

Isolationism, Internationalism and the “Other:”

The Yellow Peril, German Brute and Red Menace in Early  
to Mid Twentieth Century Pulp Magazines and Comic  
Books

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# Isolationism, Internationalism and the “Other:”

## The Yellow Peril, German Brute and Red Menace in Early to Mid Twentieth Century Pulp Magazines and Comic Books

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of History  
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by  
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The illustrations in this work, if not otherwise designated, come primarily from one of five sources; The Library of Congress, Phil Stephensen-Payne’s Galactic Central pulp magazine bibliography and cover index webpage (<http://www.philsp.com/index.html>), [www.coverbrowser.com](http://www.coverbrowser.com), The Library of Virginia, and the author’s personal collection. The source of each image is designated following its description, by LOC, PSP-GC, CB, LVA and NVM, respectively.

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## Abstract

This thesis' purpose is to demonstrate, via the examination of popular youth literature (primarily pulp magazines and comic books) from the 1920s through to the 1950s, that the stories found therein drew their definitions of heroism and villainy from an overarching, nativist fear of outsiders that had existed before the Great War, but intensified afterwards. These depictions were transferred to America's "new" enemies following both the United States' entry into the Second World War, as well as the early stages of the Cold War. This transference of nativist imagery left behind the ethnically-based origins of such depictions, showing that racism was not the sole and simple reason for such exaggerated visages. A process of change, in regards to America's nativist sentiment, so virulent after the First World War, will be explained by way of the popular, inexpensive escapism of the time, the pulp magazines and comic books of the early to mid-twentieth century.

## Introduction

Europe is entering an era of twilight. . . It is heading for a period of social and civil warfare which is likely to last fifty years and may last longer. It will emerge from this warfare a Socialist state. But the new Socialist Europe may be faced by a war greater and more crucial than any the world has yet seen – a war for the white man’s right to leadership in civilization, a war with the yellow races of the world.

- Georg Brandes, 1919

The preceding statement by Scandinavian philosopher Georg Brandes, published on the front page of the July 13, 1919 edition of the *New York Tribune*, mirrored the thoughts of many Americans following the devastation of the First World War. While America was fortunate enough to avoid the destruction that had ravaged Europe, the reverberations of the conflict impacted America as violently as any military bombardment ever could. The Victorian age of sensibility and reason was violently shattered, and in its place appeared an America very different from the one that had preceded it; Bolshevism was triumphant in Russia, which precipitated Red Scares at home combined with a seemingly never-ending cascade of immigrants. The rise in youthful sexual frivolity and sexual freedom among women convinced one poet of the time that the youth of the 1920s were “a separate race, speaking an alien tongue.”<sup>1</sup> The consumer culture that would come to define America was beginning to emerge in earnest.

America was changing, and as within any other transformations, fear accompanied the change; the fear of the immigrant, the outsider, the “other,” that had destroyed Europe and

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Perret, *America in the 1920s: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 150-152.

was planning on doing the same in America. Immigrants that did not fit the traditional, Anglo-American ideal had always been under scrutiny, such as the “uncivilized” and “atheistic” hordes of Eastern Europe and the enigmatic yellow races of Asia. Discriminatory imagery of foreigners, especially the Chinese, appeared in an excess of American publications in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (*see Figures I – III*). After the end of World War I, however, attacks upon these groups took on new importance – an importance that, in many minds, signified a life or death struggle for the survival of America.

