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"'Evil Customs of the Past': the Japanese Challenge to a Segregated New World Order  
at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919"

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After hearing of the Shandong settlement at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the chief expert on East Asian affairs of the U.S. delegation, E.T. Williams, warned that it was but a first step in Japan's pursuit of "the conquest of Asia, as a preliminary to world conquest," which was sure to lead to war with the United States.<sup>1</sup> Williams was by no means alone in his distrustful and fatalistic vision of Japanese intentions and the dire future of bilateral relations. Besides other U.S. diplomats, scores of politicians, especially those who opposed the Treaty of Versailles, cast Japan as an autocratic aggressor and argued that not only would ratifying the Shandong cession make the United States complicit in a crime, but Article X might compel the U.S. to militarily defend the Japanese theft of Chinese territory should China one day seek to reacquire it by force. For example, Henry Cabot Lodge advised his fellow senators to recall the whole sordid history of Japanese actions in East Asia since 1894 as well as Japan's "unscrupulous disposition." Japan was "steeped in German ideas" and would inevitably exploit the "unlimited man power of China for military purposes," just as Germany had used Slavs "to promote their schemes of conquest." It was an "intolerable wrong," he declared, to let Japan filch "the territory of a friend who helped us and the other nations in the war against Germany."<sup>2</sup> Robert LaFollette called his colleagues to consider whether or not the United States could be "party to a gigantic theft of territory and valuable rights from China, a sister Republic, an ally in the late war, for the benefit of the most despotic Government on earth." In addition, Lawrence Sherman of Illinois cautioned that since it was "an autocracy," Japan exhibited the motives and ambitions for unbridled expansion along German lines: "All that the Kaiser was to Europe the Mikado is to the mainland of Asia."<sup>3</sup>

It is tempting to see prescient warnings in remarks like these and most experts have done just that in searching for the causes of the atrocities of the 1930s and 1940s. Standard histories depict U.S.-Japan relations during the First World War as a time of rising antagonism between two nations with discordant politics, ambitions and ideals. The conventional wisdom, in other words, underscores incompatibility and difference, while the most rigid iteration pits Wilsonian

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Roy Watson Curry, *Woodrow Wilson and Far Eastern Policy, 1913-1921* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968) 280.

<sup>2</sup> Remarks by Lodge, *Congressional Record*, 66<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, vol. 58, part 7, (October 14, 1919) 6878 -6879.

<sup>3</sup> Remarks by LaFollette and Sherman, *Congressional Record*, 66<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, vol. 58, part 7, (October 16, 1919), 7011 and 7000, respectively.

liberal internationalism against Japanese imperialism as a major tension of the Great War.<sup>4</sup> But what Williams, Lodge and numerous other Americans worried about in the 1910s was just one of many potential futures at that point, and their general accuracy in regards to subsequent Japanese aggression does not mean they were right about the specific circumstances of 1919. Indeed, one of the dangers of highlighting an event, even one as seminal as the First World War, is taking the analytical framework of some of its main actors at face value. In this case, scholarly acceptance of the contemporary U.S. hopes and fears requires the acceptance of a highly politicized and thus warped view of Taisho Japan (1912-1926). It also has led some scholars to dismiss the Japanese variables in the equation altogether. For example, in writing about the second major objective of Imperial Japan at the Paris Peace Conference, Kristofer Allfeldt argues that what “was crucial to the rejection of the race equality proposal was not what *was* the purpose of the Japanese proposal, but what *was seen* by the other parties as the purpose of the measure.”<sup>5</sup>

If Wilsonianism is to move beyond its interpretive insularity and we are truly to reach an inclusive appreciation of Japan-U.S. relations and global affairs in general during the First World War, then we must shift our focus away from such issues as whether Wilson was an idealist or realist and what nations Japan resembled for good or ill to the ways in which U.S. and Japanese experiences echoed and shaped the transnational forces of the day.<sup>6</sup> Unlike comparative studies, which are attuned to differences, transnational history apprehends transcendent phenomena, and thus its purpose is to highlight commonalities across national borders without losing sight of the local forms of those phenomena. As important, its purpose is also to emphasize commonalities across time, which forces us to look past the periodizations based on war that dominate histories of the twentieth century. This approach helps us resist the all but irresistible pull that the search for causes of the Pacific War has had on studies of U.S.-Japan relations before 1941. In fact, as Tom Burkman and others show, Japanese participation in such internationalist initiatives as the League of Nations was indicative of a real desire to maintain an accommodationist foreign policy

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Noriko Kawamura, *Turbulence in the Pacific: Japanese-U.S. Relations during World War I* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Kristopher Allfeldt, “Wilsonian Pragmatism? Woodrow Wilson, Japanese Immigration, and the Paris Peace Conference,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 15.3 (2004): 556 (italics in the original).

<sup>6</sup> For a recent study that interrogates the idealism-realism binary, see Takahara Shusuke, *Uiruson Gaikō to Nihon: Risō to Genjitsu no Aida, 1913-1921* [*Wilson Diplomacy and Japan: Ideal and Reality, 1913-1921*] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 2006).

towards the other allies after World War I.<sup>7</sup> As importantly, no less a figure than Woodrow Wilson believed that Imperial Japan was to be an integral part of his intended new postwar world order. It was not Wilson but his domestic antagonists who miscast Japan as the next imperialist antithesis to U.S. security, a view that diplomatic historians have erroneously attached to Wilson ever since.<sup>8</sup> Still, in order to ascertain whether the Great War was in fact a major departure or a matter of aspirations left unfulfilled, we have to take a closer look at what a Japanese perspective reveals about the most vital pillar of the postwar peace, namely Wilsonian democracy. Since Imperial Japan was allegedly the antithesis of liberal internationalism, a Japanese perspective to a greater degree than mainstream U.S. and European views cuts through the layers of analytical sediment that have subsequently buried the original context of Wilsonianism.

