

Race War

Comics and Yellow Peril during WW2

Preface:

Though my research is centered on a conflict I did not fight in and an ethnic group that I am not a part of I believe this research project to be an introspective one.

World War 2 is over but it's mythology lives very large in the American pop-cultural imagination. Its stories are very easy to take as history, even when they are known to be exaggerated. Its heroes are our heroes and its villains are our villains.

So when I researched how the story of WW2 was told before the war was over and why it was told that way I felt as though I was looking directly at the American national ego, which also meant looking at myself.

One take away: You can learn a lot about a nation by who it calls its enemies and how it draws them in comic books.

-Isaac

White America's fear of Asia takes the
form of an octopus...

No. 3

THE UNITED STATES MARINES

10¢

15¢
IN CANADA



A LEATHERNECK FLAME THROWER

★ AUTHENTIC U. S. MARINE CORPS PICTURE STORIES ★

The United States Marines #3 (1944)

Or else a claw...

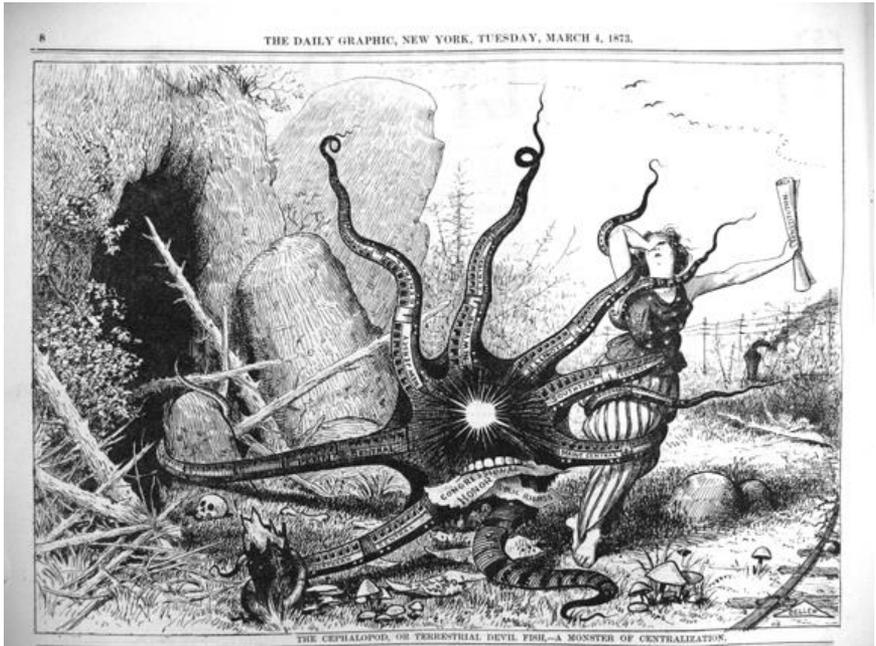


Silver Streak Comics #6 (Sept. 1940)¹

¹Silver Streak #6 is the first appearance of Daredevil

Creatures whose purpose is to reach
out and ensnare.

Before the Octopus became a symbol of racial fear it was often used in satirical cartoons to stoke a fear of hegemony...



Frank Bellew's illustration here from 1873 shows the tentacles of the railroad monopoly (built on the underpaid labor of Chinese immigrants) ensnaring our dear Columbia as she struggles to defend the constitution from such a beast.

The Threat is clear, the railroad monopoly is threatening our national sovereignty.

But isn't that the same Columbia who the year before...



Yep...

Maybe instead of Columbia frightening away Indigenous Americans as she expands west, John Gast should have painted an octopus reaching out across the continent grabbing land away from them.

White America's relationship with hegemony has always been hypocritical...

When White America views the immigration of Chinese laborers to California as inevitably leading to the eradication of "native" White Americans, it can only be because when White Americans themselves migrated to California they brought with them an agenda of eradication.

