African Samurai: True Story of a Legendary Black Warrior in Feudal Japan

Welcome! The meeting will start momentarily....

- All attendee mics will be muted during the meeting.
- Q/A will take place after the talk, please send questions along “to everyone” in the Q&A chat box!
Miles Ezeilo
Student, Howard University
Jisoo Kim
Co-Director, East Asia NRC; Director, GW Institute for Korean Studies
Thomas Lockley
Professor, Nihon University College of Law, Tokyo
Yasuke: An African Warrior in Japan

Thomas Lockley
Nihon University College of Law, Tokyo

George Washington University
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Today’s Line Up

• Background
• 1581 – Meeting with Nobunaga
• 1581 – Investiture
• 1581/2 – On Campaign
• 1582 – Last Battle
• Yasuke Today
• Multicultural Pioneer
Yasuke - Background

- Until 20th century – 11 million plus Africans sold in the Indian Ocean
- 16th century – Japan embroiled in civil war
- 1549 – First Jesuit missionaries arrive in Japan
- c1577 – Yasuke employed by Alessandro Valignano in India as bodyguard
- 1579 – Yasuke and Valignano arrive in Japan
- 1579 – 1581 Yasuke in Kyushu
African bodyguards and porters arriving in Japan in a Jesuit entourage

Extract from a *Nanban* (southern barbarian) folding screen, Kano School c. 1590-1600. Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.
African bodyguards and servants attend a Portuguese dignitary

Extract from a *Nanban* (southern barbarian) folding screen, Kano School c. 1590-1600. Courtesy of The Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis, Porto, Portugal.
1581 – Journey to Kyoto

- Valignano goes to Kyoto to ask permission to leave Japan
- In Sakai and then Kyoto, crowds of thousands gawp at Yasuke
- Property is damaged, people crushed in crowds
- Nobunaga demands to see who disturbs his peace
1581 - Meeting with Nobunaga

- Conversed in Japanese, Nobunaga impressed
- Did not believe skin colour – stripped to waist and scrubbed
- Truth realised, Nobunaga sends for sons
- Throws a party for his guest
- Gifts a large sum of money
- Asks Vignano to allow Yasuke into his service
Oda Nobunaga, posthumous portrait

Giovanni Nicolao, c. 1585. Courtesy of Sanpu Temple, Yamagata Prefecture, Japan.
Why so interesting?

• 188cms, a giant in this age
• Good looking
• Intelligent
• Entertaining
• Strength of ten men
• Buddha often portrayed as black skinned
• Many saw Yasuke as a divine visitor gracing them with his presence
1581 – Investiture

- Appointed weapon bearer
- Confidant on overseas matters
- Given residence in Azuchi Castle
- Stipend
- Servants
- SWORD – formal recognition of samurai rank
- First documented non-Japanese samurai
An African sumo wrestles while Nobunaga adjudicates. The court gaze on.

A wealthy African talks with a Portuguese merchant

Detail from a lacquer ware writing case, probably Rin school, c. 1615. Courtesy of Paulo de Cunha donation, Fundacao Abel e Joao de Lacerda, Museu do Caramulo, Caramulo, Portugal.
Azuchi Castle, where Yasuke lived

1581/2 – On Campaign

• Yasuke was likely a fad at first
• But soon won his lord’s trust
• Accompanied Nobunaga on campaign once definitely, probably twice

• June 1582 – Nobunaga sets out for western front with close entourage
• Stays the night in Kyoto
1582 – Last Battle

- Akechi Mitsuhide, trusted general betrays Nobunaga
- 13,000 against 30
- Nobunaga performs *seppuku*
- Last order, “Yasuke save my head”
- Yasuke takes head to heir
- Heir also defeated
- Yasuke returned to Jesuit church
The Honnoji Incident – Yasuke’s last battle

Artist unknown, 19th century. Courtesy of The Nagoya Hideyoshi Kiyomasa Memorial Hall, Nagoya, Japan.
The Jesuit mission in Kyoto – Yasuke’s last known abode

Kano Soshu, c. 1578-87. Courtesy of Kobe City Museum, Kobe, Japan.
Yasuke Today

- 20th century, anti-imperialist symbol
- 21st century - reborn as a modern-day idol
- Computer games
- Anime
- Manga
- Movies
- Books
- Theatre
- A source of inspiration to people around the world
Yasuke as portrayed in *Nioh*, 2017
Yasuke as portrayed in *Nobunaga’s Ambition*, 2013
Yasuke portrayed in *Momoyama Beat Tribe* theatre production, 2017
Multicultural Pioneer

• Japan rapidly becoming more diverse
• Massive increase in foreign residents
• Successful naturalisation applications c99%
• Massive increase in visibly foreign workforce
• Visa and immigration liberalisation
• Mixed heritage citizens
• Tourism and economic importance

• Debates raging
Osaka Naomi
Prominent Black Citizens

- Tochigi Aisha Harumi, Miss Universe Japan 2020
- Miyamoto Ariana, Miss Universe Japan 2015
- Sekiguchi Mandy, singer
- Konda Bobby, entertainer
- Hachimura Rui, professional basketball
- Matsushima Kotaro, rugby player
- Nun Ira Karen, judoka
- Sani Brown Abdul Hakim, 100m sprint record 9.97
African Samurai

Thomas Lockley and Geoffrey Girard

AFRICAN SAMURAI

The True Story of Yasuke, a Legendary Black Warrior in Feudal Japan

“A readable, compassionate account of an extraordinary life.”
—The Washington Post
Thank You For Listening

My FaceBook page
Q&A

- Please send questions along “to everyone” in the Q&A chat box!
- Please provide your name and affiliation when submitting questions
- Submitting a question enters you into the book giveaway.

Survey

Please scan the Q&R code or use the URL below to complete the survey!

go.gwu.edu/YasukeSurvey
Thank You

Please scan the QR code or use the URL below to complete the survey!

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