On a fundamental level, Wilsonianism can be defined as “an ideological weapon against ‘every arbitrary power anywhere.’”<sup>9</sup> But the aspiration to replace the entrenched interests of old with broader popular agency in national politics, economics and society was a transnational phenomenon well before World War I. Americans of the Progressive era, for example, were already awakened to the evils of crony capitalism and secretive political machinery when then presidential candidate Wilson called them in 1912 to determine for themselves how to live their daily lives. Meiji-Taisho Japanese had their own version of this common theme in that a binary in which Meiji modernity stood in stark, triumphant contrast to Tokugawa authoritarianism was at the center of Japanese political rhetoric in the early twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> It was heard in the rallying cries of the Taisho Political Crisis of 1912-1913, for instance, when party politicians, who believed they were revitalizing Meiji ideals by advancing the democratic world trends of the times, called for a “Taisho Restoration” to oust anachronistic oligarchy from office.<sup>11</sup> In other

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914-1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Robert G. Kane, “Race and Representation: Japan and the Limits of a Wilsonian Democratic Peace,” *White House Studies* 10.4 (December 2010): 379-406.

<sup>9</sup> Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997) 146.

<sup>10</sup> For an explanation of this binary in Taisho political rhetoric, see Kane 387-390. For more about the Edo-Meiji binary in general, see Carol Gluck, “The Invention of Edo,” in Steven Vlastos, ed., *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 262-284. For analysis of the Meiji Restoration as a reoccurring theme in Japanese discourse, see Miyazawa Seiichi, *Meiji Ishin no Saisōzō: Kindai Nihon no ‘Kigen Shinwa’* [*The Reinvention of Meiji Restoration: The Myth of Historical Origin of Modern Japan*] (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Matsuda [Genji], “Taishō Ishin {Taishō Restoration},” *Seiyū* 149 (January 20, 1913): 17; and “Katsura Naikaku no Seiritsu: Kensei no Kiki Zōdai-su {The Establishment of the

words, Japanese, like Americans and other peoples across the globe, were negotiating a new participatory politics prior to Europe's fall, which is what momentarily allowed Wilsonianism to resonate worldwide in 1919 in the first place. In that regard at least, Woodrow Wilson gets too much credit for Wilsonianism, though his rise to the world stage filled the desire for democratic reconstruction with greater energy and hope, including in Japan. The fact that the propaganda of the war years compartmentalized all politics into two competing camps, though, should not preclude recognition of the momentum of prewar domestic reform movements. Moreover, it is the words and analogies of the domestic competition to redefine the nation that shaped Japanese (and U.S.) understandings of world affairs.

More important than adjusting origin points, considering Wilsonian democracy from a Japanese perspective obliges us to see Taisho diplomats, especially Makino Nobuaki and Chinda Sutemi as reformers and Wilson as the arbitrary power. This is specifically the case in regards to tensions over racial equality, also a definitive transnational phenomenon of the twentieth century, and in fact, democracy during that time cannot be accurately analyzed without assessing race. Most studies of bilateral relations in the 1910s and 1920s shrink the issue to "Japanese pride and American prejudice" with an undue accent on Japanese anger as expressed in public protests and the press.<sup>12</sup> But this equation captures neither the mutual accommodationism that, despite racial issues, regularly drove the policies of Tokyo and Washington nor the resiliency and resoluteness of Japanese efforts to reform the racial status quo before, during and after the First World War. Although studies stress the shrill Japanese and American voices that screamed of incompatibility and clamored for war, in other words, these were not the decisive views of the day. Indeed, one of the distractions of the cultural turn has been the weight given to public opinions that had no direct say in diplomacy, and thus in the quieter inter-governmental upkeep of bilateral relations. A key trend in the early twentieth century was how Japanese elites, extending their own national narrative abroad, diplomatically confronted racism as an anachronism in great power politics and at times had greater faith in the flexibility of U.S. democracy than did Americans, including Woodrow Wilson. These efforts reflect Japanese aspirations to a leading role in a peaceful world

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Katsura Cabinet: Constitutional Crisis Increases},” *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun* (December 24, 1912), Yamamoto Shiro, ed., *Taishō Seihen no Kisoteki Kenkyū* [Fundamental Documents of the Taisho Political Change] (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 1970) 689-690.

<sup>12</sup> Izumi Hirobe, *Japanese Pride, American Prejudice: Modifying the Exclusion Clause of the 1924 Immigration Act* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

that began in the Meiji era. As most accounts contend, Japanese pursuits of the goal could be contradictory and self-serving, but we can only dismiss the efforts as such when they are stacked up against an idealized version of Wilsonianism.

In fact, the Japanese push for U.S. and subsequently League of Nations recognition of racial equality took place as Americans and other white citizens of the Anglophone nations of the Pacific Rim were demanding more exclusive societies. As president, Wilson did not support the racial demagogues whose visions of a future race war fueled the passions of numerous ordinary citizens in the United States and Japan. But from his earliest days as president, Wilson like other U.S. progressive reformers avoided addressing racial inequality at home and saw segregation as a necessary fact of life for the foreseeable future. Moreover, Wilson's rhetorical subtlety and utilization of such "common values" as democracy made him more effective than the extremists at impeding the liberalization of U.S. race relations.<sup>13</sup> In foreign affairs, Wilson believed that the United States could work with Japan despite the real conflicts of interest that arose between the two nations as they vied with one another and Europeans for markets and influence in East Asia and the Pacific. But he and other key members of his administration routinely denied that racism affected policymaking, which, as we will see, remained the stance of U.S. officials until the end of World War II, even though U.S. exclusionists were perfectly clear that their intentions were discriminatory. In short, Japan-U.S. interactions over immigration in 1913 and racial equality at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 show that the Great War brought virtually no change to the dynamics of bilateral and global race relations.