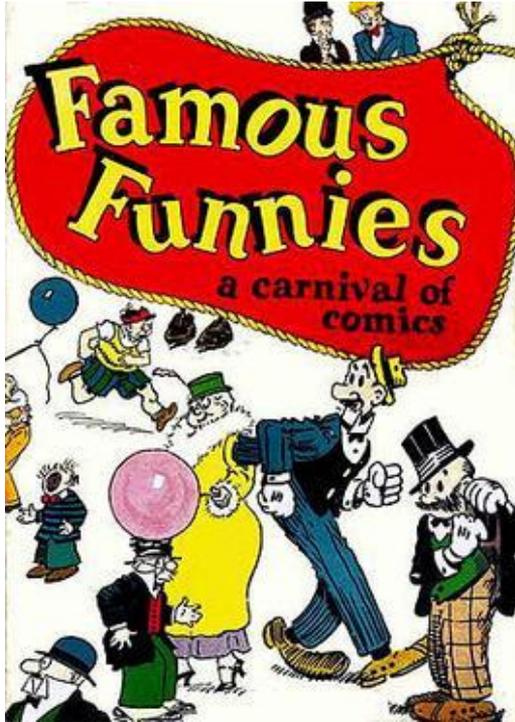
In this way White European and American "Yellow Peril" has largely been based on the view that China, Japan, and India represent the only real threats to white colonial dominance.

The paranoia of a potential competitor in the game of rule-the-world, especially a competitor perceived as being part of a different species of humans, can be seen in the motivation behind many of the U.S.A.'s military involvement in Asia.

And what could be a better opportunity to express the fear of competition with Asia than a War for the World..

Comics During World War 2...

Comics as they appear in the newspaper had existed for sometime before the modern magazine style comic was created in 1933.



Famous Funnies, often considered the first modern comic book, was a collection of popular newspaper comic strips intended to be given away at Woolworth's department store.

Comic books reprinting stories from newspaper strips such as Captain Easy, Popeye, or Joe Palooka became very popular. Before comic collections existed if someone wanted to read an

entire adventure of their favorite sailor, as printed in newspapers a day at a time over months, they would have to take clippings from every newspaper, or hope that a friend did.

Newspaper comic strips had the ephemeral quality that Television did before DVD Boxsets and Netflix streaming.

The first comics made exclusively for magazine-style comic books behaved very similarly to Netflix original series, imitating the form of collected comic books, sometimes intentional misleading people into thinking their comics had been originally printed in newspapers to lend them legitimacy.

As a result comic books were often seen as cheaper knockoffs and despite their popularity their creators were never given the celebrity status that was afforded newspaper cartoonists.

The low brow² and uncensored nature of straight-to-DVD comics made them the home for unusual subject matter such as horror, and minority creators such

²a term with its origins in racist attempts to scientifically rationalize colonialism.

as Jerry Siegal and Joe Shuster, the Jewish creators of Superman, and Chu F. Hing³, creator of The Green Turtle. a character often considered the first Chinese American Superhero.

On the right Chu F. Hing's Green Turtle faces down an inhuman Japanese Yellow-Peril octopus. Though Chu F. Hing was born in Hawai'i he was no doubt affected by the violence Japan had inflicted on his motherland and was likely eager to transfer imagery formerly used to dehumanize Chinese Americans to Japanese people.

In contrast to the images of Japanese people in Hing's comics, which fall in line with other propaganda comics created at the same time, the images of Chinese people in Hing's comics are among the only positive images of Chinese people in American WW2 comics.

The hero himself, The Green Turtle, is always facing away from the reader because Hing's publishers, Blazing comics, refused to publish a comic about an obviously Chinese character.

³ Other Asian Americans working in comics at the time include: Ben Oda, Bob Fujitani, Min Matsuda, Irving Watanabe, John Yakata, Helen Chou, Fred Eng, Morrie Kuramoto, Tsung Li, Kaem Wong, and Paul Fung.



