics today may bring Russia, Germany and Japan into a world-dominating position.”

The Nazi-Soviet-Japanese alliance across the Eurasian continent that Du Bois envisaged in his Amsterdam News column was precisely what Matsuoka worked to build in reality following his appointment as foreign minister of Japan in July 1940. When the news arrived that Matsuoka had
been named to a new cabinet under Prince Konoye (who was also president of KBS), Du Bois welcomed the rise of the former president of the SMR Company to power. Recalling Matsuoka and Manchukuo in his Amsterdam News column of August 3, 1940, Du Bois wrote, “I know the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the new Konoye government of Japan. I remember the day, late in the year 1936, when he received me in his office in the capital of Manchukuo. We sat and talked together about the world and color prejudice. . . . That fall day in Singking [sic] we talked about democracy—that broader democracy that sees no color line. Such a democracy, said Matsuoka, only Japan could lead.”

It would seem that Du Bois’s black Manchurian narrative was moving out of the prolonged impasse precipitated by the Sino-Japanese War.

Shortly after assuming the post of foreign minister, Matsuoka proclaimed the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (August 1940) as a new regional system, placing a Japan-Manchukuo-China economic bloc at its core and extending to the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina in Southeast Asia. The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was an expression of his aspiration for the Japanese Empire to be at once “the middle” in the long-established Sinocentric world in continental Asia and to challenge international Anglo-American hegemony in maritime Asia. Thereafter, Matsuoka drew up the preliminary arrangement for the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy to be signed in Berlin in September. This Axis Pact was a necessary step toward what Matsuoka conceived as the formation of a Eurasian Continental Bloc, comprising a Japanese-German-Italian-Soviet four-power entente as a deterrent against the international hegemony of Western maritime empires, in particular, the United States and Great Britain. Based on this design, Matsuoka negotiated the Tripartite Pact and then turned to reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union.

Hence, when Matsuoka departed from Manchuria by rail for Europe in March 1941—returning along the same transcontinental route taken by Du Bois in 1936—his real diplomatic mission lay in neither Germany nor Italy. Ostensibly, the European tour was aimed at reaffirming the Axis alliance and demonstrating the solidarity of its partners to the world. However, the true purpose of Matsuoka’s tour would be broached en route, when the train made stopovers on its outward and return journeys at the terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway in Moscow and Matsuoka visited the Kremlin.

A striking aspect of the Matsuoka-Stalin talks in the Kremlin on March 24 and April 12, as recorded in declassified Soviet records, is their resonance with the Du Bois–Matsuoka interview that took place in Dairen, Manchuria, in 1936. The records show that Matsuoka told Stalin, as mentioned above, that communism had long been practiced in Japan—as a credo
that he called “moral communism”—but that this traditional aspect of Japanese society had been undermined by the “evils of capitalism.” Matsuoka averred to Stalin that although “he did not agree with political and social communism,” he “basically . . . adhered to communism” himself and “was decisively against Anglo-Saxon capital.” In view of their commonalities—despite their more substantial differences in polities: the emperor system and the single-party communist state—Matsuoka proposed that the Japanese Empire and the Soviet Union cooperate to expel the baneful influence of Anglo-Saxon capitalism from Asia.113

With regard to the Sino-Japanese War, Matsuoka explained to Stalin that Japan was not at war with the Chinese people, “whom Japan does not want to fight.” Rather, Japan’s enemy was Chiang Kai-shek, “an agent of Anglo-American capital” whom Japan was determined to fight to the end. Matsuoka maintained to Stalin that the Sino-Japanese War “must be viewed from precisely that viewpoint,” a perspective from which Soviet support for Chiang (required by the Sino-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 1937) was not “sensible.” In light of world history, Matsuoka argued, Japanese-Soviet cooperation was inevitable to “wipe out the Anglo-Saxons” from Asia.114 Evidently, Matsuoka believed that the powerful pact of the Japanese Empire and the Soviet Union would ease Japanese negotiations with Chiang’s China and the United States. For Stalin, a neutral treaty with Japan meant that the Soviet Union would be saved from the danger of a two-front war on its European and Far Eastern frontiers.115 Stalin replied that “the Russians had never been [the Anglo-Saxons’] friends, and now were perhaps not very keen to befriend them.”116 After the signing of the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact (April 13, 1941), Stalin reportedly told Matsuoka that Russians were “Asiatic.”117