Reflecting historiographical trends, analyses of the 1913 U.S.-Japan immigration dispute underscore the antagonism of the episode, stating that it all but brought the two nations to blows and began a long span of racially-charged hostility that finally exploded in the Pacific War.<sup>14</sup> A

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<sup>13</sup> Gary Gerstle, "Race and Nation in the Thought and Politics of Woodrow Wilson," in John Milton Cooper, Jr., ed., *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War, and Peace* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) 94. See also Stephen Skowronek, "The Reassociation of Ideas and Purposes: Racism, Liberalism, and the American Political Tradition," *American Political Science Review* 100:3 (August 2006): 398.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Masuda Hajimu, "Rumors of War: Immigration Disputes and the Social Construction of American-Japanese Relations, 1905-1913," *Diplomatic History* 33:1 (January 2009): 1-37; Jon Thares Davidann, *Cultural Diplomacy in U.S.-Japanese Relations, 1919-1941* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Izumi Hirobe, *Japanese Pride, American Prejudice: Modifying the Exclusion Clause of the 1924 Exclusion Act* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: the Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Kachi Teruko, "Amerika Shakai ni okeru Nikkei Imin {Japanese Immigrants in American Society}," in Hosoya Chihiro

defining moment in the dispute for most specialists is the well-publicized mass protest over the issue that took place in Tokyo in mid-April. A classic account of the event that is still rehashed by historians records that “a crowd of some 20,000 ... cheered wildly as a member of the Diet demanded the sending of the Imperial fleet to California to protect Japanese subjects and maintain the nation’s dignity.” Smaller protests were held throughout Japan, while the press scorned the anti-Japanese land law as an “outrage” and published anonymous articles about Japanese plans to seize the Philippines and Hawaii.<sup>15</sup> A recent reassessment argues that media technology allowed “popular political cultures” to be “felt across borders” in events like this and negatively affect “the hearts of thousands of people in Japan and the United States.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, impetuous raw emotion is what ties the two nations together, and this conclusion casts likely unintended but serious doubt on the assumption that democratic expansion will promote a more peaceful world. But as Asada Sadao argues, though momentarily heated, the protests were organized by minority political parties and their affiliates, who were left in the dark about foreign policy decisions, and soon lost intensity.<sup>17</sup> What is more, a contemporary report about the mass protest of the so-called “U.S. question” in the Tokyo *Nichi Nichi* shows that while speakers criticized the “inhumanity of the anti-Japanese law,” they were more incensed at the “ineptitude of foreign ministry officials” in handling the matter.<sup>18</sup> As was typical of Meiji-Taishō political rhetoric, minority politicians and other public figures censured the Yamamoto Gonbei cabinet for perpetuating a regressive “clan government” through its secret diplomacy and cast themselves as defenders of the constitution in order to raise the status of their respective parties.

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and Honma Nagao, eds., *Nichi-Bei Kankei Shi* {History of Japan-U.S. Relations} (Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 1991); Hata Ikuhiko, *Taiheiyo Kokusai Kankei Shi: Nichi-Bei oyobi Nichi-Ro Kiki no Keifu, 1900-1935* {History of Pacific International Relations: Analyses of Japan-U.S. and Japan-Russia Crises, 1900-1935} (Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan Kan, 1972); Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The New Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956); and Josephus Daniels, *The Wilson Era: Years of Peace, 1910-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

<sup>15</sup> Link, *Wilson: The New Freedom*, 293. See Hajimu 28-29; Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations throughout History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998) 105; and William Braisted, *The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1909-1922* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971) 125-126, for reiterations.

<sup>16</sup> Hajimu 35.

<sup>17</sup> Asada Sadao, *Ryō Taisenkan no Nichi-Bei Kankei: Kaigun to Seisaku Kettei Katei* {Japan-U.S. Relations in the Era of the World Wars: the Navy and the Policy-making Process} (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1993) 298.

<sup>18</sup> “Tai-Bei Mondai Kokumin Taikai – Kaishū Man no amari {National Mass Meeting over the American Question – Audience of approximately 10,000},” *Shinbun Shūsei Taishō Hennen Shi* 44 vols. (Tokyo: Meiji Taishō Shōwa Shinbun Kenkyū Kai, 1978) 2: 275.

A binary pitting popular rights against arbitrary rule was also embedded in what a recent history of the global color line calls “the most dramatic [Japanese] response to the Californian question” given its condemnation of “white snobbery” and support of Japanese imperialism and pan-Asianism.<sup>19</sup> In fact, in his 1913 article titled *Hakubatsu*, which is more precisely translated as “white clan,” Tokutomi Iichirō uses the rhetorical devices of Meiji-Taisho politics to envision a more equitable world order. He states that Japan must overcome the “white clan” of Western powers that dominates the globe, particularly its “evil custom” of racial prejudice, not for itself, “but for the sake of the world and humanity.”<sup>20</sup> Here, Tokutomi is not advocating a break with the West. Rather, using a keyword from the fourth article of the Charter Oath, his admonitions reflect the sense felt by many Japanese of the era that rooting out racism worldwide was an issue in which their nation could lead the great powers. Still, the more important interactions in this regard, at least over the long run, were the discreet but persistent Japanese efforts to assure U.S. white elites of Japanese assimilability and the equally discreet but persistent U.S. resistance to that idea.

Throughout the 1913 dispute, the Japanese officials at the center of bilateral negotiations were in constant contact with the Wilson Administration. Though Ambassador Chinda warned Wilson of his concern that the “misunderstanding of Japan” harbored by a few Americans on the West Coast might have “grave effects” on the amity and growing commercial ties that the two nations enjoyed, Japanese diplomatic correspondences predominantly highlighted the historically positive state of bilateral relations.<sup>21</sup> This approach was based at least in part on the weakness of the Japanese legal case in that Makino and Chinda knew that the proposed California alien land law did not violate the letter of existing bilateral treaties.<sup>22</sup> But it was also based on a belief that

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<sup>19</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 273-274.