Blazing Comics #1, June 1944 written and illustrated by Chu F. Hing

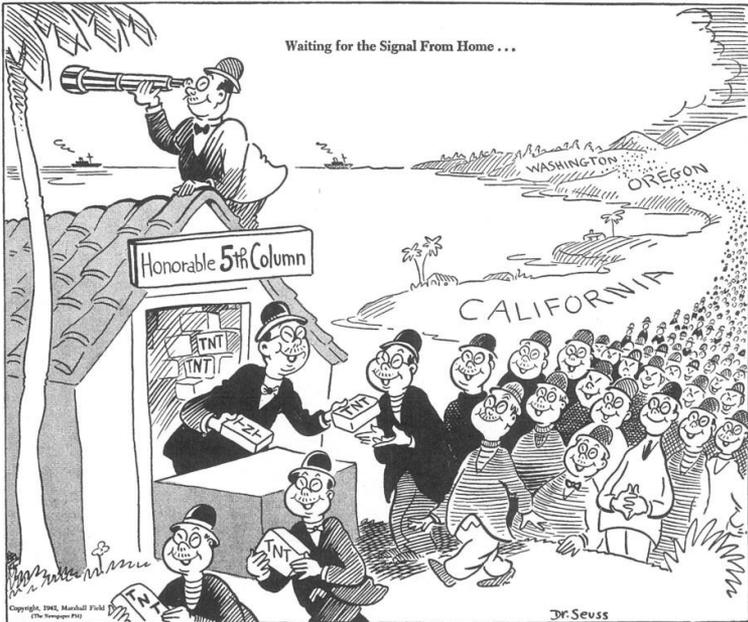
The Writers' War Board was the quasi-governmental agency in charge of coordinating the message of comics propaganda during world war 2.

The WWB was created by the Office of War Information (the government agency in charge of publishing materials to build support for the war) to be a technically independent (though still mostly government funded) organization in charge of publishing the emotional propaganda that the OWI was kept from creating under the Roosevelt administration's "strategy of truth."

The United States government wanted to create propaganda without being compared to the state-controlled media machines of Germany or Japan.

Because of their broad popularity, easy to comprehend visual nature, and reputation as low brow entertainment comics were seen as the perfect medium to disseminate messages of both racial tolerance and racial hatred to an American audience that was skeptical of propaganda following the plight of World-War-One Veterans during the great depression.

What This Country Needs Is a Good Mental Insecticide



Doctor Seuss's political cartoons published in PM magazine. 1941-1943

Though not overseen by the WWB, the newspaper comics of Dr. Seuss are a perfect example of the double message broadcast by American Propaganda during World War 2.

The first comic represents the message of racial tolerance intended to distance America from the racism of the "Aryan Race" in Germany and the "Yamato Race" in Japan.

Though America portraying itself as an anti-racist nation is an obvious hypocrisy that was seized upon by...

- Japanese propagandists, who highlighted the racism of America in messages to Asian people all over the world that America was not really their ally,
- and Nazi propagandists, who claimed that America's white supremacy was an invaluable inspiration to the Nazi Party, and America's hypocrisy indicated insincerity.

To a certain extent the axis were right. As evidenced by the second image, showing hordes of identical Japanese Americans waiting to undermine the united states with TNT.

The depiction of Japanese people as belonging to an undifferentiated violent horde may, at a first glance, be thought of as originating in the racial bias of individual cartoonists. But it was also official policy...



Chu F. Hing Blazing Comics #5, March 1945

Many cartoonists and writers pitched stories to the WWB that focused on the villainy of the Emperor and Japanese generals perpetrated against their own citizens. But such stories were uniformly rejected for being too sympathetic to the civilian population of Japan.

