

REASEACRH DRAFT- AN ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO RACE AND RACISM IN THE
PROPAGANDA OF IMPERIAL JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES

Joe Barbieri

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The 1930s and 1940s were extremely troubling times for the world. For years, it found itself at war in the bloodiest conflict in human history. World War II generated countless controversies, tragedies, and problems that would linger even after the fighting stopped. Amid the killing, the genocides, and the overall brutality of the war, the theme of intense racism wormed its way into nearly every participating country's propaganda machine. The purpose of this paper is to explore both the primary and secondary sources associated with the racist propaganda of Imperial Japan and the United States. It will attempt to answer the questions of how race and racism was used, and why it was used and accepted so readily by the civilian populations. It will also seek to prove that the populations of *both* nations were intrinsically racist, and that the propaganda released by the governments wasn't swaying anyone, it was simply reinforcing their pre-existing beliefs.

A quick look into both wartime societies can show us that both nations already held racist beliefs. It is obvious in America, where black citizens still didn't have the same rights as white citizens, and Asians felt some of this discrimination as well. The attacks on Pearl Harbor which sparked America into the war with Japan only strengthened these paranoid and racist beliefs. With Japan, their military had already invaded China years before the war officially began. If anything, the Japanese were the first aggressors, and their war crimes in China went mostly unnoticed by the rest of the world. The Japanese were already extremely hateful of the Chinese before the war, and when they became enemies with the Americans, they simply had to shift their media to a new country. This paper will focus on the political dispersion of racist propaganda, and why both of these nations did nothing to combat it. Perhaps these racist beliefs explained above were too ingrained already.

In most parts of the world, the people usually fight for what's best for everyone, and this usually means combating racism. This was not the case in the late 1930s into the 40s. The governments of nearly every world power were spouting racist propaganda material in startlingly large waves. Instead of combating it, the societies of these nations either ignored it or readily supported it. Seeing as propaganda was widely distributed in both countries, it would be hard to simply ignore. Thus, this would lead us to believe that the racism was readily accepted. Americans. Both sides were equally racist towards one another, so the question isn't if they were racist or not, it's why and how they used racism in their propaganda, and why the people of each nation supported the advertising trend.

Propaganda is usually used to sway a person into acting and thinking differently based on a visual image. The Cambridge English dictionary defines it as, "Information or ideas that are spread by an organized group or government to influence people's opinions, esp. by not giving all the facts or by secretly emphasizing only one way of looking at the facts." Militaries and governments love to use it as a tool to make people think the way they do, but it seems like the excessive use of propaganda wasn't needed in America or Japan. It's interesting that so much propaganda was made because the people seemed to already hold the racist beliefs and hatreds of each other, so why bother making propaganda? It seemed to just be giving people a message they already supported for the most part, which leads us to question instead *why* racism was supported at all.

To help answer these questions and prove these arguments, a series of propaganda posters (see Figures page 13) and secondary sources will be analyzed and explained. For the ease of research and reading, only pieces of propaganda specifically utilizing race and racism will be used and analyzed, as it would be difficult and quite possibly pointless to try and weave

arguments or evidence from anything else. The secondary sources will range in time, some being written directly after the war, and some being written long after. Previous historians and researchers have mostly taken military, political, and economical approaches to this topic, and this will be seen in the secondary source analysis. The topic itself is fairly well researched, and multiple journals and papers have tackled the subject head on. There are a distinct lack of cultural approaches because it is difficult to examine the effects of the propaganda on the culture because it seemingly *didn't* have an effect. This paper will take a strictly political approach, and it will attempt to show what the institutions used on their peoples, and why their efforts had no effect on already racist populations. The best place to begin of course is with the primary sources.

In the analysis of the visuals, several key themes can be identified. Instead of picking apart each poster for all of its visual value, it is best just to compare and contrast and identify these themes in relation to the arguments and questions that have been raised. Two pieces from each side have been chosen for analysis because they best represent the themes of racism. These themes are the portrayal of the other side as subhuman, and the abuse of stereotypes to classify the enemy. These two themes are the most common throughout the war, and are best shown with the pieces found on the Figures page, (page 13).