<sup>20</sup> Tokutomi Sohō, *Hakubatsu [The White Clan]*, Kusano Shigematsu and Namiki Sentarō, eds., *Sohō Bunsen* (Tokyo: Minyūsha, 1916) 1303-1306. The term Tokutomi uses for “evil customs” (*rōshū*) is used in the fourth article of the Charter Oath. See Asahi Shinbun Sha, ed., *Meiji Taishō Shi [History of the Meiji Taisho Eras]*. 6 vols. (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Sha, 1931) 6: 15.

<sup>21</sup> Kikuchi Takenori, *Hakushaku Chinda Sutemi Den: Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa Gaikō Shiryō {Biography of Baron Chinda Sutemi: Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa Diplomatic Documents}* (Tokyo: Kyōmeikaku, 1938) 129.

<sup>22</sup> “Makino Nobuaki Gaimu Daijin yori Zai-Beikoku Chinda Sutemi Taishi (April 11, 1913),” Gaimushō, ed., *Nihon Gaikō Bunshō, Taishō 2-nen {Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy, 1913}*, 3 volumes (Tokyo: Gaimushō, 1965) 3: 50-53, especially 51 where Makino notes that the 1911 Treaty of



“racial oppression would disappear as soon as Americans at large became cognizant of who ‘real’ Japanese were.”<sup>23</sup> As such, unlike many popular utterances, the official and semi-official Japanese statements noted the compatibilities shared by Japanese and Americans. For example, Prime Minister Yamamoto told the Tokyo press corps that although the California issue was “truly regrettable,” the imperial “government had always valued peace and friendship in dealing with [it].” Moreover, since U.S. national character was based on “justice and humanity,” he anticipated a “harmonious settlement” could be reached “without pressuring the United States.”<sup>24</sup> Yamamoto reminded local Japanese officials that the offensive California bill was the internal affair of one state, and not necessarily the feeling of all Americans.<sup>25</sup> The confidential, official notes of the Yamamoto government, which were approved by Makino and Chinda, made similar points in refuting the case for Japanese exclusion. A major note representatively argued that the “geographical propinquity” of the two nations, plus their mutual evolution “along the same lines of peace and progress, make it entirely natural that the two peoples should come into broader and closer contact with each other, commercially, industrially and socially.” Depicting the U.S. and Japan as “neighboring countries,” the note said it was crucial that “both peoples should meet and mingle in a spirit of mutual esteem, courtesy and toleration” and be governed by “justice and fair play, avoiding all discriminatory treatment which may tend to hurt the sense of national dignity of a self-respecting people.” Although Japanese might be racially distinct from Americans and Europeans, they had the “same susceptibilities, [were] inspired by the same aims and aspirations, and [were] guided by the same principles.”<sup>26</sup>

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Commerce and Navigation had no provision for agricultural land ownership. Hereafter cited as *NGB* with volume and page numbers.

<sup>23</sup> Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 61.

<sup>24</sup> “Yamamoto Shushō no Enzetsu {A Speech by Prime Minister Yamamoto},” *Seiyū* 155 (June 20, 1913): 15-16.

<sup>25</sup> “Chihō Kan Kaigi ni okeru Kunji {Instructions to the Conference of Local Officials},” *Seiyū* 156 (July 1, 1913): 18. Here, Yamamoto was repeating a point made by U.S. officials. See “The Secretary of State to the Japanese Ambassador (May 19, 1913),” U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1913* (Washington: Government Printing Office) 632, which reads: “The economic policy of a single State with regard to a single kind of property cannot turn aside these strong and abiding currents of generous and profitable intercourse and good feeling.” Hereafter cited as *FRUS* with document title, volume and page numbers.

<sup>26</sup> “An Aide-Memoire from the Japanese Government (c. June 3, 1913),” Arthur S. Link et al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. 68 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966-1995) 27: 493. Hereafter cited as *PWW* with document title, volume and page numbers.

The efforts of private Japanese citizens were meant to reinforce this perception of Japan among Americans. For example, Kaneko Kentaro implored his old Harvard classmate, Theodore Roosevelt, to use his influence, as he had as president, to prevent passage of the California alien land law, which was “entirely incompatible with our traditional [bilateral] friendship.”<sup>27</sup> Sent to the U.S. under the auspices of Shibusawa Eiichi, Soyeda Juichi, a former president of the Industrial Bank of Japan and Kamiya Tadao, Honorary Chief Secretary of the Chambers of Commerce of Tokyo, met privately with high ranking U.S. officials, including Woodrow Wilson, to discuss the immigration issue.<sup>28</sup> The two emissaries also publicly reinforced the argument that the Yamamoto cabinet was making against the California law in its private exchanges with the Wilson Administration. In an English-language pamphlet published in San Francisco, the co-authors underlined the sameness of the two societies. They invoked the memory of Commodore Perry, noting that since his arrival in 1853, Japan had been “faithfully following in the footsteps of America.” Echoing Yamamoto’s public statements and Japanese diplomatic notes, they also recognized the various reforms that Japan had undertaken with the “Great Republic” as its model and expressed gratitude for the “many acts of kindness by her neighbor on the other side of the Pacific,” whose name had “always been associated with justice, kindness and humanity.”<sup>29</sup>

But Soyeda and Kamiya also underscored the ways in which Japanese might educate Americans about how to fix the flaws in contemporary U.S. democracy. They took to task those Americans who thought that democracy had to be “a homogeneous body, so that the foreign element – such as the Japanese – must be excluded.” In fact, they argued, the diverse population of the United States, which included “Negroes, Latins, Slavs, Jews and what not” proved that U.S. democracy was “strong enough to assimilate different races.” Besides, exclusion went against the very nature of U.S. democracy, and so did the path that the United States seemed to be treading in world affairs. If some U.S. politicians were “ready to kindle the fire of race hatred and worldwide consternation, then what would be the disappointment of her trusting friend on the other side of the Pacific and with it that of the teeming populations of the Orient?” To avoid

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<sup>27</sup> “Makino Nobuaki Gaimu Daijin yori Zai-Beikoku Chinda Sutemi Taishi (April 14, 1913),” *NGB, Taishō* 2, 3: 67-68.

