



World War Two, America's Divine Mission & The Formulation of the Japanese "Other": A Study of Wartime Propaganda as a Tactical Weapon and a Euphemism for Racial Discrimination

James Maynard

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During World War Two, over fifty years of collective American prejudice towards Japanese immigrants reached a scathing pinnacle, reflected in literal terms by the official order for Japanese internment along the West Coast, and more significantly, in the consciousness of popular culture in its fierce ideological separation of "us and them." While war against the Axis powers was a total effort of quashing the brutality of anti-democratic principles, war against the Japanese was conceived as "a holy war, a racial war of greater significance than any the world has heretofore seen."

In this paper, I analyze the ideological forces behind America's "holy war" against the Japanese by focusing on the visual portrayal of the Japanese as sub-human, mindless tyrants. Instilling the American public with vivid visual propaganda pertaining to this ideological juxtaposition was the prime method of creating a wartime consensus of shared ideals and a collective hatred of Japanese "otherness." I focus on the plethora of wartime propaganda ranging from Hollywood films to animated shorts by Disney and Warner Brothers, to popular superhero comic strips and political cartoons in order to contextualize my argument within the history of Japanese-American race relations from 1880 through Pearl Harbor.

In examining this period of Japanese-American race relations while specifically covering the buildup to the United States' entry into World War Two, I assert that anti-Japanese propaganda not only bound the American public together with the common purpose of defending the superiority of democratic principles over the savage totalitarianism of Japan, but also helped fuel popular culture's entrenched racism by pervading the national consciousness with perverse, exaggerated symbols of Japanese sub-human "otherness."

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