The result of Matsuoka’s secret negotiations in the Kremlin was the “surprise agreement” of the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact. It guaranteed peaceful and friendly relations between Japan and the Soviet Union, and an accompanying declaration that pledged mutual respect for the territorial integrity and inviolability of Manchukuo and the Mongolian People’s Republic. News of this sudden accord resounded throughout the world, and it was not welcomed by the Western democracies that had Pacific possessions. As the Washington Post reported, “The world-shaking significance of this new reaching of hands from Rome to Berlin to Tokyo to Moscow”—a Eurasian power bloc—presented momentous dangers. The Washington Post story presented the conclusion of the pact as follows: “Russia and Japan, long-term dueling powers of the Far East, joined in a neutrality pact today that may be as portentous as the nonaggression accord between Berlin and Moscow in 1939, which preceded the German invasion of Poland.”118 Just
as the Nazi-Soviet pact safeguarded Germany’s eastern front to enable its southward advancement, the story suggests, the Japanese-Soviet pact could give Japan a free hand to move southward in the Pacific.

The signing of the pact came as a psychological blow to China. For China, it represented a betrayal by the Soviet Union, which had been aiding China’s war effort against Japan based on the Sino-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 1937. American novelist Ernest Hemingway, then a war correspondent in China, predicted that Russian aid would continue even after the new Soviet pact with Japan. However, according to historian Boris Slavinsky, “In mid-1941 all Soviet volunteers were recalled from China, and supply of military power to that country practically ceased.”

Matsuoka, as Japan’s foreign minister, thus instituted two new regional systems in Asia: the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and the Eurasian Continental Bloc. This specter posed a “revolutionary” challenge to the old order of Western imperialists. The Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact, in particular, was a diplomatic triumph for Matsuoka. With his triumph, the two foundational exemplars of Du Bois’s internationalism, Soviet Russia and Japan—“the fountain of socialism and the first-born of budding ‘colored’ world powers”—seemed to converge in their ideological and historical trajectories.

The prospect of a Eurasian Continental Bloc apparently dazzled Du Bois. It was, as he put it, a “world of singular beauty with the confusing tracery of patterns but echoing our world.” It lasted only for a brief moment, though, for the outbreak of the German-Soviet war shattered the idyll. In his *Amsterdam News* column of July 12, 1941, Du Bois writes in blank surprise, “Out of another world of singular beauty . . . I come back to solid earth.” Du Bois tells his readers the war “compels nearly all of us to rearrange our thoughts and forecasting.” Hitler’s attempt to “subdue Russia and to fight Communism with everything that Communism stands for except democracy,” in Du Bois’s words, left the thinker “puzzled and awhirl.” Du Bois found Hitler’s war even more puzzling when he pondered its implications for the destiny of Asia, as ironically the outbreak of the war seemed to link Asia’s liberation from white dominance with Hitler’s victory. “If the Fascists win” in Europe, Du Bois reasons, Japan would expand southward and “logically . . . dominate Dutch India, British East India and Australia” to fill the power vacuum in the Pacific left by the European colonial powers, especially Great Britain, defeated by Hitler. This assumption of hegemony in Asia, however, would leave “the puzzle of the relation of Japan to Hitler and Mussolini,” in Du Bois’s analysis, and “eventually Japan must make a tremendous choice.” Du Bois asserts that Japan “has got to realize that the new industrial revolution which has already essentially transformed the Western World which she
has been imitating, must be yielded to [communism].” However, this “will be easier than it appears,” Du Bois concludes, for “as Matsuoka, himself, once told me: within and essentially, Japan is already Communistic.”