The first major similarity and theme in racist propaganda is the dehumanization of the enemy. The “Tokio Kid”¹ poster is one of many in a series of posters that do just that. They were made by Jack Campbell and sponsored by Douglas Airfield Company.¹ According to undergraduate writer Hannah Miles, the poster (figure 1) was published in *Time Magazine* in June of 1942. The poster depicts a long-toothed beast holding a bloody knife while smiling at its

¹ Miles, Hannah, “WWII Propaganda: The Influence of Racism.” *Artifacts: A Journal of Undergraduate Writing, The University of Missouri*, Issue 6 (March 2012, Page 1).

reflection on a piece of metal. While the outward political message is urging Americans not to waste materials during the wartimes, the poster's focus is clearly the subhuman creature known as the "Tokio Kid." Nearly everything about this poster is racist towards the Japanese, even down to the intentional misspelling of Tokyo. This poster also plays on the American stereotype of Japanese greed, something connected to the second major theme in these pieces. To further explore this first theme though, figure 2 will be analyzed next.

The Japanese used the exact same tactics as the Americans in their propaganda, and thus they too have their own version of the subhuman enemy. Figure 2, titled "Churchill and Roosevelt Feast on Bones."² This piece can be seen as the Japanese equivalent to the "Tokio Kid" series, and displays just as much racism as its rival. The Americans and British are depicted as demon-like creatures feasting on dead remains. Their respective flags are used as their undergarments, a clear sign of disrespect, and they are both very fat, perhaps a signal of the capitalist greed stereotype. This is a clear representation of the first main theme in how racism was used, that of course being the theme of subhuman depiction of the enemy. Both of these pieces help answer the question of how racism was used, but there's a second major theme to tag on with this one.

Both sides utilized the tactic of stereotypes to define the enemy's entire culture. To prove this statement, figures 3 and 4 will be used. To start off figure 3, an image taken from a *Life* Magazine article,³ will be analyzed. This image is possibly the grossest display of American racism towards the Japanese, right next to the internment camps (both of which are very Nazi

² Friedman, Herbert, "Japanese PSYOP During World War II." *Published by psywarrior.com*. NOTE: This source is an online archive made by psychological warfare expert Herbert Friedman. Figures 2 and 4 were taken from this web source.

³ *Life* Magazine, "How to tell Japs from the Chinese." *Life Magazine*, Vol: 11 Number 25 (December 1941, pages 81-82)

like in nature). *Life* tried to give a visual aid on how to determine the Japanese from the Chinese, and they gave facial measurements and features of Hideki Tojo as their Japanese example. This piece clearly relies on stereotypes, and is clearly extremely racist. Even worse, this was published in *Life* Magazine, a fairly popular magazine for the public to see. This blatant piece of racism enforces my argument that the Americans were already intrinsically racist, as this was made readily available for anyone with 10 cents to read. The Japanese used stereotypes slightly differently, and with figure 4, they weren't appealing to their own people. They were actually trying to gain allies, through a racist stereotype.

The Japanese used the American stereotype of being imperialist and racist towards any smaller nation to their advantage with their pamphlet, as seen in figure 4⁴. What's interesting about this piece is that the used stereotype had its basis in truth, as America did have a deeply imperialistic past. The Japanese weren't innocent of this claim either though, so it is interesting that they chose to drop this pamphlet to the native Papuan civilizations. Translations provided by Herbert Friedman ⁴ show that the pamphlet reads, "Go Quickly and Tell the Japanese Soldiers, Oh! The American soldiers are very dumb! They don't know that the strong Japanese soldiers will kill them. Hello! Run quickly and tell the Japanese soldiers. The Japanese soldiers are there!"

While not as racist as the previous examples, this piece helps to highlight how race was used in multiple different ways. While racism was the primary form of usage, race could also be manipulated with different messages. Whether or not these pamphlets were effective is unknown.

⁴ Friedman, Herbert, "Japanese PSYOP During World War II." *Published by psywarrior.com*. Note: This source is an online archive made by psychological warfare expert Herbert Friedman. Figures 2 and 4 were taken from this web source.