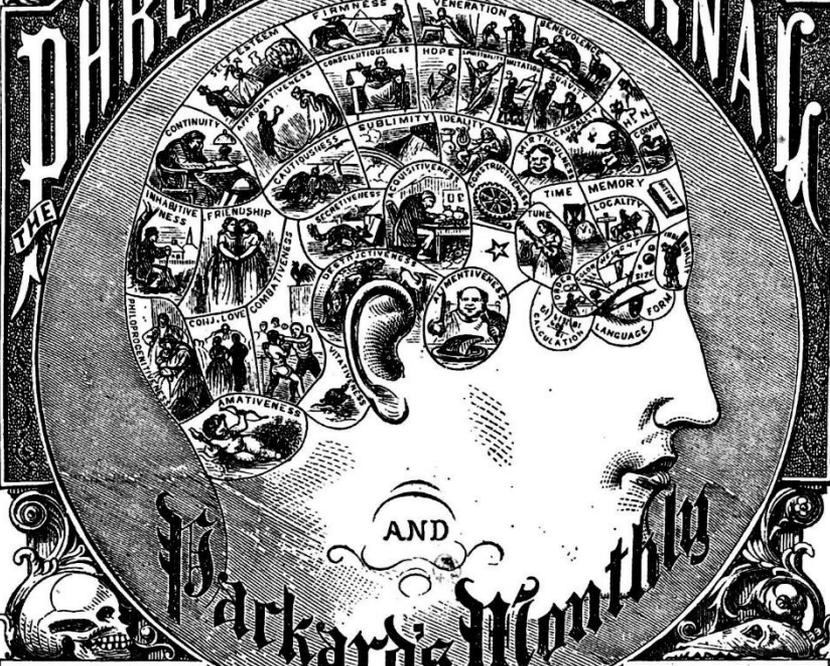
For the WWB to have endorsed a story it must have shown Japanese people as being members of an irredeemably violent race, both subhuman in its ambitions and superhuman in its ability.

Old Series, Vol. 50.
APL. 1870.

KNOW THYSELF

New Series, Vol. 1.
NUMBER 4.

PHRENOLOGICAL JOURNAL



AND Packard's Monthly

A Pictorial Magazine.

A First-Class Monthly Journal devoted to Science, Literature, and General Intelligence, especially to Phrenology, Ethnology, Physiology, Ethnology, Psychology, Health, Education, and to all those progressive measures calculated to Reform, Elevate and Improve Mankind.



Subscription Terms.

One Copy a year, - \$8.00
 Five Copies, a year, 12.00
 Ten Copies, a year, 20.00
 And One Copy to Agent who gets up Club.
 Single numbers, 30 cts. Supplied by all News-men and Book-sellers.
 New Volumes begin with January and July. Remit P. O. Orders or in Registered Letters.

THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND'S MANKIND

Edited and Published by
SAMUEL R. WELLS,
 880 Broadway, New York.



W. HOWLAND, S.C.H.Y.

Phrenological Journal and Packard's Monthly, vol. 1, no. 4 (April 1870)

Carl Linnaeus and Phrenology..

Images of Japanese people in American war comics have their origins in the writings of Carl Linnaeus the 'father of taxonomy.'

In the tenth edition of his book *Systema Naturae* (1758), where in previous editions he first used the terms mammal and homo sapiens, Carl Linnaeus identified five categories of homo sapiens. Among his descriptions of the different varieties of humans are

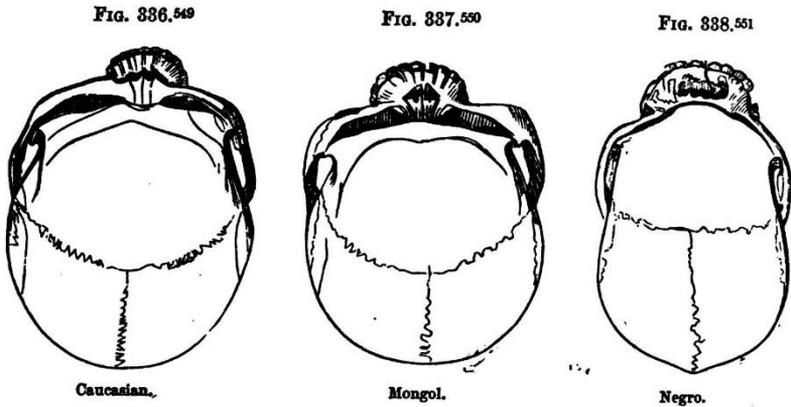
- European.
 - o Fair, sanguine, brawny.
 - o Hair yellow, brown flowing;
 - o eyes blue;
 - o gentle, acute, inventive.
 - o Covered with close vestments.
 - o Governed by laws

~and~

- Asiatic.
 - o Sooty, melancholy, rigid.
 - o Hair black;
 - o eyes dark;
 - o severe, haughty, covetous.
 - o Covered with loose garments.
 - o Governed by opinions

Though Carl did not specifically dictate that these categories represented different species of human, his writings inspired Johann Friedrich Blumenbach to "scientifically" prove that there were five different species of homo sapiens. Johann's observations centered on the size and proportions of human skulls. He claimed that "Caucasians" had the highest brow and "Mongolians" and "Ethiopians" had the lower brow.