<sup>28</sup> See “John Bassett Moore to Joseph Tumulty (June 18, 1913),” U.S. Department of State Archives, Decimal Files, 811.52/154 and “Soyeda Juichi to Woodrow Wilson (June 25, 1913),” 811.52/173. Hereafter cited as SDA with series and document numbers.

<sup>29</sup> J. Soyeda and T. Kamiya, “A Survey of the Japanese Question in California” (San Francisco, 1913) 3 (located in SDA 811.52/197-1/2).

that awful fate, Soyeda and Kamiya called for “Campaigns of Education” that would “enlighten public opinion” in both nations about their commonalities.<sup>30</sup> As Asada argues, this hope reflects the “blind spot” of Taisho liberals, namely that their U.S. counterparts were similarly committed to ending racial discrimination.<sup>31</sup>

Despite reciprocal professions of friendship, the Wilson Administration acknowledged no commonality with Japan when it came to the racial aspects of the dispute. In its official notes, in which the president was fully involved, the U.S. government said that the Yamamoto cabinet had “been misled in its interpretation of the spirit and object of the legislation in question.”<sup>32</sup> It claimed that all “differences between human beings – differences in appearance, differences in manner, differences in speech, differences in opinion, differences in nationality, and differences in race – may provoke a certain antagonism; but none of these differences is likely to produce serious results unless it becomes associated with an interest of a contentious nature, such as that of the struggle for existence.” In California’s case, the “contest is economic; the racial difference is a mere mark or incident of the economic struggle.” The U.S. position also held that every nation, including Japan, appreciated this fact, “and it is for this reason that each nation is permitted to determine who shall and who shall not be permitted to settle in its dominions and become part of the body politic, to that end it may preserve internal peace and avoid the contentions which are so likely to disturb the harmony of international relations.”<sup>33</sup>

In short, the Wilson Administration parried the efforts of Chinda and Makino to prevent discrimination against Japanese immigrants with the principle of national self-determination, which here meant that nations had the right to exclude certain peoples from their societies. By this interpretation, Japan was pursuing not racial equality, but racial imperialism. As Wilson’s eventual nemesis, Henry Cabot Lodge, remarked at the time: “We can exclude anybody we choose to exclude: that is the inalienable right of every sovereign nation. ... If one nation can force its citizens upon another nation, the nation upon whom these citizens are forced is a tributary and a subject nation.”<sup>34</sup> Advocates of the exclusionist movement in California were clear that denying Japanese entry to the United States was racially motivated. William Kent, a

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<sup>30</sup> Soyeda and Kamiya 6, 16 and 13.

<sup>31</sup> Asada, *Ryō Taisenkan no Nichi-Bei Kankei*, 300-301.

<sup>32</sup> “To Baron Sutemi Chinda (May 19, 1913),” *PWW* 27: 454.

<sup>33</sup> “The Secretary of State to the Japanese Ambassador (July 16, 1913),” *FRUS*, 1913, 641.

<sup>34</sup> “Henry Cabot Lodge to Brooks Adams (May 22, 1913),” *Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, 1775-1966*, microfilm edition, 183 reels, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, undated), reel 37.

U.S. congressman from California who kept Wilson apprised of public sentiments there, stated that: “the whole question is a social and not an economic one. ... The clash of race antipathy which is very real and very essential will lead to war and not to peace and will prevent democratic development [in California], just as it has done in the South.”<sup>35</sup> For his part, Wilson studiously avoided any direct reference to race and stressed the limits to what his administration could do to resolve the immigration issue. The federal government, he told Chinda, “could not infringe upon the constitutional rights that each state enjoys.”<sup>36</sup> Sidestepping repeated Japanese attempts to negotiate a new bilateral treaty in 1913 and 1914, Wilson also informed the Japanese ambassador that although he was ready “to advise other states against discrimination,” he did not “feel justified in presenting to Congress a treaty that will *deny* to the states the right to discriminate.”<sup>37</sup> As we will see, the 1913 immigration dispute set the parameters for the bigger and better-known battle over racial equality at Versailles in 1919.

In the interim, Japanese diplomats had again tried to address the treatment of Japanese immigrants in the United States with the Wilson Administration. Most notably, during the lead-up to the Lansing-Ishii talks in 1917, Ambassador Satō Aimaro discussed with Wilson’s chief advisor, Edward M. House, a possible revision of bilateral treaties so that Japan was expressly accorded the most-favored-nation status it had by treaty rights with the European powers. Satō went so far as to advise that the United States adopt a “constitutional amendment restraining any state from making and enforcing any law discriminatory against aliens in respect to property and other civil rights.”<sup>38</sup> But U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing left the immigration question off the list of issues that he was willing to discuss with Ishii.<sup>39</sup> In the summer of 1918, Ishii met with House and made clear that the postwar order had to end such negative “prewar conditions” as U.S. restriction of immigrants in the interest of “international justice.”<sup>40</sup> Although he is less direct in using the language of article four of the Charter Oath than Tokutomi was in 1913, Ishii

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<sup>35</sup> “William Kent to Miss Ida M. Tarbell (May 8, 1913)” William Kent Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 290, Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives.

<sup>36</sup> Kikuchi, *Chinda Den*, 129.

