

Good essay on propaganda in the united states (us) and japan during the second wo...

[War](#), [World War 2](#)



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Introduction: General History of the Second World War

The Second World War has instigated several nations to enter into conflict against one another as they associate themselves into two major factions – the Axis powers led by Germany, Japan and Italy, and the Allied forces led by France, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK). Notably, the Second World War has extended its destructive reach beyond the Western world consisting of Europe and North America towards the Asia-Pacific region, having coincided with the plan of Japan to invade mainland China dating to 1937, then known officially as the Republic of China. Nevertheless, the 1939 invasion of Poland by Germany, which was under the leadership of the Nazi Party led by Adolf Hitler, has stood as the origin of the Second War. The involvement of Japan and the US in the Second World War resulted from the overlapping interests of both nations, which in turn led both to forge alliances with the Axis powers and Allied forces, respectively (Dower 293-318).

Japan entered the Second World War when it attacked the US by bombing Pearl Harbor in 1941. The Tripartite Pact, an agreement that formalized the Axis powers, enabled both Germany and Italy to go to war against the US,

which declared war against their ally Japan following the Pearl Harbor Bombing. The US initially refused to enter the Second World War upon its onset in 1939 through the Neutrality Acts, all of which limited its role to being an arms supplier to those involved in conflicts in Asia and Europe. The Neutrality Acts, being a series of laws and amendments that helped shape the position of the US towards the Second World War, did not distinguish the roles of conflicting parties therein. Keeping a neutral position towards the Second World War, the US sought not to intervene in any of the conflicts in Asia and Europe. However, the vagueness of the Neutrality Acts eventually led the US to lean towards the Allied forces. The increasing entanglement of the US in the Second World War led to its eventual clash with Japan. US President Franklin Roosevelt sought to embargo all its arms supplies to Japan as part of his “quarantining” agenda to support China during the Sino-Japanese War. Having felt the pressure the embargo by the US has brought, Japan reacted aggressively by staging the attacks at Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Dower 293-318; Miller & Commager 77-128).

The clash between Japan and the US has become among the most notable rivalries during the Second World War. Not only did both Japan and the US resort to exercising brute force in their conflicts, but both also used propaganda attacks against one another. Thus, the objective of this study revolves around the interest of exploring the nature of the propaganda attacks exposed by Japan and the US against one another during the Second World War. How did the Second World War-propaganda of both Japan and the US work? How different are the propaganda in Japan and the US against one another during the Second World War? How effective were the Second

World War-propaganda of Japan and the US? The foregoing questions serve to shape the focus of this study as stands to contribute to the difference between the views of Japan and the US towards the Second World War. Such takes on the premise that racism emanating from propaganda characterized the conflict between Japan and the US during the Second World War. The inclusion of several samples of Second World War-propaganda by Japan and the US stands as a further attestation to the significance of this study, all of which possess racist attitudes against one another.

View of the US on the Second World War

The US, like Japan, has feature Second World War-propaganda that circled on the concept of racism. More importantly, racism against the Japanese in the US focused on worries that the burgeoning population of Japan would spill over adjacent predominantly white territories such as western US, Australia and New Zealand, often termed as the invasion of the “ Jap hordes”. With that, US propaganda against the Japanese during the Second World War have focused on portraying Japan as an overpopulated place capable of instigating invasions against the rest of the world in billion-people hordes. Such imagery emerged in propaganda against Japan in the US even though the Japanese numbered less than a billion in their own nation during the Second World War (Aoki; Dower 77-93; 147-180; Kurashige 1632-1652; Young 27-52).