From these observations the pseudoscience of Phrenology was born.



This illustration is from the book "Types of Mankind" (1854) published by Josiah Clark Nott and George Robin Gliddon based on the notes of the President of the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences: Samuel George Morton.

Morton, who died in 1851, had a very big skull collection.

His collection of over 1,000 skulls primarily came from the victims of US imperialism including Seminole warriors slain by the US army, Liberians resisting Colonial settlement, and Cuban or Dutch East Indies plantation works coerced to death in the field.

Morton argued for the theory that there were five different species of human and that Caucasian humans were the most intellectually capable and that the other races were more closely related to our monkey ancestors.

Morton's work was celebrated and used to justify colonialism and slavery at Harvard, the Smithsonian, and the floor of the US senate.

Phrenology and "racial science" were highly influential in shaping the White American imagination and the ideology of the Nazi Party.

The legacy and imagery of phrenology can be seen in a supposedly informational comic strip in the "Pocket Guide to China" (1942) issued to US service men stationed in China

HOW TO SPOT A JAP

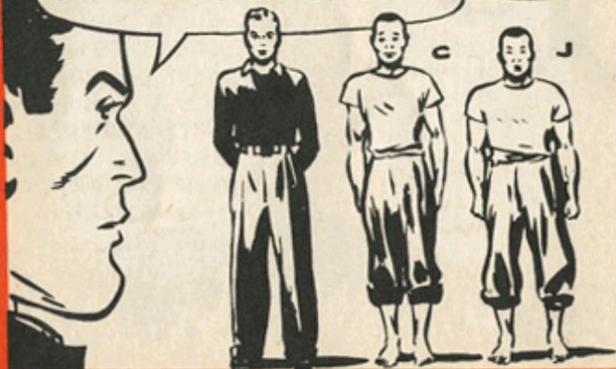
RYAN, YOU AND TERRY HAVE BEEN OUT IN CHINA FOR A LONG TIME... HOW ABOUT SHOWING THE MEN A FEW POINTS OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE JAPS AND OUR ORIENTAL ALLIES!

YES, SIR!

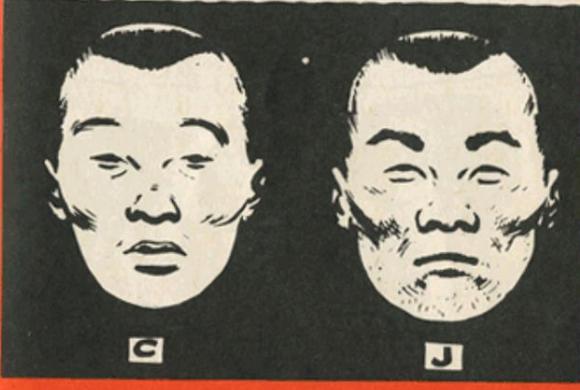
by MILTON CANIFF



HERE ARE TWO MEN JUST PICKED UP BY A PATROL... THE FIRST THING TO CONSIDER IS APPEARANCE... THE CHINESE IS "C"... THE JAP IS "J" NOTICE THAT C IS ABOUT THE SIZE OF AN AVERAGE AMERICAN: J IS SHORTER — AND LOOKS AS IF HIS LEGS ARE JOINED DIRECTLY TO HIS CHEST!..



C IS DULL BRONZE IN COLOR — WHILE
J IS LIGHTER — MORE ON THE LEMON —
YELLOW SIDE. **C**'S EYES ARE SET LIKE
ANY EUROPEAN'S OR AMERICAN'S — BUT
HAVE A MARKED SQUINT.... **J** HAS
EYES SLANTED TOWARD HIS NOSE...



THE CHINESE HAS A SMOOTH FACE...THE
JAP RUNS TO HAIR LOOK AT THEIR
PROFILES AND TEETH... **C** USUALLY HAS
EVENLY SET CHOPPERS — **J** HAS BUCK
TEETH... THE CHINESE SMILES EASILY —
THE JAP USUALLY EXPECTS TO BE SHOT...
AND IS VERY UNHAPPY ABOUT THE WHOLE
THING... ESPECIALLY IF HE IS AN OFFICER!



