

## Aesthetics, Ethics, and Narratives of Race in the Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

In *The English Patient*, Michael Ondaatje writes, “They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation” (286). In so writing, Ondaatje asks the ethical question that haunts Hiroshima and Nagasaki: What could have sanctioned the murder of ±105,000<sup>1</sup> non-whites?

Scholars agree that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were unnecessary and did not, as it is often asserted, save lives. In “Hiroshima: Historians Reassess,” Gar Alperovitz writes:

All of these assessments also bear on the question of the number of lives that might possibly have been lost if the atomic bomb had not been used. Over the last decade, scholars of very different political orientations, including Barton Bernstein, Rufus Miles Jr., and John Ray Skates, have all separately examined World War II U.S. military planning documents on this subject. These documents indicate that if an initial November 1945 landing on Kyushu had gone forward, estimates of the number of lives that would have been lost (and therefore possibly saved by use of the atomic bombs) were in the range of 20,000 to 26,000. In the unlikely event that a subsequent full-scale invasion had been mounted in 1946, the maximum estimate found in such documents was 46,000.

46,000 deaths, though significant, pales in comparison to the estimated 105,000 deaths caused by the two bombings. This numerical disparity suggests that America underestimated the destructive power of the atomic bomb, overestimated the projected casualties resulting from an American invasion of Japan, or misrepresented the figures to audiences in order to excuse the use of the bomb as an attenuating virtue (it saved more people than it killed). Whether or not America dropped the bomb on Hiroshima with an understanding of its total effect, the bombing of Nagasaki three days later was excessive; 66,000 died in Hiroshima, a number which on its own exceeds the maximum estimate of deaths that would have resulted from an invasion. Due to the numerical disparity between actual deaths and projected deaths, the argument that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki saved lives has no factual grounding.

Scholars also agree that the use of the atomic bomb was not necessary to force Japan to surrender. In “Why Japan Surrendered,” Robert Pape suggests that Japan was prepared to surrender at the time of the bombing; he writes, “Japan's military position was so poor that its leaders would likely have surrendered before

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<sup>1</sup> This figure is drawn from “The Avalon Project” of Yale Law School, which in turn obtained its figure from The Manhattan Engineer District. The bombings resulted in 20 white (American, Dutch, British) casualties, .0002% of this estimate. An estimated 22,000 Koreans were killed in the bombings (Hane).

invasion, and at roughly the same time in August 1945, even if the United States had not employed strategic bombing or the atomic bomb” (156). In Pape’s evaluation, the bombing of Hiroshima coincided with the expected date of surrender. The bombing of Hiroshima on August 6 and the bombing of Nagasaki on August 9 suggest that the bombings were executed at the moment before they would become unjustifiable; that is, the bombs were dropped before the Japanese were expected to surrender so that the bombs could be used before the war ended. The 1946 War Department Study *Use of the Atomic Bomb on Japan* supports the notion that Japan was ready to surrender, reading, “the Japanese leaders had decided to surrender and were merely looking for sufficient pretext to convince the die-hard Army Group that Japan had lost the war and must capitulate to the Allies.” The entrance of Russia into the war, it continues, “would almost certainly have furnished this pretext, and would have been sufficient to convince all responsible leaders that surrender was unavoidable.” Because Russia’s entrance into the war would have occasioned the surrender of Japan, America needed to act before Russia declared war on Japan in order to justify the use of the bomb. The bombing of Hiroshima two days before Russia declared war on Japan suggests that America dropped the bomb in anticipation of Russia’s declaration of war and, as such, Japanese surrender. The act of intentionally dropping the bomb, given the findings that it would not have saved lives and that it was not necessary for Japan’s surrender, suggests that America had ulterior motivations for bombing Hiroshima.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars argue that the bombings may have been motivated by an American desire for advantage in relations with Russia. Alperovitz writes, “Modern research findings, for instance, clearly demonstrate that from April 1945 on, top American officials calculated that using the atomic bomb would enormously bolster U.S. diplomacy vis-a-vis the Soviet Union in negotiations over postwar Europe and the Far East.” The bombings, then, may have had diplomatic motivations; America was looking to a future in which it and the Soviet Union, already troubled by a contentious past, would facilitate postwar processes in Europe. In “Reminiscences,” Leo Szilard further suggests the diplomatic motivation by noting the opinion of Secretary of State James Byrnes; Szilard writes, “Byrnes thought . . . that Russia might be more manageable if