However, Du Bois was not to see Matsuoka transform Asia into a contiguous regional community that transcends nationalism, realizing the promise of the Co-Prosperity Sphere that is “communism.” A week after Du Bois’s column of July 12 appeared, the Japanese foreign minister was dismissed from Konoye’s cabinet, and Matsuoka’s Co-Prosperity Sphere became an autarchic regional empire that Japanese militarists dreamed of as industrially strong enough to wage total war. History also proved that Japanese-Soviet cooperation—and the Eurasian Continental Bloc that it enabled—could not work as a diplomatic deterrent against the international Anglo-American hegemony in maritime Asia. The United States, fearing that the Japanese-Soviet pact would embolden Japan to advance south against the British and American assets in Asia and the Pacific, “accelerated its own war preparations against Japan and adopted an even tougher stance in its negotiations with Tokyo,” setting the stage for Pearl Harbor.123 Ironically, the geopolitical vista that appeared on the Eurasian horizon in 1941—which briefly made Du Bois’s socialist Manchurian narrative seem viable in its resonance with Matsuoka’s foreign diplomacy—proved to be neither a deterrent to war nor an augury of a new international (and racial) order. Rather, it precipitated the Pacific War, merging the Sino-Japanese War into the greater conflict in the Pacific theater of World War II.

In this essay, I have delineated a black Eurasian Pacific geography that Du Bois charted and argued for the crucial—though rarely acknowledged—role that his Manchurian narrative played in it. In Du Bois’s description, the communism that he imagined developing from Asia was “Marxian in its division of income according to need” but “distinctly Asiatic in its use of the vertical clan division and family tie, instead of reaction toward a new bourgeoisie along horizontal class layers” as in Europe. This communism afforded “vast hope,” Du Bois writes in his travel manuscript. “With its Asiatic stress on character, on goodness, on spirit,” it promised to avoid “the tendency of the Western socialistic state to freeze into bureaucracy,” according to Du Bois. “Instead of socialism ever becoming a stark negation of the freedom of thought and a tyranny of action and propaganda of science and art,” the black thinker posits, it might create “a great democracy of the spirit.” Du Bois speculates that if the experiment had succeeded, it might have fulfilled Matsuoka’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere; indeed, it might have “achieved a co-prosperity sphere with freedom of soul” (RA, 150–150A, 151). But the Japanese Empire was “under curious double control” (RA, 153). Even-
tually Japan’s “headstrong leaders,” writes Du Bois, “chose to apply Western imperialism to her domination of the East, and Western profit-making replaced Eastern idealism” (RA, 151).

After the Japanese Empire’s capitulation in World War II, Matsuoka was judged on “Class A” charges of “crimes against peace” in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. He died of tuberculosis before his trial was completed. Manchukuo vanished from the postwar world map; on August 8, 1945, two days after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, breaching the neutrality pact, whereupon Stalin broached the Manchurian frontier and placed Manchukuo under Soviet control. Inspired by Matsuoka, Du Bois’s Manchurian narrative demarcated the promise of Asian socialism that the Manchurian venture once seemed to furnish. This essay has attempted to convey this unique power of Manchuria to exercise the imagination of the African American leftist intellectual, who would evolve into a Maoist in the 1950s.

Notes


2. The state established in Manchuria was also spelled Manchoukuo.


5. As Arnold Rampersad observes, “Two concerns dominated [Du Bois’s] analyses of international events in the 1930s and 1940s: the success of socialism, objectified in the fate of the USSR, and the rise of the darker races out of colonialism or, in the case of Japan, to the height of international power” (Rampersad, The Art and Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976], 223). In the phrasing of Francis L. Broderick, Du Bois’s assessments of world powers were based on two criteria—“their sympathy for colored colonial peoples and their aversion to capitalism”—which


8. While Du Bois’s novel Dark Princess (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928) is a prime example of “Afro-Orientalism” that stresses Afro-Asian solidarity, I am interested in re-thinking black internationalism by linking it less to ideology and more to travel.