Francis Crookshank's "The Mongol in Our Midst" (1924) which argued that Down's Syndrome was a sign of Racial Degradation, was used to justify forced sterilization and influenced images of Asian people in American media.

YOU MAY FIND JAPS AMONG ANY ORIENTAL CIVILIAN GROUP... THAT IS A FAVORITE INFILTRATION TRICK... MAKE YOUR MAN WALK... THE CHINESE STRIDES... THE JAP SHUFFLES (BUT HE MAY BE CLEVER ENOUGH TO FAKE THE STRIDE)... MAKE HIM REMOVE HIS SOCKS AND SHOES, IF ANY...



THE CHINESE AND OTHER ASIATICS HAVE FAIRLY NORMAL FEET... THE JAP WORE A WOODEN SANDAL ("GETA") BEFORE HE WAS ISSUED ARMY SHOES... HE WILL USUALLY HAVE A WIDE SPACE BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND TOES... OFTEN CALLOUSED FROM THE LEATHER STRAP THAT HELD THE "GETA" TO HIS FOOT...



Note the allusions to simian biology and behavior.

Or if that is too subtle for you, try this illustration published in 1943 in the New York Times (artist uncredited and signature difficult to parse)



In this drawing the executioners of American pilots are depicted as wild apes that must be exterminated by "civilization." An image that clearly illustrates the colonial sentiments of Americas relationship with Asia.

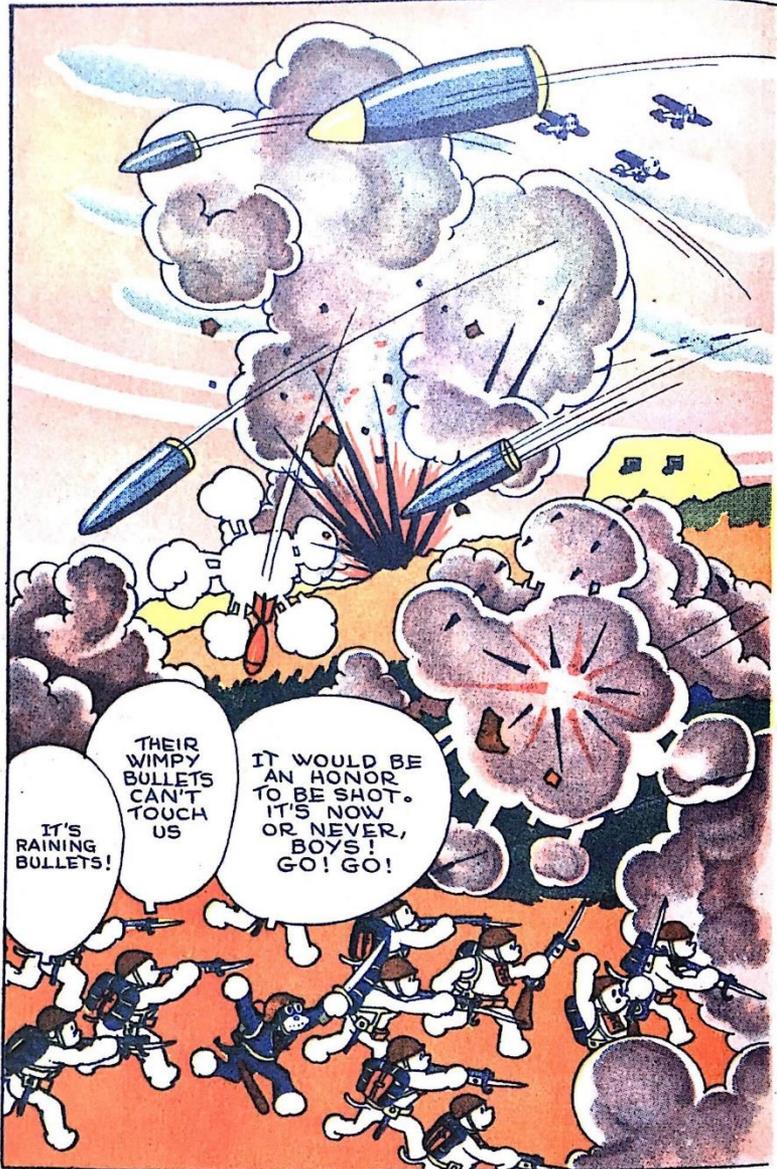
Given the legacy of racism towards Asian and Pacific Islanders in the United States it's no wonder the WWB struggled to find comics that positively represented their Chinese allies.