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<sup>2</sup> America, of course, was involved with and aware of the Russo-Japanese situation. As Alperovitz notes, Truman “went to Potsdam to meet Stalin... to make sure the Soviets would, in fact, enter the war.” The fact that America and Russia were in discussion suggests that America would have been aware that Russia intended to enter the war on August 8 and would have acted accordingly. Moreover, Truman wrote, “If the test [of the atomic bomb] should fail, then it would be even more important to us to bring about a surrender before we had to make a physical conquest of Japan” (qtd. in Alperovitz). Truman knew that a Russian declaration of war would likely result in Japan’s surrender, but, as his conditional syntax indicates, he prioritized the use of the bomb.

impressed by American military might" (127). The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as Alperovitz and Szilard suggest, demonstrated the nuclear power of America to the Soviet Union so that America could gain leverage in post-war negotiations over Europe and the Far East. The use of the atomic bomb against the Japanese, who were prepared to surrender, in order to give America an advantage in postwar negotiations with the Soviet Union returns us to the question: What could have sanctioned the murder of ±105,000 non-whites for diplomatic advantage with Russia?

In *Hiroshima: The World's Bomb*, Andrew Rotter suggests that racism explains, at least in part, the decision to drop the bomb for diplomatic reasons at the expense of Japanese lives. He writes, "White American racism caused, or at minimum enabled, the United States to use a devastating weapon on the Japanese, brown people whom they considered inferior to themselves, barbaric in their conduct of war, and finally subhuman—'a beast,' as Truman put it" (166). Rotter suggests that American anti-Japanese racism accounts for the genocidal expenditure of non-white lives for diplomatic reasons. This American anti-Japanese racism, Rotter notes, manifested itself in the aesthetic portrayal of Japanese people as "subhuman." The (mis)representation of Japanese people as subhuman narrates an unreal hierarchy of race in which white Americans are humans and Japanese are not. American anti-Japanese racism resulted in the framing of the Japanese people as subhuman, which in turn enabled the use of the atomic bomb on the Japanese people, not for pragmatic or expedient reasons, but to demonstrate "American military might" to the Soviet Union.

I argue that American anti-Japanese racism enabled the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. American narratives of race fostered antipathy toward the Japanese to the extent that the Japanese became expendable. The accumulation of an increasingly racist anti-Japanese popular aesthetic, which took the form of textual, visual, musical, and filmic propaganda, resulted in the animalization and subsequent dehumanization of the Japanese people. This dehumanization allowed for the "ethical" bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for diplomatic advantage with Russia. I conclude that the aesthetic, and its accumulation, possesses the ethical power to condition genocide and that America's dehumanizing aesthetical narratives of the Japanese people enabled the murder of 105,000 Japanese and other non-white people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Japanese military was also abhorrent in its war crimes. By focusing on an American transgression, I am not suggesting that America's system of violence was worse than Japan's, as both were condemnable. However, the fact remains that American anti-Japanese racism enabled the murder of 105,000 Japanese and non-Japanese non-whites in a demonstration of military might.