The predominant form of popular youth literature at this time, owing in large part to its low costs, both in production as well as in consumption, were the fantastic pulps of the early 1920s and 1930s and later, particularly with the advent of the Second World War, comic books. Both mediums offered the youth of America many things: fast-paced action, travels to unbelievable and far-off worlds, miracles of modern science, and a reality in which good, almost always, triumphed over evil. What these also offered were definitions as to what that “good” and “evil” were; in most cases, the good was personified by a heroic, strapping Anglo-Saxon male and the evil by a villain of obviously foreign origin, either a sly and crafty Oriental or a brutish criminal who had an obvious, alien-like disdain for wholesome American values. If, in the event the good was not triumphant, it was usually due to the hero’s inability to cope with the foreign and alien nature of his opponent. The definitions of heroism and villainy reflected in what are now considered undoubted racist imagery were influenced and intensified by the horrors of the First World War, a time when America was undergoing fundamental changes in nearly every aspect of its culture and identity after what was, up until that time, the most costly conflict in Western history. The isolationism and fear of the “other” from abroad, on the part of

the politicians and the public alike, were primarily responsible for the intensification of such imagery within the pages of the pulp magazines. The fear of change in the 1920s was only intensified by advent of the Great Depression. In the 1930s, the same fear of the “other” intensified in light of events occurring in Asia and Europe, as trepidations regarding a potential, second worldwide conflict fast approached. With the outbreak of World War II and, particularly America’s involvement beginning in 1941, the largely ambiguous Oriental and brutish, Hun-like misanthrope were remade to be clearly recognizable as the “Jap” and the “Kraut.” These were the same depictions as before; the only difference now was that the real threat these groups now posed warranted, in many minds, the intensification of these stereotypes to near ludicrous proportions. If the 1920s had warned Americans of the impending, foreign invasion, the late 1930s and the Second World War confirmed the rationality of such fears.

After the war ended, the nation’s fear of the “other” was forced to assume a different persona. With America now assuming the position of a global power, spreading its culture and influence abroad, the enemy came to be found in the form of the one group that vehemently resisted assimilation into the new American sphere of influence: Communists, and more specifically, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Just as was the case in the 1920s, America’s enemies were those who would not, or could not, assimilate; those who would not accept America’s historical values and culture. Before, it had been foreigners in the United States; now, with America forced to see itself in a global consciousness, those who were not assimilating were Communists, and the depictions previously used to deride ethnic differences in the “other” was now, somewhat easily, transferred to Russians and Communists within the pages of comic books. The imagery used to depict the “Oriental” and “Jap” previously, was now

seen in the visage of Communist Chinese and North Koreans; the form of the barbarous and depraved “Hun,” and later Nazi, was now carried over to Communist Russians.

## The Pulps and the Comic Books- A Brief Overview

The precursor to every form of popular, periodical American literature was the dime novel of the mid-nineteenth century. The first of these was *Beadle's Dime Novel*, which ran from 1860 to 1874, a bi-weekly and inexpensive periodical that was numbered sequentially and featured action and adventure stories geared towards a male, adolescent audience. Soon after *Beadle's* success, other publishers followed its lead and produced numerous “dime novels,” the term having become a catch-all for a new medium, as opposed to a specific brand name.<sup>2</sup> As opposed to the pulp magazines that appeared later, most dime novels contained a singular story about a singular character, many of which became household names in their time; ace detective Nick Carter, who first appeared in *The Old Detective's Pupil; or, The Mysterious Crime of Madison Square* (September 18, 1886), went on in the future to star in pulp magazines, novel series, radio shows, and episodic serials and full-length feature films (*see Figures VI and VII*). While the dime novels would survive into the early twentieth century, they found competition as early as the mid-1880s.

The pulp magazines, deriving their name from the cheaply-produced pulp wood paper on which they were printed, provided tales of the fantastic, on both this and unknown worlds, that appealed to an ever-growing audience. The pulp magazine originated with the publication

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<sup>2</sup>For a more complete understanding of the dime novel, including its history and its fandom, see: J. Randolph Cox, *The Dime Novel Companion – A Source Book* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000).

of the *Golden Argosy*, beginning in 1882, the first creation of newspaper magnate Frank A. Munsey (see *Figures IV and V*). As Munsey's biographer George Britt explains, *The Golden Argosy* appeared at just the right time in American history:

As yet there was no popular literature for them [the average American], no middle ground of periodicals between the Augusta [or penny] dreadful and the ponderous reviews dealing in subject matter the average man cared nothing about at a price he couldn't afford to pay. . . And the country's non-magazine buying millions were ripe for anyone who could interest them in reading.<sup>3</sup>

As was the case with the dime novels beforehand, the popularity, and profits, generated by Munsey's periodical inspired a host of imitators, and a new industry was formed. The pulps covered a variety of genres, inspired by their dime-novel predecessors. Westerns, espionage, detective, and general adventure stories filled the pages of the new medium; a new genre, called "Scientification" (later renamed science-fiction) was one of several new genres the pulps would produce. As with any medium, the pulps have their share of drivel, and by contrast, their masterpieces. For every painful cliché or uninspired work that was obviously vomited forth from the depths of authorial squalor (again, pseudonyms were used quite often) for the sole purpose of meeting an editor's deadline, there are works worthy of literary notice, from both recognized masters of fiction such as Robert E. Howard, Isaac Asimov, H.P. Lovecraft or Dashiell Hammett, to the more obscure authors, who put just as much of themselves into their work as their more illustrious compatriots, and will hopefully be rescued, at some point in the future, from the literary limbo in which they now reside.

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<sup>3</sup> George Britt, *Forty Years - Forty Millions: The Career of Frank A. Munsey* (Port Washington: Kennikat press, 1972), 82.

The 1920s and 1930s saw the peak of pulp magazine profits and popularity; with the coming of the Second World War, the pulps began to decline. The readership of the pulps matured with the magazines. This readership eventually outgrew the pulps in order to create their own tales of the fantastic in the form of “more respectable” novels, or a new industry they themselves would create and furnish with a cast of characters even more diverse and imaginative than their pulpish predecessors: the world of comic books.

The creators of the great comic book heroes of the 1940s (and, in many cases, of the present) grew up reading the pulps. Bob Kane and Jerry Robinson, creators of Batman, drew inspiration from such pulp heroes as The Shadow and Zorro. The creators of Superman, Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, were avid readers of the science-fiction pulp *Amazing Stories*, and they created their own “fanzine” pulps before they began work on the “The Last Son of Krypton.” Julius Schwartz, a prolific writer at National Allied who would eventually become the company’s editor, overseeing their prodigious superhero output of the late 1950s-early 1960s, was a fan of science-fiction pulps alongside Siegel and Schuster in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>4</sup> With the American comic book’s pedigree arguably reaching as far back as Rudolph Töpffer’s publication, in 1846, of his *Histoire de M. Vieux Bois*, or (its English title) *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck*, the first modern comic book that would be recognized as such today was 1934’s *Famous Funnies*. Created by Harry Wildenberg and M.C. Gaines for Eastern Color Printing Company, the title was a retooling of a promotional comic book given away the year before. Composed of reprints of popular newspaper strips, by its twelfth issue, *Famous Funnies* showed a profit, and, as was to

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<sup>4</sup> For more information concerning Julius Schwartz’s amazing career in science-fiction, comic books, and its related fandom, see: Julius Schwartz, *Man of Two Worlds – My Life in Science-Fiction and Comics* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000).

be expected, an industry was created. Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, an adventurous pulp writer, came up with the idea of printing all-original material in a comic book, and thus National Allied's *Detective Comics* arrived on the newsstands in 1937.<sup>5</sup> While many titles still published newspaper reprints, the future was to be had in new, original stories, and, specifically, those about singular characters, preferably those who were "super." A trend initiated by the arrival of Superman in *Action Comics* No. 1 (June, 1938), the superhero genre was born, commencing an explosion of colorful, costumed characters and stories, and cementing the comic book as the predominant form of inexpensive, literary escapism for decades to come.

