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Japan: Ally in the Struggle Against Racism, 1919-1927

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Abstract

In the summer of 1919, which John Hope Franklin called "the greatest period of interracial strife the nation had ever witnessed," prominent and not so prominent blacks of an international mind prepared to take their appeal for justice to the Paris Peace Conference; there they hoped to gain Japanese support for an international solution to America's racial quagmire. A group which included Madame C. J. Walker, the millionaire cosmetics entrepreneur, A. Philip Randolph, labor leader and co-editor of the Messenger magazine, acclaimed journalist and anti-lynching activist Ida Wells Barnett, and Monroe Trotter, editor of the Boston Guardian newspaper, visited the Japanese delegation at the Waldorf Astoria in New York prior to the convening of the peace conference. They left with assurances that Japan's delegates were sympathetic to the plight of blacks in the United States. Members of the East Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia subsequently addressed a petition to the Japanese asking that they work "to remove prejudice and race discrimination in all nations of the earth."

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In May 1919 the political weight of the Chinese working class, was demonstrated for the first time (although in a confused manner) when the workers of Shanghai and elsewhere struck in support of nationalist students protesting against Japanese imperialism. In 1922 the seamen of Hong Kong staged a great strike which won major concessions from the British and was the first truly impressive manifestation of the Chinese working class struggling on its own terrain. The intention was the formation of an 'anti-imperialist united front' to struggle for the national liberation of China, which in the first instance meant struggling against the war-lords who controlled large tracts of China, especially in the north. The Anti-Comintern Pact was an anti-communist pact concluded between Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan (later to be joined by other, mainly fascistic, governments) on November 25, 1936 and was directed against the Third (Communist) International. The pact replaced Germany's long running relationship with China before WWII. Germany originally felt closer to China when it opposed the terms of the Versailles Treaty giving Germany protectorates in China to Japan. Nor do we find racism to be a salient feature in the society of the two countries at the time. Rather, much of the horrendous acts of World War 2 were done out of a mentality shaped by bigotry.