To this end, I will perform a rhetorical analysis of American anti-Japanese textual, visual, musical, and filmic propaganda, or “texts,” in order to discern the aesthetic features that, in their accumulation, dehumanized the Japanese people and ethicized the bombings of them. In particular, I draw on an understanding of rhetoric advanced by William Covino and David Jolliffe in *Rhetoric: Concepts, Definitions, Boundaries*. Covino and Jolliffe write, “Rhetoric is a primarily verbal, situationally contingent, epistemic art that is both philosophical and practical and gives rise to potentially active texts” (5). In so outlining the concept of rhetoric, Covino and Jolliffe emphasize its multiform, though “primarily verbal,” nature and its contextual dependence. Rhetoric, they argue, must be considered in its inter-textual context, regardless of the forms those texts take. As such, beyond examining the intrinsic textual devices that dehumanize the Japanese people, I look at how each text symbolically corresponds to other texts; by working through a selection of historical, propagandistic materials, I map the accumulation of messages and identify the inter-textual strains that run through them, paying particular attention to the use of animal types to dehumanize the Japanese.

While the method of this essay is rhetorical analysis, the driving principle is historical revisionism. In *A People’s History of the Civil War: Struggles for the Meaning of Freedom*, David Williams indicates the need

for a more comprehensive treatment of American history, stressing that the mass of Americans, not simply the power élites, made history. Yet, it was mainly white males of the power élite who had the means to attend college, become professional historians, and shape a view of history that served their own class, race, and gender interests at the expense of those not so fortunate—and, quite literally, to paper over aspects of history they found uncomfortable. (10-11)

Williams notes the partiality of the (American) historical record insofar as it only represents a privileged subset of the population. His call points to revisionism, or informed re-interpretations of skewed histories, not only to correct the historical record but also to undo the systems of academic oppression, intertwined with “class, race, and gender” and other intersections, that ethically justify such “uncomfortable” “aspects of history” as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This essay seeks not only to correct the misconception that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were ethical; it also seeks to illuminate the relationship between aesthetics and ethics and to suggest that the former plays a far greater role in informing the latter than is generally acknowledged.

Anti-Japanese narratives of race dehumanized the Japanese in a consistent, animalizing way; this animalizing trend reverberated throughout the American imagination. The poster “Open Trap make Happy Jap” (fig. 1) represents an early

incarnation of this aesthetic. The poster depicts a mouse-like Japanese soldier listening through a keyhole to what the viewer presumes are Americans talking. Though the soldier is recognizably human, he also has identifiably murine features, particularly his pronounced ears, which, though they are not as large as the ears of the rat in “Don’t Talk: Rats Have Big Ears” (another example of animalization in American anti-Japanese propaganda; fig. 2), are mouse-like in contrast to human physiognomic proportions. The poster also depicts the Japanese soldier with teeth that resemble a mouse’s in their comic largeness. Moreover, the soldier’s nose is compact and red and visually centers the face (it is the point from which the wrinkles of the soldier’s face originate), invoking the facial composition of a mouse (compare with fig. 3); the two wrinkles that run from the nose to the cheekbones resemble whiskers to the effect that the soldier’s nose becomes a snout. The physiognomy of the soldier, though human, is mouse-like in its exaggeration of the ears, the teeth, and the nose. By drawing on murine comic-visual tropes, the poster represents a straightforward aestheticization of the Japanese as mice.

Though it cautions Americans to speak with discretion, the message “Open Trap make Happy Jap” also intones violence in its use of the word “trap.” Though trap refers to the mouth of the speaker (as in “shut your trap”), it also, given the murine qualities of the soldier and the domestic setting, invokes the mousetrap. The sound lines emanating from the keyhole are sharp and graphically invoke the sound that a mousetrap makes when it is triggered. The violent undertones (subtext) of the message reveal the spirit of brutality toward the Japanese that accompanied their dehumanization. The re-presentation of the Japanese people as mice in the American imagination and the spirit of violence that underlies this re-presentation prefigure the inhumane acts of violence committed in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For additional depictions of the Japanese as rodents, see: “Keep this Horror from Your Home” (fig. 7), “Jappy So-o-o Happy When This Happens to You” (fig. 8), “Jap Trap” (fig. 9) and the Tokio Kid series. These posters demonstrate the saturation of the American imagination with depictions of the Japanese as rats.