## Historiography

The historiography regarding pulp magazines, thus far, is rather small, with very few works addressing the issue of racial depictions and caricatures. Editor Tony Goldstone, in his introduction to *The Pulps: Fifty Years of American Pop Culture*, devotes very little time to the subject, offering only that the heroic characters found in the pulps "took on all the known forces responsible for the plight of the country, and anything else that itched in the imagination, particularly 'red menaces' and 'yellow perils'."<sup>6</sup> The few that do approach the topic of race, however, often link racial depictions to social or cultural factors. In *Yesterday's Faces: From the Dark Side* (the third, in a five-volume series analyzing pulp magazines) Robert Sampson suggests that the origins of the "yellow peril" made popular by Sax Rohmer's *Fu Manchu* stories of the early 1910s (which saw a resurgence in the later pulps of the 20s and

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<sup>5</sup> For more information concerning the birth of the comic book industry, see: Les Daniels, *Marvel – Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1993); Ron Goulart, *Great American Comic Books* (Lincolnwood: Publications International, 2001); Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow – Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Ronin Ro, *Tales to Astonish – Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, and the American Comic Book Revolution* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Tony Goodstone, ed., *The Pulps: Fifty Years of American Pop Culture* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1970), xv.

30s) can be found in white, Anglo-Saxon fears concerning, what appeared at the time, to be a terrifyingly belligerent Oriental race. The Boxer Rebellion in Qing China in 1900 and the victory of Japan over Tsarist Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 are two of the examples that Sampson gives as the impetus for the creation of the “yellow peril” genre of pulps.<sup>7</sup> Sampson unfortunately offers very little in the form of further evidence, failing to see a deeper and long-lasting series of events that could have led to the need for such depictions, with the later texts in his series offering more synopsis of pulp stories rather than any actual analysis. Similar to Sampson, Ron Goulart, author of *Cheap Thrills: An Informal History of the Pulp Magazines*, offers one recent event of the time, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 as a possible reason for the popularity of the “evil Oriental” motif, again, not taking into account many other events and far-reaching factors. *Hard-Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* argues that it was the loss of traditionally “white” jobs by the American proletariat to “newer” groups, such as the Chinese and those of Eastern European origin that fostered this animosity; author Erin A. Smith asserts that such class and ethnic antagonisms facilitated the rise in popularity of much of the negative depictions found in pulps, of both “Orientals” and “Huns” alike.

One fault of the pulp historiography is that, in some cases, the authors in question have not actually read, by their own admissions, many of the primary sources they are writing about. William F. Wu’s section concerning pulp magazines, in *The Yellow Peril – Chinese American in American Fiction 1850-1940*, focuses on several pulp titles, such as *Fu Manchu*, *Yen Sin*, and the works of Dashiell Hammett. The problem lies in Wu’s dependence on secondary sources for this entire section, as he deems actual pulp magazines too rare and difficult to find, which simply is

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Sampson, *Yesterday’s Faces Volume 3: From the Dark Side* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987), 8.

not the case. Erin A. Smith, in the article “How the Other Half Read: Advertising, Working-Class Readers, and Pulp Magazines,” attempts to define the pulp magazine’s audience, not by analyzing the actual stories, but rather the type of advertisements found within their pages.<sup>8</sup> Problems arise with the fact that the same advertisements, such as those for correspondence schools, appeared in any number of more “sophisticated magazines” of the day. Also, according to sources contemporary with the pulps, publishers depended on newsstand and subscription sales for their income. With advertisements accounting for very little of the pulps’ revenue, it would seem that the stories, not the ads, were in the chief interest of both publisher, and reader.<sup>9</sup> While Smith in her later book (*Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*) devotes much more time to the actual content of the pulps, “How the Other Half Read. . .” provides something of a superficial understanding of the pulp magazines.<sup>10</sup> Such is the state of pulp magazine historiography; for the most part, it has either been written by individuals who grew up reading them, and are therefore slightly biased in their favor (such as Goldstone), or by those who were born after their heyday, and have not read them significantly, but are nonetheless writing about them, such as Wu.