There are obviously more than four pieces of propaganda that display racism, but the bunch analyzed here are some of the most useful examples for analysis. Both the Japanese and Americans used the themes of dehumanizing the enemy and making the enemy seem greedy. The theme of dehumanizing goes back ages, and in the Pacific especially, where Western explorers would sometimes refer to natives as savages. While this situation isn't first contact with another culture, it must be admitted that the interaction between the American and Japanese cultures isn't so different than what history tells us the interactions between explorers and natives was like. Both sides were paranoid and afraid of one another and that fear (and the wartime period) led each to make strikingly similar propaganda decisions for their people.

Neither side really knew what to make of the other, other than the fact that they were enemies. Many explorers and natives eventually came to blows, and in the end, the Americans and Japanese found themselves in bloody war, filled with racist messages about their foes. Perhaps this was just history repeating itself under a different guise? Regardless, an exploration of other scholars' work and arguments can further explain the political decisions for the propaganda, and the political effects it all had.

Historians and researchers in the field have identified themes and made arguments on wartime propaganda for years. The topic of Japanese/American wartime propaganda has been widely written about, and every historian and writer have their own take on the subject. What's interesting is that there are very similar themes all throughout their works. Now, instead of looking for themes in visual media, the themes of already written arguments will be examined.

The first and most important theme for my overarching argument is to identify the fact that the Pacific War acted as a war between entire nations, rather than just warring armies. Senior lecturer at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia Lynette Finch published an article

detailing the history of propaganda in the academic journal *Armed Forces and Society*. In it she states, “The crucial variance from preceding wars lies in the fact that, in this century (the 20th century), wars have been between nations and not between armies.”⁵ Using this argument, Finch is saying that the military class is not the only one fighting. The politicians and peoples are fighting in a sense, so naturally the governments of these warring nations would make propaganda a primary focus to sway the people. So, I argue, using Finch to back me up, that this is *precisely* how the politicians of wartime America and Japan used propaganda. They wanted to resonate the fact that they hated the “Japs” or the “Stupid Americans” as much as the people did, and to convey this message, they supported the already present feelings of xenophobia and racism present in the societies they led.

The Second World War acted as one of the first wars massive enough to encompass entire populations. The media in the home nations had its own war to fight, and Finch has a quote to explain this idea. She says, “Modern wars have become, literally, wars between masses and the propagandists’ role has been adapted to match the new situation.”⁵ The politicians and medias of wartime America and Japan were probably racist themselves, and their decision to release so much racist content wasn’t affected by morality; they were making a calculated decision, and a smart one. What better way to win over the people and try to boost morale than to continually paint the enemy as a horrible monster? There are of course, arguments to refute this. Ian Campbell, a rather famous Pacific historian wrote an article on cultural contact in the Pacific.

Campbell’s article takes a cultural approach to history, something not found in many sources dealing with wartime propaganda. Campbell says, “Culture-contact occasions elicited

⁵ Finch, Lynette, “Psychological Propaganda: The War of Ideas on Ideas During the First Half of the Twentieth Century.” *Armed Forces and Society*, Volume: 26, Number 6, (Spring 2000, p. 372)

⁵ Ibid.

forms of behavior that might be described as not being part of the normal cultural expressions of the parties involved. ⁶” With Campbell’s argument, we can argue that the mass amounts of propaganda were just the byproduct of the war. In some cases, this is probably true. Politically, it makes no sense to distribute hateful pieces of media just because you can. I’d say that the propaganda itself was a direct byproduct of the war, but the racial messages were already present, they just hadn’t been made into posters and poems yet.

One of the more disturbing trends of the war was the leap that propaganda took from poster to published text. In John Dower’s book, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* ⁷, (p.78) Bower explains that American journals published articles such as, “Why Americans Hate Japs more than Nazis,” and other blatantly racist articles. In John Breck and Nancy Pavia’s article, “Racism in Japanese And U.S. Wartime Propaganda” ⁸, evidence from Japanese newspapers in the form of racist poems and short texts is provided. Breck and Pavia translate a Japanese poem, and one line even calls the Americans “twisted-nosed savages.” ⁸ These examples provide evidence that it just wasn’t the military class of people seeing racist propaganda in either country. The government and the media made a dedicated effort to make sure regular civilians were exposed to the racist material. This goes back to Finch’s point about war being between nations instead of just armies. The leaders of each country made the sound minded political decision to make racist propaganda easily viewable to the civilian population.