American anti-Japanese propaganda did not only depict the Japanese as rodents (though rodents constituted a major narrative source); Americans were liberal in their use of other pests, including snakes and octopi, which share a sinuous quality; see: “Salvage Scrap to Blast the Jap” (fig. 10) and “The United States Marines” (fig. 11). In “Slap that Jap!” Dr. Seuss, in a disillusioning display of racism, depicts a Japanese person as a fly (fig. 12). Seuss’s portrayal of a Japanese person as a fly invokes annoyance and emphasizes the ease with which an American could have killed a Japanese person (it would not be too far to suppose that Americans had killed flies). It also underplays the threat that the Japanese people represented to America; understood to be flies, the Japanese did not represent the same human threat that America posed to Japan. Dr. Seuss dehumanizes the Japanese by depicting them as flies, suggesting in turn their human inability and the ease with which they can be killed.

In keeping with visual narratives such as “Open Trap Make Happy Jap,” Norman McCabe’s *Tokio Jokio* reinforces the association of the Japanese with mice. For instance, *Tokio Jokio* depicts a mouse-like Japanese soldier standing at a “listening post” (fig. 4). However, the listening post is not a listening post in its military sense;<sup>5</sup> rather, it is a column with keyholes in it. The soldier, who visually resembles Jerry (fig. 5) from *Tom and Jerry*, places his, once again, pronounced ear to a keyhole. The similarities between the scene and “Open Trap make Happy Jap” suggest the emergence of tropes that imagine the Japanese as mice listening to American conversations through keyholes. In another instance, the film depicts a Japanese soldier running in panic during an air raid (fig. 6). The soldier scurries between trees on all fours, visually resembling the erratic movements of a mouse fleeing capture (the animation is rapid and the track of the soldier is circular to dizzying effect). A still from the film reveals the extent to which the soldier is portrayed as a mouse. In the still, the soldier is between strides, and his sheathed sword extends behind him like a tail; the soldier’s overbite, in addition to his pronounced ears, reinforces his mouse-like appearance. The soldier is also low to the ground and has slightly larger hind leg muscles than he does foreleg muscles; these features correspond to features of mouse anatomy. These moments represent two examples of the animalization that occurs throughout *Tokio Jokio*, the cumulative effect of which is the cognitive association of the Japanese with mice.

Yet, the act of animalization is unique to the Japanese. The film depicts Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini as humans with no identifiable animal characteristics (fig. 13 and fig. 14). By not animalizing, and thus dehumanizing, them, Americans accorded Hitler and Mussolini the human rights that they did not accord to the Japanese. Though they represented Axis forces, the whiteness of Hitler and Mussolini secured their humanity. By contrast, the Japanese leaders Hideki Tojo and Isoroku Yamamoto are depicted unambiguously as mice (fig. 15 and fig. 16). This contrast reveals the correlation between color and narrative representation in the American imagination—in which whites are humans, regardless of their wartime alliance, and in which the Japanese are animals—and, thus, the racism that governs American aesthetic ideology.

This racist aesthetic ideology also governed the domestic ostracism of the Japanese. In “The Question of Japanese-Americans,” published in *The Los Angeles Times*, W.H. Anderson writes, “Perhaps the most difficult and delicate question that confronts our powers that be is the handling—the safe and proper treatment—of our American-born Japanese, our Japanese-American citizens by

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<sup>5</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “listening post” as “an advanced position used to discover movements or the disposition of the enemy.”

the accident of birth. But who are Japanese nevertheless. A viper is nonetheless a viper wherever the egg is hatched.” Anderson makes clear that the American citizenship afforded to Japanese people born in America is an “accident” and, as such, a flaw in the constitution. According to Anderson, being born in America does not confer American identity. A person must satisfy the precondition of whiteness, or at least non-Japanese-ness, in order to be considered an American. The analogy to a viper is dehumanizing in the obvious sense that it suggests that the Japanese are snakes, a comparison that is more potent for its mythological symbolism (the snake metonymically represents the devil). By aligning the Japanese with snakes, Anderson posits ethnicity as a determiner of humanity. The Japanese are not humans because they are Japanese, much like the Japanese are not Americans because of their ethnicity. Anderson’s remarks represent the act of analogically dehumanizing the Japanese based on a racial criterion and indicate, given the public nature of his opinion, the pervasive role of the animalizing aesthetic in domestic ostracism.