<sup>37</sup> “From William Jennings Bryan, with Enclosure (September 17, 1913),” *PWW* 28: 283 (italics in the original).

<sup>38</sup> “Memorandum by the Japanese Ambassador (Sato), May 8, 1917,” *FRUS, The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920*, vol. 2, 403-404.

<sup>39</sup> “Zai-Beikoku Satō Aimaro Taishi yori Motono Ichiro Gaimu Daijin (May 12, 1917),” *NGB, Taishō* 6, vol. 3: 707-709.

<sup>40</sup> “Zai-Beikoku Ishii Taishi yori Zai-Eikoku Nagai Taishi (January 14, 1919),” *NGB, Taishō* 8, vol. 3, part 1: 436.

nonetheless extends the dichotomized spirit of reform of the early Meiji era to then contemporary international affairs, subtly casting the United States as the regressive side of the binary. The gist of Ishii's discussion with House ultimately became part of the negotiation strategy of Japan's plenipotentiaries at the Paris Peace Conference, Makino Nobuaki and Chinda Sutemi.<sup>41</sup>

Initially, Makino and Chinda, under a general charge from the Hara Takashi government, engaged in what seemed to be promising consultations with House and Woodrow Wilson about the feasibility of affirming racial equality in the League of Nations Covenant. According to House, Wilson had initially proposed the insertion of an article into the Covenant that “required newly created states to accord equality of treatment to all racial and religious minorities.”<sup>42</sup> Politically, however, there was a world of difference between the President's visionary call for equality in “newly created states” and the final Japanese proposal, which endorsed “the principle of equality of nations and just treatment of their nationals” seemingly everywhere.<sup>43</sup> Similar to the Emancipation Proclamation a half century earlier, Wilson's proposal only applied to enemy territory, in this case the new states that might emerge in Eastern Europe from the fallen empires of the Central Powers. But the Japanese proposal included the territories of the victors, whose advocates protested vehemently against the affront its inclusion posed to their right to determine who could and could not enter their borders. Echoing the U.S. position in support of California in 1913, British delegate Robert Cecil said that the race question could not be resolved “without encroaching on the sovereignty of States” that made up the League.<sup>44</sup> Politicians from the West Coast of the United States warned Wilson of the dire political repercussions that would ripple through state and national politics if the racial equality proposal were passed, since Asians would likely “demand the repeal of the Asiatic Exclusion Law of the United States.”<sup>45</sup> The uninhibited hostility towards the Japanese proposal of Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes, who played a role quite like California Governor Hiram Johnson in 1913, allowed the Wilson Administration

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<sup>41</sup> Burkman 81.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Bonsal, *Unfinished Business* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1944) 20.

<sup>43</sup> For the development of the language of the Japanese proposal, see *NGB, Taisho 8*, 3.1, 436-515. Note how the original formulation of *jinshu sabetsu teppai* (end racial discrimination) was a direct challenge to U.S. policy in 1913.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Cecil as cited in Shimazu 28.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, “Joseph Patrick Tumulty to Newton Diehl Baker, with Enclosure (April 5, 1919),” *PWW* 57: 49-50 and “From the Diary of Dr. Grayson (April 11, 1919),” *PWW* 57: 240 (which contains the above quote).

to leave its own opposition largely unsaid.<sup>46</sup> Upholding the protests of Great Britain and its Dominions, Wilson effectively vetoed the racial equality proposal by requiring a unanimous vote of the Commission on the League of Nations instead of simply the favorable majority that it had received.<sup>47</sup>

A more clandestine procedural approach reinforced this arbitrary decision. As Stephen Bonsal, Wilson's private translator, recorded in his diary, an "amendment to Article V ... had been introduced by President Wilson without fanfare and quietly put through. It justifies and sanctions the ruling of the President that the Japanese equality proposal, or amendment, was defeated, although a majority voted for it. And it also means that it cannot be reintroduced with any hope of approval as long as a representative of Australia is present." The change in procedure stated that: "Except where otherwise expressly provided in this Covenant or by terms of the present Treaty, decisions at any meeting of the Assembly or of the Council shall require the agreement of all the Members of the League represented at the meeting."<sup>48</sup> Wilson for his part tellingly stated that he meant "to quiet discussion that raises national differences and racial prejudices. I would wish them, particularly at this juncture in the history of the relations of nations with one another, to be forced as much as possible into the background." Besides, he argued, the League was "the first serious and systematic attempt made in the world to put nations on a footing of equality with each other in their international relations."<sup>49</sup> This rationalization, of course, addresses only half of the Japanese proposal, "the equality of nations," and ignores the non-discrimination against peoples that was at the heart of the matter. Reflecting his gradualism in regard to equalizing race relations, Wilson did not permit an issue of relevance for the distant future to get in the way of one that was of pressing concern in the present. Whether or not it was his intent, his pragmatic defense of state sovereignty in this case bolstered the transnational effort to maintain white supremacy by the Anglophone world of the early twentieth century.

The scholarly consensus is that rejection of the racial equality proposal incited Japanese anger at the United States in the interwar years and turned "Japan away from cooperation with

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<sup>46</sup> Lake and Reynolds 301-302; Allerfeldt 551-552.

<sup>47</sup> Lloyd Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 120.

<sup>48</sup> Bonsal 210-211.

