

Racism in the setting the rising sun postcard essay

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At the conclusion of the First World War the United States of America became a legitimate global military superpower. Its colonies in Asia were a proof of that burgeoning military might. Aside from its military presence in the Philippines, the U. S. government had created a significant force projection in Asia, through the military base located in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Relative peace was the general description in the two decades that followed the First World War. But in the decade of the 1940s Hitler and his allies were ready to take over the world. Japan was Germany's major ally in the East. America's military presence in the Asia Pacific was a major roadblock to Japan's Asian plan. It was the presence of Pearl Harbor that served as the thorn-on-the-side of the Japanese Imperial Army. One Sunday morning in December of 1942, Japan's air force enacted their version of Hitler's blitzkrieg or lightning-fast surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The treacherous attack justified America's entry into World War II. The United States utilized a two-pronged attack to defeat Japan. The first one was through the use of military force, and the second one was through the use of propaganda. The postcard from William H. Hannon's Special Collection Library entitled: "Setting the Rising Sun" is a good example of the use of propaganda to defeat the Japanese imperial army.

Analyzing the postcard entitled: "Setting the Rising Sun" requires background information on racism and the significance of the surprise attack of Pearl Harbor on the general consciousness of the American people. A preliminary investigation on the said postcard requires a two-stage process. The first stage is an overview of racism.

It is common knowledge that racism is not a good thing (Acosta 15).

However, it is not clear why. According to one commentary, race is a way of “making up people, an act of defining racial groups is a process fraught with confusion, contradiction, and unintended consequences” (Omi and Winant 105). It is also important to point out that the process of “making people up is not a static undertaking. Concepts of race prove to be unreliable as supposed boundaries shift, slippages occur, realignments become evident and new collectives emerge. State-imposed classifications of race, for example, face continuing challenges by individuals and groups who seek to assert distinctive racial categories and identities” (Omi and Winant 105).

Racism is wrong because it does not cover all the realities regarding a certain people group. For example, a racist comment regarding African-Americans focuses on the significant number of Africa-American men behind bars. It prompts the generalization that this ethnic group is prone to a life of crime. This racist comment is not true, because there are many African-American men who are important contributors in nation building.

Although racism is not a recommended course of action when it comes to interacting with people coming from a different ethnic background, it is an inevitable consequence of socialization. In the book entitled *Racial Formation in the United States*, “Making up people is both basic and ubiquitous. We must categorize people in order to navigate in the world – to discern quickly who may be friend or foe, to position and situate ourselves within prevailing social hierarchies, and to provide clues that guide our social interaction with the individuals and groups we encounter” (Omi and Winant 105). In other

words, it is human nature to develop an easy way to deal with a complex social question regarding a particular people group (Leon and Nakashima 112).

With regards to the interaction between the American and Japanese people, it is human nature to focus on certain features and exaggerate them in order to create a racial profile on particular groups (Anzaldua 76). It is also human nature to focus on certain aspects of a culture or physical characteristics of a people group to create an ethnocentric view on other ethnic groups.

Since racial profiling is not a static process, it is important to note that during this particular time in American history, the American people's perception of the Japanese people were negatively affected by the Japanese Imperial Army's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. On top of the negative and exaggerated view of the Japanese people, the less than ideal view was made more difficult by the resentment felt by American citizens. These are critical viewpoints needed to understand the reason behind the creation of the said postcard.

At first glance, the postcard uses visual images to tell a story. The postcard depicts a setting sun in the horizon. It is easy to conclude that this is a setting sun because of the color of the sun. It is not a bright yellow sun. It is a red-orange color that is a universally accepted notion of a setting sun. In addition, the postcard depicts a platoon or battalion of soldier marching in the background. In the forefront, there are two soldiers trying to subjugate a young boy with Asian features. They seem to force the boy to sit into a crude

type of urinal. It can be argued that they are trying to subjugate or punish a mischievous child.

A standard World War II book with pictures of the men in mortal combat will reveal the common type of uniform and weaponry that the U. S. Armed forces issued to American soldiers. The common denominator is a type of military uniform that distinguishes American troops from other combatants coming from other military units from other countries. In addition, the ubiquitous symbol of the American G. I. is the M1 Garand. It was the favorite rifle of U. S. infantrymen.

An overview of the postcard will reveal that there are other pieces of evidence that serves as proof that it was created at the height of World War II. Aside from the battle uniform of the soldiers and the weapons, the caption says: "Setting the Rising Sun." A review of World War II history will reveal that the Land of the Rising Sun is a common epithet used for Japan (Cromwell 5).

It is understandable why the creator of the postcard used racism to depict the Japanese people in unflattering terms. The way the Japanese people were compared to mischievous children was an objectionable fact. However, it must be made clear that the American people were utterly disgusted by how the Japanese Imperial Army treacherously attacked Pearl Harbor. Historians talk about the assurances made by the Japanese Imperial Army that there were no battle plans drawn up to attack Hawaii (Cromwell 6). It was the diplomatic ploy used after the United States manifested its concern in the aftermath of Japan's announcement that it has sided with the Axis

Powers that was later known as the integrated forces under Hitler's military coalition. However, the assurances were made in poor taste as the Japanese Imperial Army went into Hawaii and destroyed Pearl Harbor.

The postcard was made to made fun of the Japanese Imperial Army. It was the attempt to belittle the capabilities of the Japanese people to defeat the United States Armed forcercs. It was unfortunate that the creator of the postcard used racism to offend the Japanese people (DiMarzio 10). However, it was the emotions, and the political situation of the 1940s that prompted people to demean the Japanese people.

It is also important to point out that the Japanese people were depicted using exaggerated facial features. The Japanese people were caricatured using a small frame, chubby arms, and feet. It was contrasted with the imposing figures of the American soldiers that were beside the child-like figure near the ground. The position of the Japanese man near the ground was a powerful statement regarding the insignificant physical capabilities of the enemy.

Without a doubt the postcard was a part of the psychological warfare or propaganda that was utilized to boost the morale of the American soldiers. It was also a way to rally the supporters in the U. S. mainland. The United States government needed war funds and volunteers. It is through the use of propaganda that inspires the American people to provide financial support and to send their sons to the battlefield. Nevertheless, the caricature of the Japanese people was offensive. One of the most glaring examples is the way the soldiers forced the child-like person into a urinal. It is not clear what is

the intended message of the creator but it can be argued that the use of the urinal was a means to make fun of the Japanese people. It was sending a strong message that the U. S. Armed forces are going to force the Rising Sun into submission.

Racial profiling is utilized to get a handle on complex social information. Racial profiling is the inevitable consequences of socialization as one people group tries to create a mechanism to describe or deal with other ethnic groups. However, human nature exaggerates certain physical characteristics or cultural features due to ethnocentric tendencies. The postcard is not just a way to profile the Japanese people. It was also a negative reaction to the Pearl Harbor attack. Thus, the words and images used were harsh. It was not only to demean the Japanese people, but also to rally those who were left behind in the U. S. mainland to support the troops in the battlefields of Asia.

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