This is an illustration by Reed Crandall of the character Chop-Chop from Military Comics #16 (1943)

Chop-Chop is the Chinese member of the fiction international pilot team The Blackhawks.

His infantile and subhuman depiction is starkly different from Chu F. Hing's depiction of Chinese people.



IT'S
RAINING
BULLETS!

THEIR
WIMPY
BULLETS
CAN'T
TOUCH
US

IT WOULD BE
AN HONOR
TO BE SHOT.
IT'S NOW
OR NEVER,
BOYS!
GO! GO!

illustration from the manga Norakuro by Suihō Tagawa. Originally published in Shonen Kurabu (1937) translated edition published in Kramer's Ergot 6 (2006)

Japan Draws Itself...

Japan portrayed itself quite differently in its own comics as you might imagine.

Though this excerpt from Norakuro was published before American involvement in the pacific theatre it highlights Japan's self-image as a scrappy liberator.

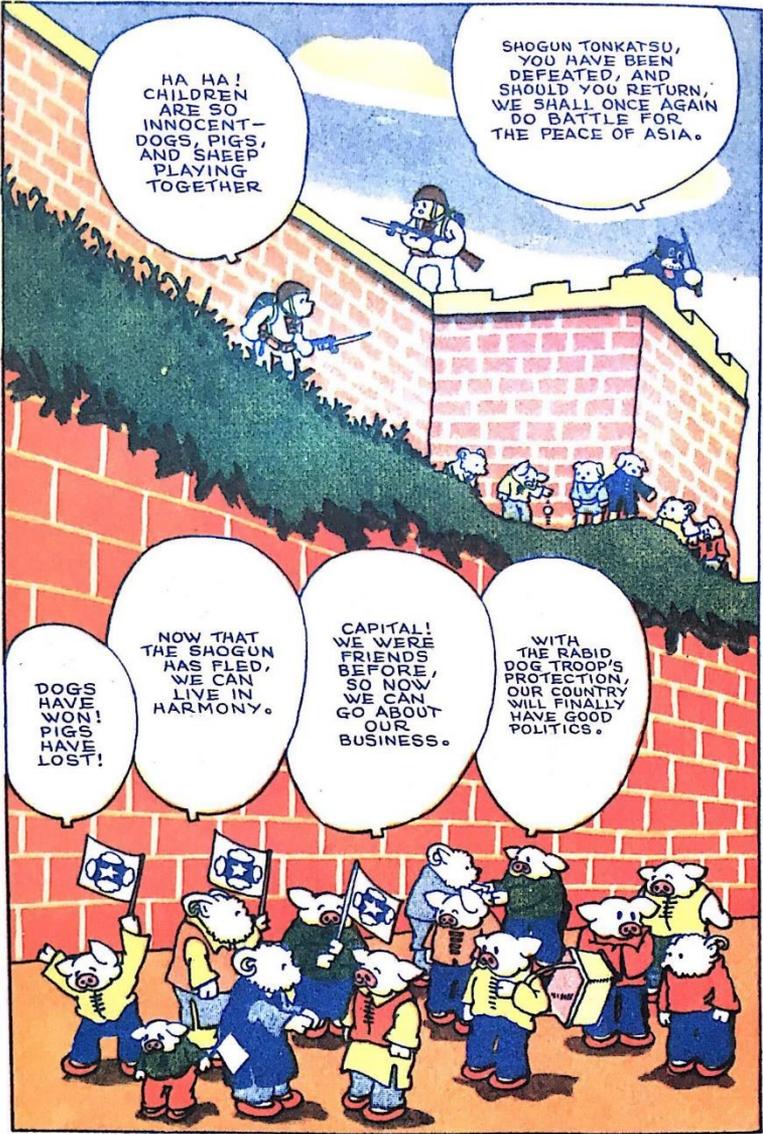
The protagonist Norakuro, an adorable dog, pushes back hordes of Chinese soldiers, shown as pigs, in a brightly colored and adorable binge of violence.