13. Report, New York City, May 1, 1942, 1, FBI file 100–99729.


18. “No. 5741, December 12, 1936, Visit of Professor Du Bois.” KBS requested permission for Du Bois to inspect the navy’s battleship at Yokosuka.


21. KBS did not “invite” Du Bois to Japan, though it significantly facilitated his planned visit. In 1936, KBS was “contemplat[ing]” extending an invitation to Zona Gale Breese, winner of the 1921 Pulitzer Prize, to visit Japan. She was indeed invited and vis-


24. “Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai Yakuin Meibo” [KBS: Directors, Advisers, Councilors List, as of September 1, 1936], KBS Collection. KBS’s councilors included the director of the information department of the Foreign Office (which gave Du Bois a geisha party); the president of the Tokyo Pan-Pacific Club (which invited him to its monthly luncheon); the director of the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum (which he visited); the presidents of Tokyo Imperial University and Waseda University (at each of which he lectured); the director of the Tokyo Imperial University Library (which he inspected); the chairman of the board of directors of the Osaka Mainichi, a major newspaper company (at the hall of which he gave a lecture entitled “Message to Japan”); the executive director of Japan Broadcasting Corporation, Japan’s national public broadcasting organization (which mentioned Du Bois’s arrival in Japan “twice in nationwide radio hookups”); the mayor of Osaka (who “officially” received him); the vice minister of railways in the Japanese government (which provided him a free rail pass); the president of Nippon Yusen Kaisha (which provided passage on its ship Tatsuta Maru when he left Japan); and others (Du Bois, “Forum of Fact and Opinion,” Pittsburgh Courier, March 13, 1937, 11; Du Bois, Newspaper Columns, 1:179).


31. W. E. B. Du Bois, “Russia and America: An Interpretation,” draft manuscript, reel 46, frame 132, Du Bois Papers. All subsequent references to the work are cited as RA in the text. Page numbers for “Russia and America” are cited as they appear in the manuscript.


33. William C. Kirby, Germany and Republican China (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), 143–44.


35. All foreign travelers through Manchukuo were required to obtain visas at the passport office in the compound of the Manchouli station.


37. Du Bois notes that the Yamato Hotel at Hsinking was once “a Russian club . . . amid ancient acacias” (RA, 130), but he has probably confused the two Yamato hotels—both owned by SMR—at Harbin and at Hsinking.


39. Louise Young, Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 250.


41. “Senman-nin ‘Kokujin no Jifu’: Dyuboisu hakase Sakuya Rairen” [Father of Ten Million Blacks: Dr. Du Bois Arrived at Dairen Last Night], Manshu Nichi-Nichi, November 18, 1936, 7.

42. “Kokujin no Jifu, Sakuya Koenkai” [Father of Blacks Lectured Last Night], Manshu Nichi-Nichi, November 19, 1936, 7.


45. “Manshukoku Kenkoku Sengen” [Declaration of Founding of Manchukuo], March 1, 1932, frame 0021, Ref. B02030709100, JACAR.


48. “Manshukoku Kenkoku Sengen” [Declaration of Founding of Manchukuo], frame 0021.