<sup>49</sup> David Hunter Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant*. 2 volumes (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1928) 1: 462-463.

the West and toward more aggressive nationalistic policies.”<sup>50</sup> In addition, experts argue that the immigration dispute “acted as a serious impediment to improving bilateral relations” and was regarded by Japanese officials as “a justifiable *casus belli*.” Here, no less of an authority than Hirohito, testifying in 1946, is cited to tie racial discrimination to the Pacific War.<sup>51</sup> The story of U.S.-Japan relations between the world wars, then, is typically a declension narrative. Moreover, analyses of Japanese foreign policy motivations in the 1910s and 1920s focus unduly on negative emotions, especially fears of being marginalized or “losing face” in world affairs. For example, the seminal work on the Great War and Japan stresses the consternation Wilsonianism caused there, since it presumably condemned “all that the modern Japanese state had stood for since its creation,” namely the pursuit of “arms, empire, and oligarchic rule” that had been modeled on Imperial Germany.<sup>52</sup> In other words, Japan’s national identity made it an outsider compared to the other victors in the war, especially the liberal internationalist United States. Naoko Shimazu likewise stresses contemporary Japanese insecurities about the fragility of Japan’s international identity in her acclaimed study of the racial equality clause. She underscores an alleged Japanese hypersensitivity to racial issues due to it being “a rising non-white great power,” which also set Japan apart from the Anglo-American powers. To her, Japanese membership in the League of Nations was defensive in that a major motive for cooperating with the West was “to prevent the further international isolation of Japan,” which had ostensibly worsened during the Great War as British and U.S. suspicions of Japanese actions in China grew. The racial equality proposal was also grounded in Japanese fears of future racial discrimination and was in essence a pre-emptory effort “to secure Japan’s great power status in the League of Nations at its inception.”<sup>53</sup> Besides ignoring the often severe conflicts of interest over the structure of the postwar world between the assumedly “white” empires of Great Britain, France and the United States, not to mention Italy, these interpretations overlook the extent to which the hopes and fears expressed over how best to

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996) 274-275; Lake and Reynolds 303; and Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001) 321.

<sup>51</sup> Shimazu 74-76; and Lake and Reynolds 308 (for the reference to Hirohito).

<sup>52</sup> Frederick Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 202 and 236.

<sup>53</sup> Shimazu 79, 90, and 112, for the comments on racial sensitivity; 164-165, for the comment on League membership; and 113, for the comment on the racial equality proposal as “pre-emptory.”

advance Japan's proven position in world affairs fit into the discursive framework of the Meiji-Taisho era.

In fact, Japanese reactions to the failure of the racial equality proposal reflect a deep and abiding aspiration to cooperative, great power leadership in a more integrated world. To be sure, the rise of U.S. strength after 1917, and the apparent intentions of Woodrow Wilson to deploy it in order to remake the world in the U.S. image, raised concerns over Japan's capacity to remain autonomous and connected in global affairs.<sup>54</sup> These concerns had extensive roots. After all, the dominant national identity that had originated with the Meiji state in the mid-nineteenth century was partly defensive in that it was meant to reconstruct Japan so that it might effectively confront Western encroachments. But its emphasis was predominantly positive in regard to Japan's place in the world. The tenets of the Meiji promise of success – imperial rule, social cohesion, and international engagement – were also condemnations of the failed policies of a Tokugawa past in which usurpation, arbitrary rule had produced the disastrous results of internal rift and global obscurity. By the early twentieth century, this dichotomy had become the central analogy by which Japanese elites understood domestic and world affairs. As such, Dickinson overplays the rhetorical novelty of the Imperial Rescript on the Establishment of Peace (1920) as a marker of a “conspicuous new national posture” for Japan.<sup>55</sup> But he is absolutely right to highlight Japanese eagerness to play a lead role in postwar reform instead of the hand-wringing of nearly all other analyses. On a basic level, the evident fixation on Japan's international isolation in 1919 reflects the established parameters of Japanese political rhetoric rather than deep-seated insecurities over its status among the powers. In keeping with a core concept of Meiji ideology, Foreign Ministry officials assumed that, all else considered, Japan was an integral and innovative member of the modern world. They therefore did not see the racial equality proposal as merely a “symbolic” gesture meant to assuage “the national pride of Japan.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For an analysis of these fears, see Asada Sadao, “Nichi-Bei Kankei no Imēji – Senzen {Images in Japan-U.S. Relations – the Prewar Period},” in Miwa Kimitada, ed., *Sōgō Kōza Nihon no Shakai Bunkashi*, vol. 7, *Sekai no Naka Nihon* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1974) 308-359 (“Prewar” refers to the Second World War in this case).

<sup>55</sup> Frederick R. Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 35.

<sup>56</sup> Shimazu 79-80.



Rather, the proposal was principally a Japanese attempt “to impose a new criterion ... on the hitherto Western-centric definition of a great power.”<sup>57</sup> But although the criterion was new, the aspiration was not, nor did it simply ride the wake of Wilsonianism, which had no provision for reforming global racial hierarchies. Indeed, if anything, U.S. officials feared the Pandora’s Box such a new criterion might open. Moreover, Japanese irritation at the intransigence of its wartime allies in this regard did not amount to a wholesale rejection of a postwar order based on cooperative diplomacy and democracy. This was because Japanese, who had their own tradition of representative government, did not identify the United States or its president as the sole agents of democratic reform in the world. Indeed, some U.S. policies and attitudes were themselves in dire need of change. For example, Makino thought that Wilson had acted more “dictatorial” than democratic during the Paris Peace Conference, while as Ishii Kikujiro commented in 1917, U.S. restriction of immigrants based on race could have no place in any new order.<sup>58</sup> At this point, the Kaiser may have replaced the Shogun as the ultimate symbol of regression, but the parameters of the analogy stayed the same. Although the defeat of racial equality in 1919 was a setback, it did not end Japanese efforts to win recognition of the principle, which continued into the 1920s.<sup>59</sup> Nor did it steel the resolve of well-placed Japanese officials to forsake international cooperation and confront the West. As Prime Minister Hara Takashi argued in 1920, the foreign perception that “the Japan are an aggressive, war-like race” that acted only out of its own self-interest was a simple misunderstanding, as was the opinion that the military clique controlled Japanese politics and foreign policy.<sup>60</sup> As had been the case since at least 1913, in other words, key officials and private citizens believed that Americans and Europeans would accept Japanese as like them once they understood what Japan was really all about.

