

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY- AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF RACE AND RACISM IN  
AMERICAN AND JAPANESE WAR PROPAGANDA

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History 3031

11/7/17

## Intro

The 1930s and 1940s were an extremely troubling time 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. This paper will be covering the usage of racism and psychological warfare in the Pacific Theater, between the Imperial Japanese and the American forces. It will attempt to answer the questions of how race and racism was used, and why it was used and accepted so liberally.

In modern American society, it is safe to say that the government and media *usually* attempts to battle against racism and suppress it. 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. American scientific journals were even releasing articles like, "Why Americans Hate Japs More than Nazis."<sup>5</sup> It was no better in Japan as historians Nancy Break and John R. Pavia detail in their historical article, "Racism in Japanese and American Wartime Propaganda." They state that the Japanese magazine *Hinode* (Sunrise) released an article basically supporting the genocide of Americans.<sup>7-1</sup> 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.

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<sup>17-1</sup> Break and Pavia quote and recommend Berreman's "Assumptions About Americans in Japanese War Propaganda"

From the examples given above, it can be seen that both sides had populations that clearly supported the use of racism in everyday media. Propaganda is usually used to sway a person into acting and thinking differently based on a visual image. 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, a series of secondary sources with their own arguments has been collected for analysis. Perhaps with the help of other scholars, historians, and researchers, the question of how the Pacific Theater was gripped in maddening radical racism and why it was might be more easily answered.

**Source 1- Lynette Finch, "Psychological Warfare: The War of Ideas on Ideas During the First Half of the Twentieth Century" <sup>1</sup>**

Senior lecturer at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia Lynette Finch published this article detailing the history of propaganda in the academic journal *Armed Forces and Society*. In it, Finch goes over a brief history of propaganda being used in Europe before getting into the questions of why propaganda is necessary, or if it is at all. Finch raises several important points that relate to the question of why race was used in the Pacific Theater propaganda.

Finch says, "The crucial variance from preceding wars lies in the fact that, in this century, wars have been between nations and not between armies." <sup>1</sup> This is a critical point to answering

the question of *why* race and racism was used so liberally between the Japanese and American sides. The war carried a much more personal feeling to it, and each side was determined to undermine the other's culture. This wasn't a war for land or riches like in some old story. The Japanese had launched unprovoked aggressive attacks in both China and America, and this made the war feel much more personal for those involved. Indeed, each *nation* was completely dedicated to the war effort, it wasn't just the military.

To aid this point, Finch goes on to say, "Modern wars have become, literally, wars between masses and the propagandists' role has been adapted to match the new situation."<sup>1</sup> This argument suggests that entire cultures are involved in wars in the modern time, and the propagandists have to base their work around that. Both the Japanese and the American societies supported the war, and acted radically different because of it. This relates back to an interesting quote from I.C Campbell.

Campbell said, "Culture-context occasions elicited forms of behavior that might be described as not being part of the normal cultural expressions of the parties involved."<sup>10-2</sup> The war turned artists and columnists to racially fueled propaganda, but can we solely blame the war alone? Or were these societies already racist, and did the war just make it public?

**Source 2- Joel V. Berreman, "Assumptions About America in Japanese War Propaganda to the United States"<sup>2</sup>**

Berreman focuses on the Japanese using "assumptions" or stereotypes about American culture to fuel their propaganda program. He publishes his work in the *American Journal of Sociology*. He goes over how the Japanese made assumptions that the Americans had "no war

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<sup>210</sup> I.C Campbell's article is on cultural contact and cultural context. It should be noted that he was not writing specifically about the war in the Pacific.

aims” and were “used to living in decadence and wealth.”<sup>2</sup> Because the two cultures were unfamiliar with one another, they both generally used racial or cultural stereotypes, especially in the tense war environment. This will be a recurring theme in the research, as both sides like to take stereotypes to the next level in their propaganda.

### **Source 3- David Nelson Rowe, “Ultimatum for Japan”<sup>3</sup>**

Published in 1945, the year of Japanese surrender, this article looks into the “offers” and threats made by the Allies to Japan near the end of the war. Obviously, Truman had the nuclear bomb in his pocket, and he and the rest of the Allies warned Japan to surrender else they face the “threshold of annihilation.”<sup>3-3</sup> Rowe seems to be supporting an invasion of the Japanese mainland in this article as he says it might be the only way to “cause violent revolution to take place.”<sup>3</sup> Rowe believes that the psychological warfare was effective enough to have the Japanese continue fearing the Americans and trusting their military with their lives. He says the only way a revolution would happen would be for the “military to fall.”<sup>3</sup> Relating back to Berreman’s argument of assumption being used in propaganda, Rowe argues that the people of Japan were deeply fearful of the Americans, and would only revolt against their own government if they were left with no choice but to appease an invading army. This is proof that propaganda was possibly quite effective in areas of Japan.

### **Source 4- Darlene C. Mahaney, “Propaganda Posters”<sup>4</sup>**

Mahaney wrote a short article attached to an archive of military propaganda from WWII.

<sup>4-4</sup> Though there isn’t a lot of textual data to pull from, she does raise two key points. First,

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<sup>33-</sup> Rowe is quoting an American document sent to Japanese officials in this quote. Rowe thinks it is very silly that the Americans tried to negotiate through documents, as he thought that the Japanese psychological warfare on its people and military had been very effective.

<sup>44-</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the posters in this source will not be examined. Rather, arguments and points raised by Mahaney will be used.

Mahaney writes, “Democratic nations such as the United States and Great Britain used propaganda extensively when they felt the need to get the backing of the public for a significant purpose.”<sup>4</sup> By this logic, the argument in the introduction of both the Americans and Japanese societies *already being racist* would hold up. Each side used this racist propaganda, and if they were attempting to get the backing the public, they had to have know that their societies were already racist. Why use racist propaganda otherwise? It wouldn’t be to raise hatred, as both nations already disliked one another deeply.