The indirect analogical dehumanization of the Japanese in Anderson’s account finds full, direct metaphorical expression in Robert Lee Scott, Jr.’s *God is my Co-Pilot*. Scott writes, “Every time I cut Japanese columns to pieces in Burma, strafed Japs swimming from boats we were sinking, or blew a Jap pilot to hell out of the sky, I just laughed in my heart and knew that I had stepped on another black-widow spider or scorpion” (254). In Scott’s account, the black-widow spiders or scorpions refer to the Japanese, who become said arachnids throughout the course of one sentence. Scott uses the explicit metaphorical equation of the Japanese to black-widow spiders or scorpions to invoke the perceived power differential between American humans and Japanese pests. Though dangerous, black-widow spiders do not match the destructive power of human military technology (or of humans). The fact that Scott “stepped on” the Japanese demonstrates on a special (read: species) level the power disparity between the two. A black-widow spider is, Scott suggests, no match for a human with military-issue boots. The ease with which Scott would kill a black-widow spider or a scorpion approximates the ease with which he kills Japanese soldiers. Scott’s affectless description marks the extent to which anti-Japanese racism allowed for the killing of Japanese people with the detachment of killing a pest.

In 1942, Carson Robison released two songs that represented the racial basis of American antipathy to the Japanese. “Remember Pearl Harbor” masquerades as a song of remembrance, but its lyrics reflect the hatred that underlies the call to remember. The song includes lyrics such as, “Kill a hundred rats for every boy that fell” and:

Then from the sky without warning  
The vultures swarmed to attack  
[...]

They stabbed our boys in the back.

As Scott and Anderson did, these lyrics dehumanize the Japanese by contrasting an understanding of the Japanese as animalized scavengers (“rats” and “vultures”) with the “boys,” or humans, of the American military. By highlighting this difference, “Remember Pearl Harbor” reinforces the power differential between Americans and the Japanese on a species level (in the vein of Scott). The war with the Japanese, it suggests, is not a war between humans; rather, it is a war between humans and scavenging animals. The song, in a self-conscious act of differentiation, emphasizes the fact that the Japanese and the Americans share no special relation; its lyrics read:

Remember how we used to call them our “little brown brothers?”  
What a laugh that turned out to be  
Well, we can all thank God that we're not related  
To that yellow scum of the sea.

The original benevolence of Americans in extending brotherhood to the Japanese (they called the Japanese “little brown brothers”) is reversed when Robison sings, “Well, we can all thank God that we're not related / To that yellow scum of the sea.” The lyrics contrast the colors “brown” and “yellow,” using the former to indicate a form of relation with Americans, while denouncing any form of relation with the “yellow scum of the sea.” The use of color to distinguish the American species from the Japanese species racializes the act of dehumanization. The idea that Americans share no special relation with the Japanese (they are of different species) dehumanizes the Japanese on the basis that yellow does not signify human. As “Remember Pearl Harbor” reveals, the dehumanization of the Japanese was tied to and indexed by a principle of racial difference.

Robison’s “We’re Gonna Have to Slap the Dirty Little Jap (And Uncle Sam’s the Guy Who Can Do It)” epitomizes racially based American antipathy toward the Japanese. Though the song does not explicitly name “rats” or “vultures,” as “Remember Pearl Harbor” does, it does invoke the animalistic nature of the Japanese. Its lyrics read:

We’ll skin that streak of yellow from this sneaky little fellow  
[...]  
We’ll take the double crosser to the old woodshed  
We’ll start on his bottom and we’ll go to his head  
When we get done with him, he’ll wish that he was dead...