The US did not see Japan as a serious military threat that could harm their interests prior to the 11941 Pearl Harbor bombing. Many of the anti-Japan propaganda released in the US portrayed the Japanese as stupid in terms of

engaging in warfare, particularly in terms of the quality of their arms and vessels. US propaganda during that time have consistently shown Japan as one that lacks serious credibility in terms of coming up with innovations and tactics related to war. However, following the serious damage inflicted by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor, the US began to shift their view towards highlighting Japan as one whose soldiers have fanatic tendencies characterized by their extreme show of loyalty to their nation. Such a description ultimately led American cartoonists to portray the Japanese as apes (Dower 94-117; Herz 471-486; Koppes & Black 383-406; Saito). The alliance of Japan with Germany and Italy under the Axis powers also became the subject of several American cartoonists drawing propaganda. Anti-Japan propaganda in the US also portrayed the Japanese as eager understudies of the Nazis. In that sense, US propaganda have shown Japan as inferior compared to Germany within a patron-client setup, while identifying both the Japanese and Germans, alongside Italy, as being one and the same enemies (Dower 118-146; Saito).

Examples of Second World War-Propaganda in the US

“ Japanese Monkey-Men” (Appendix 1. 1)

Appendix 1. 1, a US propaganda illustration from David Low shows Japan as a monkey unsure of its three targets – US, UK and the USSR. The words “ eeny, meeny, miney mo” went along the swaying motion of the Japanese monkey, which had to choose between three white men as its target. The illustration came out at a time when there was still uncertainty over attacks from Japanese forces (Dower 182).

“ Japan’s Surrender” (Appendix 1. 2)

The formal surrender of Japan in September 1945 prompted the publication of the cover of Leatherneck magazine in Appendix 1. 2. The illustration, which represents Japan as a monkey held by an American soldier, shows how the domestication of the Japanese following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The frustration of Japan over its loss in the Second World War is apparent in the facial expression of the monkey, while the happy expression of the American contrasts to the earlier attitude of the US towards the behavior of the Japanese they deemed as savage (Dower 186).

“ Yellow Peril” (Appendix 1. 3)

Among the most prominent stereotypes by the US towards the Japanese people consists of the xenophobic concept “ Yellow Peril”, popularized by the Fu Manchu novel series by Sax Rohmer. Japan, portrayed as a crocodile landing on Pacific shores, faces an attack by an American eagle in an illustration published in the Chicago Tribune shown in Appendix 1. 3(Dower 189).

Effectiveness of the Propaganda

The propaganda of the US thrown against the Japanese is representative of the general view of xenophobia experienced by many Americans against not just the Japanese, but also to all Asians in particular. Just like in the case of Japan in its alliance with Germany and Italy, the US had to feature propaganda that is specific to the Japanese people, so as not to harm its support for China. Flexibility became the key for negatively portraying the Japanese as monkeys, as the US viewed them as savage creatures with features inferior compared to people of the Western world turned

domesticated ones following their eventual defeat and surrender. Thus, the effectiveness of US propaganda against Japan has rooted from the deeply ingrained attitudes of Americans against Asians, in general (Dower 77-180).

View of Japan on the Second World War

During the Second World War, Japan consistently referred to itself as the superior race to justify its position as an imperial power in the Asia-Pacific region. The Japanese shared similarities with their counterparts in Europe and North America in that they utilized a variety of linguistic and graphic tools to emphasize their supremacy. Code names, images and metaphors, among many others, used by the Japanese all sought to undermine the reputation of all non-Japanese people and glorified all attributes associated with Japan. Dower (203-233) noted that Japan stressed heavily on the notion that it is a distinct nation with a unique location and a pure population different from the predominantly white Western world (Iriye 149-213). However, Japan exercised great care over exposing its racist propaganda in light of its alliance with Germany and Italy under the Axis powers. Both Germany and Italy have large white populations indistinguishable to that of the US and other European nations under the Allied forces. At the same time, Japan has gone through various stages of Westernization throughout much of the 20th century, which makes it hypocritical in the face of its anti-Western propaganda. Thus, Japan worked through the apparent impracticality of its propaganda by concentrating on attacking the US, deeming its alliance with the Axis powers as strategic to its interests in establishing the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in the Asia-Pacific region (Dower 234-261; Miller & Commager 77-128).