54. Young, *Japan’s Total Empire*, 291.


65. Richard Wright, “Big Harlem Rally for China Tonight,” Daily Worker, September 27, 1937, 4. In 1941, Wright applied to cover the Sino-Japanese War as a foreign correspondent for the Associated Negro Press (ANP). Wright sought this assignment out of envy of Ernest Hemingway, who had recently visited Chungking, the wartime capital of China’s Nationalist government, as a correspondent for the New York leftist newspaper PM, along with his wife Martha Gellhorn, a war correspondent for Collier’s magazine (Hazel Rowley, Richard Wright: The Life and Times [New York: Henry Holt, 2001], 235). Wright wanted “to see how men and women of color are living in other parts of the world” and became determined to go to the Far East (Richard Wright to Claude A. Barnett, March 4, 1941, box 93, folder 1187, Richard Wright Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT). However, Wright’s application to the State Department for a passport to travel to China and the Soviet Union as a reporter for the ANP was denied (R. B. Shipley, Passport Division, to Richard Wright, June 24, 1941, box 107, folder 1645, Richard Wright Papers).


67. Chee Lai! (Ariset!): Songs of New China (New York: Keynote Recordings, 1941), 5.


79. The league had proposed establishing international control of Manchuria. In speaking against this proposal, Matsuoka, Japan’s chief delegate, asked rhetorically, “What justification is there for such an attempt on the part of the League of Nations? I cannot see. Would the American people agree to such control over the Panama Canal Zone? Would the British people permit it over Egypt?” (League of Nations, delegation from Japan, *Japan’s Case in the Sino-Japanese Dispute as Presented before the Special Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations* [Geneva: Author, 1933], 60).


90. That the Italo-Ethiopian War was one of the most important points of reference in the African American community is reflected by the invitation of Malaku E. Bayen, “representative of Emperor Haile Selassie” and founder of the Ethiopian World Federation in New York, to attend a debate on the Sino-Japanese conflict at the Dunbar Literary Club of Harlem in January 1938 (“Discuss Japan,” *New York Amsterdam News*, January 29, 1938, 2).


103. For an account of the committee, see Donald J. Friedman, The Road from Isolation: The Campaign of the American Committee for Non-Participation in Japanese Aggression, 1938–1941 (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1968).


110. Slavinsky, Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact, 7. Also, it is worth noting that Matsuoka’s pro-Axis attitude did not entail anti-Semitism, although that charge has been leveled against him. As biographer David J. Lu notes, Matsuoka launched a rescue operation through SMR to render assistance to Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution. The operation provided refugees with shelter, visas for travel, passage to the United States and South America, or settlement in Manchuria and Shanghai (Lu, Agony of Choice: Matsuoka Yōsuke and the Rise and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1880–1946 [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002], 135–36).

111. In Rome, American modernist poet Ezra Pound welcomed Matsuoka in a letter to the foreign minister, in which he wrote, “No occidental decently aware of” the qual-
ities of Japanese civilization could be “infected with anti-japanese [sic] propaganda.” In this letter, Pound also raised a proposal for peace directly with Matsuoka: “Men like myself would cheerfully give you Guam for a few sound films” of Noh drama (Ezra Pound to Yosuke Matsuoka, March 29, 1941, in Sanehide Kodama, ed., *Ezra Pound and Japan: Letters and Essays* [Redding Ridge, CT: Black Swan Books, 1987], 249).

112. The details of the Matsuoka-Stalin talks that transpired in the Kremlin on March 24 and April 12 were slow to emerge. Although an account of the first conversation as Matsuoka described it to Hitler was found in confiscated German Foreign Ministry files immediately after the war, and was in the hands of the Allied prosecutors in the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials, official Soviet records of the conversations remained classified in the Russian Foreign Ministry archives until December 1994. The declassified records were fully brought into the public domain by Slavinsky’s *Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact.*


114. Ibid.


124. George S. Schuyler attributed the surprise attack of the Soviet Union on Man-
chukuo to the US dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. He editorialized in his *Pittsburgh Courier* column, “The dropping of the atom bomb did more than slaughter Japanese workers and their families. It spurred Russia to belatedly declare war on her erstwhile Japanese allies so that she would not be left out in the cold when the time came for distributing the Far Eastern swag” (Schuyler, “Views and Reviews,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 18, 1945, 7).