The use of the verb “skin” denotes the act of skinning an animal. The metaphor of skinning suggests that the Americans of the song treat the Japanese “fellow” as an animal; the act of skinning, by association with animals, animalizes the Japanese “fellow” and represents an American understanding of the Japanese as animals to be skinned. Though they signify the beginning of a new musical phrase, the succeeding lyrics are sung in the same verse and, as such, operate in the semantic

shadow of the verb “skin.” The lyrics, which describe an unspecified act in an “old woodshed,” implicatively extend the metaphor of skinning. As an extension of the skinning metaphor, the lyrics can be read as “We’ll take the double crosser to the old woodshed / We’ll start [skinning] on his bottom and we’ll [skin up] to his head.” The act of skinning becomes particularly horrifying when the listener realizes that the song, though it implies that the Japanese are animals, refers to the Japanese in human terms. The use of the word “fellow” in the lyric “We’ll skin that streak of yellow from this sneaky little fellow” and the use of human pronouns such as “his” and “him” signify a human being. Thus, when read with an understanding of its pairing of the animal and the human, the lyric describes the skinning of a “fellow” human. The act of skinning the Japanese fellow equates him to an animal, even though the song preserves an understanding of his humanness. The motivation behind the skinning, as the lyric indicates, is to remove the “streak of yellow” from the Japanese “fellow.” The act of skinning the Japanese fellow for his “yellow” skin represents a racially motivated act of violence and dehumanization against a person based on the color of his skin. The increasingly violent and increasingly racial nature of American anti-Japanese propaganda is reflected in the production of a song that attacks the Japanese based on the color of their skin. The song represents a blatantly violent incarnation of the animalizing aesthetic and, in its application of an animal-metaphor (skinning) to a human, suggests the conflation of the two, prefiguring the American treatment of Japanese humans as animals.

American military violence toward Japanese soldiers demonstrates the power of the animalizing aesthetic to conflate the Japanese with animals. In *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, E.B. Sledge writes:

The Japanese’s mouth glowed with huge gold-crowned teeth, and his [American] captor wanted them. He put the point of his kabar on the base of the tooth and hit the handle with the palm of his hand. Because the Japanese was kicking and thrashing about, the knife point glanced off the tooth and sank deeply into the victim’s mouth. The Marine cursed him and with a slash cut his cheeks open to each ear. He put his foot on the sufferer’s lower jaw and tried again. Blood poured out of the soldier’s mouth. He made a gurgling noise and thrashed wildly. (120)

Though the Marine’s actions are animalistic, it is the Japanese soldier who is treated as the animal. The Marine tortures the Japanese soldier with a level of detachment akin to that of an uncompassionate human killing an animal. The extent of the Marine’s violence suggests something more than hyper-masculine, hyper-maniacal fanaticism. The Marine’s actions represent the real-life enactment of the animalizing aesthetic; the Marine, in believing that the Japanese are animals, treats the Japanese soldier as one, to be done innumerable injustices and

to be attacked for prize (the soldier's gold teeth). Sledge's account demonstrates the depth of American violence toward the Japanese and an instantiation of the animalizing aesthetic that, though it falls short of atomic bombings, allowed for the guiltless murder of a Japanese person.