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<sup>57</sup> Shimazu 79-80; 91.

<sup>58</sup> Makino Nobuaki, *Kaikoroku {Memoirs}*. 2 vols. (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Sha, 1978) 2: 226. For other examples of this theme, see Miwa Kimitada, “Japanese Opinions on Woodrow Wilson in War and Peace,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 22:3/4 (1967): 368-389.

<sup>59</sup> In 1924, for example, Japanese delegates introduced a racial equality proposal to the Congress of the International Federation of League of Nations Societies. See *New York Times* (July 2, 1924): 19.

<sup>60</sup> Hara Takashi, “Sekai ni Gokai saretaru Nihon no Kokuminsei {Japanese National Character Traits Misunderstood throughout the World},” *Gaiko Jiho* 32 (October 1920): 798-806. In this vein, see also Matsunomiya Shunichiro, “Nichi-Bei Sogo no Hattatsu to Gokai {Japan-U.S. Mutual Development and Misunderstanding},” *Gaiko Jiho* 32 (December 1920) 1176. To be sure, other Japanese elites had a different take on the causes of foreign “misunderstanding” (*gokai*). For example, Goto Shinpei stressed Japan’s “unique cultural spirit” as a distinguishing factor from the West. See Goto Shinpei, “Nihon no Bunkateki Shimei {Japan’s Cultural Mission},” *Gaiko Jiho* (October 1920): 681-685.

The presence of an indigenous, vibrant embrace of democracy and cooperative diplomacy in Japan simply does not fit into the standard analytical framework of Japan-U.S. relations in the trans-Taisho era, nor does the seriousness of Japanese pursuits of racial equality. Instead, what we hear is a tale of an increasingly aggressive Japanese empire taking calculated steps to acquire more and more territory on the road to its fateful collision with U.S. democratic internationalism. Yet, it is vital to remember that even the foreign observers who at the time thought Japan might wage war against the United States took Japanese democracy seriously. For example, the noted British naval correspondent, Hector Bywater, wrote fictionally in 1925 that “the historian may be permitted to marvel at the folly of Japan in wantonly attacking a country with whom she had no real cause for enmity, and whose friendship was essential to her own welfare.”<sup>61</sup> Historians have done just that since the end of the real Pacific War, which in key ways played out as Bywater had predicted nearly two decades earlier in his futuristic novel. Although we may rightly appreciate his general foresight, it is what the novel reveals about the contemporary context in which he wrote that is most significant for present-day scholars. Bywater imagined no ideological or overt racial hostility as the cause of the conflict. Nor did he foresee a clash of incompatible political systems. Instead, Japanese leaders order the attack against the United States to redirect rising domestic political passions against a foreign foe. It is the opposition parties and public outcry, moreover, which ultimately bring down the cabinet responsible for Japan’s disastrous defeat.

In order to move towards a transnational history of World War I era Japan-U.S. relations, it is essential that Japanese pursuits of racial equality, whether in regards to immigration or the League of Nations covenant, be taken just as seriously. These pursuits on a most basic level reflect the foundational Meiji faith that upon entering world affairs Japanese would be accepted by the powers, but they also show the confidence that Japanese had in their democratic institutions by the 1920s. They were not the shrewd bargaining chips that some U.S. diplomats at the time cynically thought they were, though this misperception remains accepted by most specialists of U.S. foreign relations to this day. In his recent reassessment of race and war mobilization, Takashi Fujitani observes that Japanese and U.S. leaders during the Second World War disavowed racism in order to mobilize “allies of color to win the war and to gain their support for the longer-term goal of establishing postwar global, or at least regional,

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<sup>61</sup> Hector C. Bywater, *The Great Pacific War* (1925; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942) 320.

hegemony.”<sup>62</sup> This was not the case after the First World War. For all the praise and blame that scholars have heaped upon Woodrow Wilson for trying to create a democratic postwar order, that fabled U.S. President had no intention of winning allies of color to build the world anew when it came to dismantling racial hierarchies. Indeed, one of the things that exasperated him the most at Paris, Wilson said, was “the unqualified hope that men have entertained everywhere of immediate emancipation from the things that have ... oppressed them. ... You cannot throw off the habits of the individual immediately. They must be slowly got rid of, or, rather, they must be slowly altered. They must be slowly adapted.”<sup>63</sup>

In 1919, in other words, Wilson reveals a pattern of denying and thus perpetuating racism as a factor in U.S. politics and diplomacy that was evident from his earliest days in office, and one that his successors on either side of the aisle would continue until the demands of the Pacific War forced them to change. As Fujitani, Akira Iriye and Gerald Horne remind us, this change came about largely because the so-called “white Allied powers ... had to present themselves as committed to racial equality in response to Japanese appeals for the collaborative resistance of non-white peoples to white, racist imperialism in the Asia-Pacific.”<sup>64</sup> This by no means absolves Japan of the atrocities its soldiers committed. But it does fit within a larger pattern of Japanese efforts to confront racism as an anachronism in great power politics long before the self-serving need arose for Imperial Japanese to end their discrimination against other Asians. This pattern was a product of neither of the world wars. Moreover, although it was meant to improve Japan’s position among the great powers, the effort was genuine and consistent throughout the 1910s and 1920s. In short, if we are to accept that, in the end, the brutal Japanese imperialism of the 1930s and early 1940s finally forced the world to at least begin to amend the global color line, then we should readily acknowledge the seriousness of the efforts to end discrimination made peacefully by Taisho Japanese in a democratic era, even if the push for racial equality found full expression only after a worse world war.

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<sup>62</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014) 11.

<sup>63</sup> Wilson cited in Roy Watson Curry, *Woodrow Wilson and Far Eastern Policy, 1913-1921* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957) 284.

<sup>64</sup> Fujitani 12.