It can be seen that propaganda was clearly a goal of the leaders of each nation. Each side dedicated precious time and resources to making propaganda for both the military and the

⁶ Campbell, Ian, “The Culture of Culture Contact: Refractions from Polynesia.” *Journal of World History*, University of Hawai’i Press Volume: 14, Number 1 (March 2003, p.64).

⁷ Dower, John, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (Published under Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, 1993)

⁸ Breck, Nancy and John R. Pavia, “Racism in Japanese And U.S. Wartime Propaganda.” *The Historian*, Volume: 56, Number: 4 (Summer 1994, p. 672-673)

civilian classes. The themes of the historians and writers here are fairly similar. Bower, Break, and Pavia prove that the civilian populations were seeing racist material, and possibly even supporting it. There was never a concentrated effort to stop the distribution of the material, and in general, the populations accepted it. Campbell and Finch each have different takes on cultural actions, but their themes are similar. Campbell argues that cultures might act differently based on the context they're part of, and Finch argues that when in war, entire nations and masses will act—culturally—for the war effort. The theme here is that the respective cultures will *work together* in the face of conflict, whether that be explorers in Polynesia (Campbell) or a wartime foe (Finch). In the case of the propaganda efforts made by the politicians and medias of wartime America and Japan, each side worked against each other in stunningly similar fashions, and both sides citizens supported the war effort (for the most part). While the propagandists of each nation worked tirelessly to paint their enemy as the “other” each side was in fact, more similar than they would've ever cared to admit.

After reviewing the themes found in both the primary visuals from the war, and the work of other historians and scholars on the topic, it can be clearly seen that both the Imperial Japanese and the Americans during the Second World War were intrinsically racist. The political choices made by each country's leaders were morally wrong yes, but they were also a strategic decision to show that the government stood with the people, and against the “other.” It has been proven that the civilians were seeing what their governments were putting out, and they did little to nothing to stop it ⁹. The racial tensions that were exposed and enflamed during the war would continue for decades to come, and in some senses, are still existent in today's culture.

⁹ The disclaimer here is that my research has focused on the governments and militaries. There were surely people who fought against internment camps or against Japanese racism. It is wrong to discount their actions, as they did what they could to fight against the atrocities of their mother countries.

Politically, the Americans and the Japanese weren't so different. The cultural contact in the Second World War wasn't a story of a powerful racist country discovering an islander population and imposing its might on it. The Second World War was a story of two powerful racist *nations* fighting not only to impose their might on the other, but fighting for *the Pacific itself*, or more so the culture tied in with it. Each side fought what would nearly become a war of total annihilation over what? Each side made extremely racist remarks and media over what? What could be so important? Politically, the Pacific Ocean and its resources were useful, but not something to use a nuclear bomb over.

Culturally, the two nations were at war with one another. Each side's leaders thought that they were protecting their own cultures from the horrible "other." War isn't pretty, it isn't glorious. It is tragic, it is horrible, and it is sad. The propaganda released by each side shows how low humanity can sink in the face of a perceived cultural invasion, and a cultural war. As historians, it is easy to attack and demonize the Japanese and American wartime cultures for their actions, but as historian John Gaddis says in his book *The Landscape of History*, "I'd argue, indeed, that the historian of the past is much better off than the participant in the present, from the simple fact of having an expanded horizon."¹⁰ We have an expanded view of the horrible works done by both the Japanese and Americans. It's easy to call them all horrible, but many of the people on each side, as people in their present time, were just doing what they thought was best for their nations. It was wrong, but it was what was done, and both sides were equally guilty of the racism. Perhaps we can take these events and strive to never repeat them. Indeed, one day we might finally be free of racism once and for all, but even if we aren't, we should at least strive to never hit this low again.