However, Japan saw its Asia-Pacific neighbors in a negative light as well. The racist attitude of Japan asserting its supremacy has somewhat placed questions on the integrity of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere it has sought to establish. The Asia-Pacific region, understandably composed of different kinds of people, has featured Japan as the prominent figure in its political, economic and security affairs. Thus, it has become clear that the plan to create the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere is a move by Japan to institutionalize its authority over the entire Asia-Pacific region. With that, propaganda against non-Japanese Asians existed alongside those against people in the Western world, with most of them derided for their darker skin and relatively backward civilizations (Dick 244-272; Dower 234-292; Miller & Commager 77-128).

Examples of Second World War-Propaganda in Japan

“Purging One’s Head of Anglo-Americanism” (Appendix 2. 1)

Japan engrossed itself on themes on purification during the Second World War, as shown notably in a 1942 illustration on Manga magazine entitled “Purging One’s Head of Anglo-Americanism” shown in Appendix 2. 1. The illustration intends to promote to the Japanese people the significance of removing influences from the US – symbolized by the dandruff shown on the lower left side. Dower (191) duly identified the words written alongside the dandruff in the illustration, namely “extravagance, selfishness, hedonism, liberalism, materialism, money worship, individualism, and Anglo-American ideas”.

“‘ABCD’ Powers” (Appendix 2. 2)

Another illustration, shown in Appendix 2. 2, published in Manga magazine in

1942 shows Japan as the sun appearing to dispel the so-called "ABCD" powers - America (US), Britain (UK), China and the Dutch (The Netherlands). Japan, symbolizing the sun, has emerged in the illustration as a purifying force that appears to clean the dirtifying forces of the ABCD powers. In the illustration, both the US and UK are portrayed as criminals. The character representing the US has a crown - encrusted with the letter J standing for Jewish, criticizing the plutocratic rule of the Jews on the US market, falling over its head. It is in that instance where Japanese propaganda has taken on the opportunity to align itself with the ideals of the rest of the Axis powers, particularly that of Germany whose leader Hitler strongly sought for the complete extermination of Jews. China is portrayed with the face of Chiang Kai-Shek - the leader of the Republic of China, with a tailed body - an image strongly connected with the nationalists in China. The Netherlands is merely portrayed as a shoe in the illustration - an image attributed to their decreasing power in the Asia-Pacific region in light of the objective of Japan to found the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere (Dower 192).

"People of the Southern Region" (Appendix 2. 3)

The remarkably racist attitude of Japan is not just limited to its adversaries in the Western world, but is also reflective of its approach towards non-Japanese Asians. The illustration, named "People of the Southern Region" and shown in Appendix 2. 3, shows a transition from Western dominance to Japanese ascendancy over the Asia-Pacific region. The illustration portrays Japan through two objects - the rising sun with the caption "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" and the hand that is somewhat congratulating the native - an Indonesian that moved away from the Dutch scurrying off

from the brightness at the right side of the picture. The appearance of the Indonesian native is severely different from that of the Japanese hand, which has a fairer skin and enclosed in a jacket sleeve, compared to the darker skin and bare clothing of the former. Such portrays the Indonesian as an unmistakable client of Japan, whose main interest is to enable its influence to prevail throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, the illustration asserts the benevolent and superior image of Japan against non-Japanese Asian clients within the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, as it replaces the Dutch and other Europeans that have long invaded several parts of the Asia-Pacific region (Dower 200).

Effectiveness of the Propaganda

Overall, the propaganda released by Japan in light of the Second World War became effective in terms of enforcing the nationalism of its people, which in turn became useful for eliciting their cooperation in all efforts related to conflict participation at the time. The assertion that the Japanese are the superior race does not differ from that of its key associate Germany, whose leader Hitler strongly suggested the dominance of the Aryan race. Although Japan experienced pressure from the US through its arms supply exportation embargo, it nevertheless pursued to improve the idea that its people belong to a race different than the rest of the world, compared to the predominantly white population of nations in the Western world and the inferior non-Japanese Asians forming the rest of the Asia-Pacific region. However, Japan had to practice caution over generalizing all nations in the Western world, as such would have risked its strategic alliance with Germany and Italy under the Axis powers (Dower 203-292; Miller & Commager 77-128).