The second key point Mahaney brings up is her list of the 4 main types of propaganda used during the war. The fourth main type is “negative posters displaying soldiers dying or demeaning stereotypes of Axis leaders.”<sup>4</sup> The leaders weren’t the only ones targeted in propaganda attacks, it was often the entire culture, in an attempt to label the opposing side as “the other.”

#### **Source 5- John W. Dower, War Without Mercy, Race and Power in the Pacific War**

John Dower wrote an entire book about the problems of race and racism during the Pacific War. Though the entire book wasn’t read, the chapter “Apes and Others”<sup>5</sup> contained startling information to back the overarching argument of racist societies during the war. Dower describes an article released by an American scientific magazine titled, “Why Americans Hate Japs More than Nazis.”<sup>5</sup> The article was released to the public before any real arguments were made, and it was just assumed to be the natural public opinion. Dower describes this as “commonplace racism”<sup>5</sup> and says that there was “no questions about this observation.”<sup>5</sup> Not only was the American public turning a blind eye to internment camps, but they were also casually allowing these kinds of articles to be published. This is just further proof that the America, and very possibly the world, was racist and they knew it all too well.

**Source 6- Matthew D. Johnson, “Propaganda and Sovereignty in Wartime China: Morale Operations and Psychological Warfare under the Office of War Information”<sup>6</sup>**

Johnson focuses on OSS (Office of Strategic Services) and OWI (Office of War Information) operations in wartime China. Though his argument lies someplace else in the propaganda sector of the Pacific Theater, he makes an interesting point in his article. He highlights how the British and Americans were trying to make a more solid ally out of China, and to help them along, they used propaganda. British historian George Taylor was “shocked by the crudeness of U.S military propaganda leaflets,”<sup>6</sup> in his time working with the Americans. He suggested that they reform their approach. Even more interesting is the set of directions that the Chinese branch of the OWI received from Washington.

Johnson details part of the OWI’s attempted reform, “At the same time, OWI propagandists specifically avoided use of racist language— two examples given were ‘natives’ and ‘yellow race’—in order to avoid alienating allies.”<sup>6</sup> This is more proof that the Americans were self-aware of their racism against Asians, primarily their Japanese adversary. Before the reform in propaganda, the military had planned to use racist language with the Chinese as well. It seems the Americans were well aware of what they were doing, and yet they continued to do it.

**Source 7- Nancy Breck and John R. Pavia, “Racism in Japanese and U.S Wartime Propaganda”<sup>7</sup>**

Breck and Pavia’s article, published in *The Historian*, acts as sort of the Japanese counterpart to the concerning points brought up in Dower’s book. Breck and Pavia prove that it wasn’t just the Americans acting intensely racist during the war, the Japanese did so as well, and in oddly similar ways. Both sides liked to dehumanize the other, and each side published clearly

racist material in public magazines and newspapers. The first of these is a poem that when translated to English is, “Laughable Enemies.”<sup>7-5</sup>

In the poem, the Americans are called “hairy twisted-nosed savages.”<sup>7</sup> This is an interesting point because typically in Pacific history, the islanders are the ones being called “savages” usually by some Western entity. In this case, the islanders (the Japanese) are using the term for the Americans. This poem, along with an article supporting the genocide of Americans (published in the Japanese magazine *Hinode*) were published for the public to see and read. The publishers and authors *knew* they were being racist, and they used this racism not only in visual propaganda, but even in poetic propaganda. The Japanese society was just as racist as the American’s, and both sides propagandists used this to their advantage.

**Source 8- Erin E. Sapre, “Wartime Propaganda: Enemies Define by Race”<sup>8-6</sup>**

There are many themes in this work, and many are philosophical in nature as it is a philosophy paper. Sapre has many points that are similar to Dower’s, in the fact that both sides readily used racist propaganda for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they believe that propagandists thought this form of propaganda would be the most effective. Sapre argues that this racist propaganda is misleading and ineffective, and only creates negative effects.

Sapre says, “Friendly soldiers begin to commit the very acts that they have previously been highlighted to demonstrate the primitiveness or evilness of the enemy, which demonstrates the inaccuracy of propaganda because it portrays the practice of evil activities as a behavior solely characteristic of the enemy.”<sup>8</sup> With this logic, both countries only heightened the violence of the war with this propaganda and yet *both sides continued to produce it!* It is certainly

<sup>57</sup> Breack and Pavia cite Darren Keene’s “The Barren Years: Japanese War Literature,” for this specific poem.

<sup>68</sup> In Sapre’s opening, they state that they were influenced by John Dower’s research into the area of racism in propaganda. The two might have similar themes and arguments based on this.



troubling to think that two entire countries were this far lost into the determination to win the war, even if it meant completely dehumanizing the opponent and creating more violence.

### **Conclusion**

All of these sources hold a similar theme: racism was everywhere in the Pacific Theater's propaganda, and it was liberally used. Neither the Japanese nor the Americans had a problem with the blatant racism, and some even supported it. Why did they use it? Dower, Brack, Pavia, and others seem to believe that the two nations were determined to outpace each other in every aspect, including propaganda, and both wanted their militaries and nations to think of the enemy as the subhuman "other." Racism was used in a variety of ways, from visual images to poetry.

So, two key questions have been answered in a way, but one final question remains. Why did the two countries produce so much racist propaganda, and why did each perform radical actions based on that racism? That question would require more research, and may not have a definitive 100% answer. It seemed as if the entire globe was consumed with a maddening racism at that time period. Perhaps it couldn't have been avoided, but people always have a choice. It seems a series of immoral and incorrect choices were made in the 1930s and 1940s.

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