¹⁰ Gaddis, John. *The Landscape of History*. (Multiple publishers, April 2004, page 4 chapter 1).



Figure 1, "Tokio Kid"

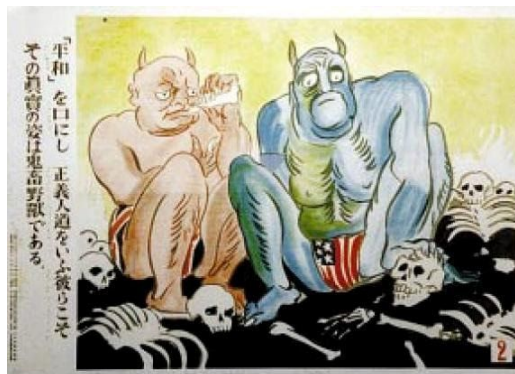
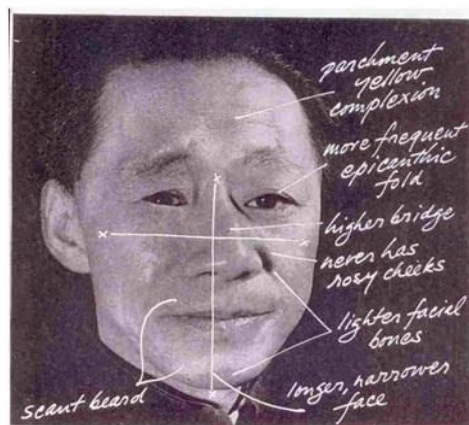
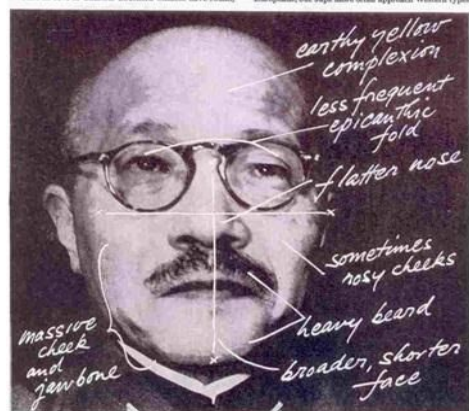


Figure 2, "Churchill and Roosevelt as Beasts"



Chinese public servant, Ong Wen-hao, is representative of North Chinese anthropological group with long, thin-lined face and scant beard. Typical fold of skin above eyelid is found in 80% of Chinese. Southern Chinese have rounder, broader face, not as markedly lined as the Japanese. Except that their skin is darker, this description fits Filipinos who are often mistaken for Japs. Chinese sometimes pass for Europeans but Japs more often approach Western types.



Japanese warrior, General Hideo Tojo, current Premier, is a romantic, closer to type of hostile Japs than highland relatives of Imperial Household. Typical are his heavy beard, massive cheek and jaw bone. Present Japs is quiet Mongoloid, with flat, wide nose. An often scowled close is facial expression, shaped by culture, not anthropological factors. Chinese wear rational calm of tolerant realism. Japs, like General Tojo, show humorous intensity of ruthless mysticism.

Figure 3, "Life Magazine Picture"



Figure 4, Japanese Pamphlet



Figure 5, "To the American Soldiers"



Figure 6, "This is the Enemy"