And once the Pig soldiers are defeated dogs, pigs, and bear-things (?) all celebrate together.

Now that the their oppressor has gone they can all live in harmony under the watchful eye of the Japanese.

The Japanese, even while they were committing unspeakable acts of brutality on those they colonized, broadcast an image of pan-Asian unity against the European colonialists lead by the powerful Japanese Empire.

Which definitely freaked out American and European powers who had stoked a fear of Asian unity for centuries.



HA HA!
CHILDREN
ARE SO
INNOCENT—
DOGS, PIGS,
AND SHEEP
PLAYING
TOGETHER

SHOGUN TONKATSU,
YOU HAVE BEEN
DEFEATED, AND
SHOULD YOU RETURN,
WE SHALL ONCE AGAIN
DO BATTLE FOR
THE PEACE OF ASIA.

DOGS
HAVE
WON!
PIGS
HAVE
LOST!

NOW THAT
THE SHOGUN
HAS FLED,
WE CAN
LIVE IN
HARMONY.

CAPITAL!
WE WERE
FRIENDS
BEFORE,
SO NOW
WE CAN
GO ABOUT
OUR
BUSINESS.

WITH
THE RABID
DOG TROOP'S
PROTECTION,
OUR COUNTRY
WILL FINALLY
HAVE GOOD
POLITICS.

Conclusion...

The legacy of comics in The United States is a confusing one to inherit as a young cartoonist. Sometimes comics are a voice for the oppressed: cheap to reproduce, easy to disseminate, simple to understand, and difficult to censor on a noncommercial scale. But sometimes comics are a tool of oppression for the same reasons.

Even today, when print has been completely surpassed by the internet as the most accessible means of distribution, that potent combination of words and pictures maintains this duality: providing a platform for unheard voices, while being used as cultural weaponry to influence elections and provoke hate.

The power of comics and other pop culture to influence the national consciousness is fully understood by powerful people who exploit it. Through its power colonial geopolitics become pop culture, becomes a national mythology that can justify human rights abuses whose enormity is always shocking.

The same tactics that were used to justify the incineration of hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are being used today by television shows like Cops to justify the mass incarceration of people of color for low level drug offenses while pharmaceutical companies are unpunished for their participation in the opioid epidemic, or used by video games like call of duty to stoke fear and hate for Islamic people by dehumanizing them as inherently prone to violence.

It is important, now more than ever, to understand the history and imagery of American racism, to understand how a medium can be abused by governments and other malefactors to spread fear and hate, so that we might better shape an American culture that does not destroy and enslave its citizens.

This is the legacy we were born with...

This is the mythology we were born with...

If it can be purposely shaped to dehumanize, it can be shaped humanize.

Works Cited

- Caniff, Milton. “How to Spot a Jap.” *HOW TO SPOT A JAP (1942)*,
Ethan Persoff, www.ep.tc/howtospotajap/.
- Dower, John W. *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. Pantheon Books, 1993.
- Hirsch, Paul. “‘This Is Our Enemy’ The Writers’ War Board and Representations of Race in Comic Books, 1942–1945.” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 83, no. 3, Aug. 2014, pp. 448–486.,
[doi:https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2014.83.3.448](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2014.83.3.448)
Accessed: 25-04-2019 22:10 UTC.
- Jay, Alex. “The Art of Chu F. Hing, Part 4.” *The Art of Chu F. Hing, Part 4*, Chinese American Eyes, 1 Jan. 1970,
chimericaneyes.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-art-of-chu-f-hing-part-4.html.
- Tagawa, Suihō. “Norakuro.” *Kramer's Ergot 6*, edited by Sammy Harkham, Gingko, 2007.
- Tchen, John Kuo Wei, and Dylan Yeats. *Yellow Peril! an Archive of Anti-Asian Fear*. Verso, 2014.