Synthesis: How Were the Propaganda of Both Japan and the US Effective?

Several parallelisms have emanated from the propaganda released by both Japan and the US against one another. Both Japan and the US imbued racist attitudes in portraying one another in various ways, predominantly through print media. Japan saw itself as the home of the superior race, the Japanese, due to their perceived distinction over the predominantly white Western world and their imagery as saviors of the Asia-Pacific region from the clutches of European control. The US, for its part, portrayed Japan in various ways - from being an inferior player in the Second World War brought forth by the perception that the Japanese lack proper skills and technology for warfare, to being a monkey wrought with savagery with their distinctively Oriental attitudes that eventually cooled down to domestication in light of defeat. Although the US and the rest of the Allied forces prevailed over Japan and the Axis powers, their respective propaganda became effective in eliciting nationalist attitudes to engage their citizens into contributing to efforts for the Second World War. Both the Japanese and the Americans fought against one another with their respective nations on top of their priorities empowered by glorified images of their national identities present in their corresponding propaganda (Dower 77-180; 203-292).

Conclusion

Both Japan and the US incorporated racist attitudes against one another during the Second World War; such became prominent in the way both presented through their propaganda. Whereas Japan asserted their superiority in the Asia-Pacific region and the rest of the world akin to that emphasized by Germany, the US sought to diminish thoughts of Japanese

superiority at home by consistently portraying them as monkeys - beings perceivably less than humans. Nevertheless, the empowerment brought by the propaganda of both Japan and the US against one another is extraordinary, in that both have shown sheer aggression in their respective campaigns during the Second World War. Japan, unexpected by most of the Western world in terms of their military capabilities, proved a destructive force in the Asia-Pacific region, wherein the US stood as its major enemy from the Allied forces. The US, on the other hand, sought to reinforce xenophobic ideas against Asians as a whole, albeit focused on the Japanese, in its goal to encourage all Americans to contribute in any way they can for the war, as well as to motivate them towards victory (Dower 293-318; Miller & Commager 77-128).

Overall, one could claim that the Second World War is a war fought by forces asserting superiority over the other. The Axis powers - Germany, Italy, Japan and their other allies, all came together in the belief that they are superior in their respective domains. Both Germany and Italy vowed to consolidate their interests in Europe while Japan sought to dominate throughout the Asia-Pacific region. The Tripartite Pact helped institutionalize the cooperation all nations under the Axis powers observed towards one another, to the extent that it became the legal force that officiated conflict against any upcoming enemy. The Allied forces - France, USSR, US, UK and their other allies, may have cooperated with one another in the interest of resisting what they deem the atrocious acts of the Axis powers. Although all of them have their respective interests on maintaining their significance in international political affairs, they engaged in conflict by presenting themselves as the "good"

against the “evil” Axis powers, albeit with propaganda at par with the racially antagonistic ways of the opposition (Dower 293-318).

The conflict between Japan and the US in the Second World War, particularly in the Asia-Pacific theatre, has served as an ideal microcosmic model portraying racial animosity in international affairs at the time, as attested by the effectiveness of Japanese and American propaganda aimed against one another. The relative lack of international exposure of nations and the brutal nature of events during the Second World War has enabled the cultivation of negative attitudes against conflicting sides. Racial propaganda, particularly in the case of Japan and the US, stood out as a visual approach to enemy defamation during the Second World War, in turn being a collaborative effort among conflicting sides that required effective mobilization of populations through the cultivation of hatred against their respective enemies (Dower 293-318).

Appendix

Appendix 1: Examples of Second World War-Propaganda in the US

1. 1: “Japanese Monkey-Men”
1. 2: “Japan’s Surrender”
1. 3: “Yellow Peril” (Appendix 1. 3)

Appendix 2: Examples of Second World War-Propaganda in Japan

2. 1: “Purging One’s Head of Anglo-Americanism”
2. 2: “‘ABCD’ Powers”
2. 3: “People of the Southern Region”

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