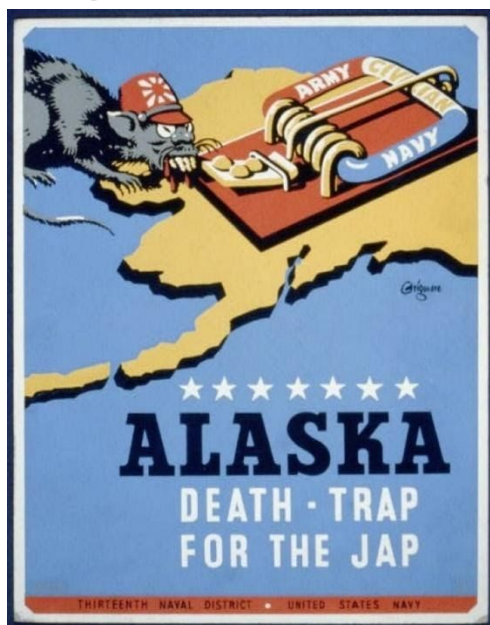


Figure 8, Alaskan Naval Poster ¹¹

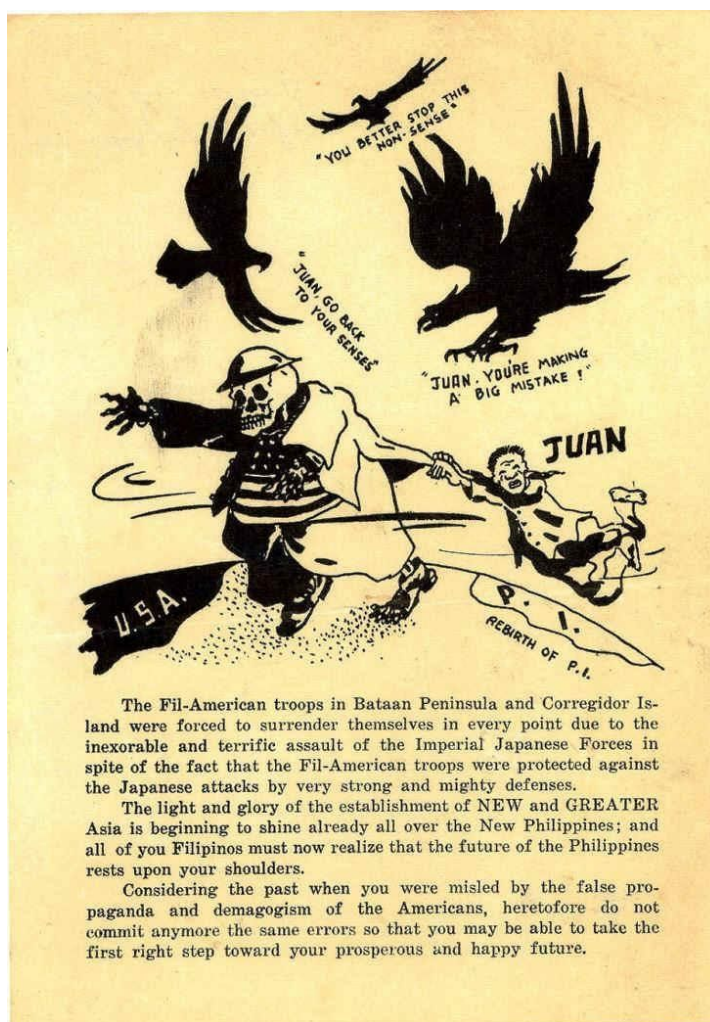


Figure 7, "Juan..."



Figure 9, Pamphlet to US Marines ¹²

¹¹ Miles, Hannah. "WWII Propaganda: The Influence of Racism – Artifacts Journal - University of Missouri." Artifacts Journal RSS. Mar. 2012. Web. 02 Apr. 2015. (Figure 6)

"Pearl Harbor." History.com. A&E Television Networks. Web. 02 Apr. 2015.

"US Entry and Alliance." HISTORY. 03 Apr. 2014. Web. 02 Apr. 2015.

This is the provided bibliography for figure 8. The website link is <https://propagandapostersofwwii.weebly.com/anti-japanese-propaganda.html> if you are interested for more posters.

¹² Friedman, Herbert, "Japanese PSYOP During World War II." Published by psywarrior.com.

Timeline

July 7, 1937- Japan invades China ¹³

December 8, 1941- America declares war on Japan

February 19, 1942- Order 9066 is signed requiring Japanese American citizens to leave the West Coast. This would lead to the eventual internment of them. ¹⁴

April 9, 1942- The Bataan Death March begins. ¹⁵

August 15, 1945- Japan surrenders to America.

¹³ U.S Department of State, *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-1941* (Washington, D.C.: U.S., Government Printing Office, 1943), pp.44-52

¹⁴ History.com Staff, "Japanese American Relocation." *A+E Networks* (2009)

¹⁵ History.com Staff, "Bataan Death March." *A+E Networks* (2009)