The power of the aesthetic lies in its ability to refract the way that people view each other. American anti-Japanese propaganda animalized the Japanese as rodents, black-widows, scorpions, snakes, octopi, and vultures, and, in so doing, dehumanized them, allowing for the "ethical" bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Unfortunately, America has not moved beyond its stigmatizing narratives; it persists in its regime of aesthetical oppression. For instance, the stylization of prison inmates as "bad" or as "criminals" reinforces a homogenizing aesthetic that reduces the individual to a type (MacLin and Herrera). The effacement of the individual inmate has given rise to aesthetics that counter the stereotype. A mosaic in the "Art of Communication" exhibition takes as its guiding aesthetic principle the multitude of individuals represented by the Washington Corrections Center for Women (fig. 17). The mosaic is a patchwork of different pages from, for the most part, different books, and each page features the message of a different individual. Each message distinguishes itself by its semantic and graphic singularity. By presenting itself as a multitude of discrete parts, the piece subverts the homogenous aesthetic of the American anti-prisoner narrative. The intrinsic disparateness of the whole, formally manifested in the diversity of messages, penmanships, colors, and pages, suggests the impossibility of typifying inmates. Yet, though the "Art of Communication" exhibition represents a noble attempt to deconstruct a stigmatizing aesthetic, it requires the accumulative power of myriad counter-aesthetics to effect change. Meanwhile, America continues to stylize inmates as "criminals" and "bad," with all of the associations that arise therefrom, and, though it may do so more subtly than it did to the Japanese, it continues in its aestheticization of "others" as inferior.

American anti-Japanese propaganda took various aesthetic forms, including text, image, song, and film. The cumulative effect of these aesthetic, public forms was the animalization and subsequent dehumanization of the Japanese people and the real-life treatment of the Japanese people as animals (demonstrated in Sledge's account). This dehumanization of the Japanese people in the American imagination altered the terms upon which the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were executed. If the Japanese were not people but animals, then the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not the bombings of people but the bombings of animals. Though the bombings would be met, and were in fact met, with allegations of inhumane action, such allegations would mean little to those to whom the Japanese were not humans. American anti-Japanese propaganda achieved the dehumanization of the Japanese people and integrated its vision of the Japanese people into the everyday reality. In

“Hiroshima, the Holocaust, and the Politics of Exclusion: 1994 Presidential Address,” William Gamson supports the notion that an act of racial other-ing allowed the inhumane bombings to occur; he writes, “Genocide, sanctioned massacres, and indiscriminate bombings of civilian populations of the ‘enemy’ in war all imply the existence of an ‘other’ to whom one is not obliged to extend the most basic human rights” (5). A refusal to accord the “other” the “most basic human rights” is an act of dehumanization, because a denial of human rights is a denial of the other’s human right to them. The narration of a (false) reality in which the Japanese people were animals enabled the inhumane bombing of the Japanese people for diplomatic advantage. The reality created by American anti-Japanese propaganda is, in essence, one in which the Japanese are not humans and which allows Americans to expend non-human Japanese lives without qualms of inhumane treatment. The aesthetic adopted by American anti-Japanese propaganda—an aesthetic which would have had considerable reach given its presence in different and widely circulated media—possessed the power to ethicize the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki because, under its conditions, no “human” lives would be lost.

American history disguises the role that racism played in producing the conditions which allowed for the “ethical” bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The aesthetics of American anti-Japanese propaganda took the form of animalizing and dehumanizing narratives of the Japanese people. This aesthetical dehumanization of the Japanese people, grounded in race, reveals the power of aesthetics to influence ethics and, in the case of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to ethicize the murder of 105,000 non-whites for diplomatic reasons. The accumulation of aesthetical re-presentations of raced peoples narrates false realities that enable and ethicize unethical acts. This revelation points to a truth, which regrettably is nothing new, but which nonetheless bears repeating: The “factual” narratives of American history are not always reliable. The project of historical revisionism continues, parsing history for insight into the shadows created by lights that blind but do not illuminate.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

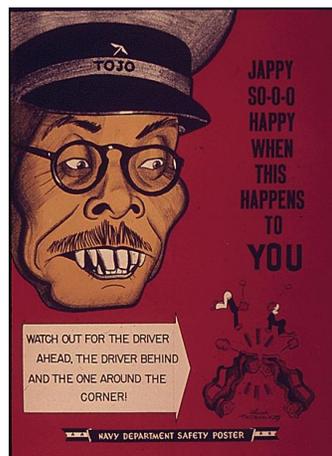


Figure 8



Figure 9



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