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<sup>8</sup> Erin A. Smith, “How the Other Half Read: Advertising, Working-Class Readers, and Pulp Magazines.” *Book History* 3 (2000) : 204-230. Smith, in her opening paragraph of this article, uses two descriptors of pulps (that they were “trash” intended to be discarded upon reading, and that the “majority” of pulps featured covers with scantily-clad women) that owe more to the popular conception of the pulp, rather than actual experience with the medium. One can peruse the first forty or so years of the *Argosy’s* publication, and would not find any scantily-clad females on the covers. Later pulps, of the weird fiction and detective veins, certainly employed such marketing tactics; however, a demarcation between one type of pulp, and another, is still required.

<sup>9</sup> Archer Jones, “The Pulps: A Mirror to Yearning.” *The North American Review* 246, No. 1 (Autumn, 1938) : 35-47. In his article, Jones states that advertising accounted for less than 10% of the pulp industry’s revenue, with the majority of profit coming from actual magazine sales.

<sup>10</sup> Erin A. Smith *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

In particular regards to the subject of the depiction of minorities in comic books, most efforts focus on the subject of race relations within America, as opposed to American fears concerning those from outside of the United States. Gerald Early and Alan Lightman's article "Race, Art and Integration: The Image of the African-American Soldier in Popular Culture during the Korean War" and Jeffrey A. Brown's *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans* are excellent examples of works that study the role comic books have, or have not played, in relation to the social history of African-Americans. Arie Kaplan's *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* explores the vital role American Jews played in the creation of the comic book industry itself, as publishers, writers and artists.<sup>11</sup>

The majority of works that detail the history of comic books do just that; provide an overview of a particular decade, or even the entirety of the industry itself, while only touching, here and there, upon issues of race and their importance in comics at the time. In actuality it is impossible to find any serious discussion on the topic, with many authors preferring to praise comic books for sending heroes to battle foreign foes before war even broke out. *The Smithsonian Book of Comic-Book Comics* does not even address superhero comics pertaining to the Second World War; out of the twenty-nine stories contained therein, only 5 are of a superhero variety, and none of those are World War II-related stories. *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art*, by Roger Sabin does not address the depictions of foreign enemies a great deal. Admittedly, his work is more concerned with so-called "underground" comics than the more mainstream titles, but he does devote a significant part of the book to

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<sup>11</sup> Gerald Early and Alan Lightman. "Race, Art and Integration: The Image of the African American Soldier in Popular Culture during the Korean War." *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 57, no. 1 (Autumn, 2003) : 32-38. – Jeffrey A. Brown, *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and their Fans* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). – Arie Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008).

the history of the medium, a space in which one would expect race to be mentioned, in some capacity.<sup>12</sup>

In many works, if the topic of race (with the exception of African-Americans) is approached, it is rather quickly addressed and just as quickly left behind. Les Daniel's *Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics* attributes the depiction of Japanese villains in Marvel (at the time "Timely") Comics in one sentence, as the product of "racial prejudice and resentment over the attack on Pearl Harbor" which "created a climate in which it didn't seem out of line to depict Orientals as subhuman monsters."<sup>13</sup> In his introduction to Marvel Comics' inaugural volume of collected reprints of 1941's *U.S.A. Comics*, Dr. Michael J. Vassallo touches upon the issue hurriedly that the "ethnic references we find offensive today . . . were products of their time period, and should be taken as such," moving quickly to analyses of the stories found within the volume.<sup>14</sup> While Dr. Vassallo's statement is certainly true, it does not negate that fact that the reasons behind such depictions are nowhere to be found throughout the text.

Serious, academic research into what exactly inspired this imagery is lacking. A majority of secondary sources focus on what the Second World War did to comics and how they changed as a result of the war, as opposed to any in-depth study as to what the imagery therein represented other than simply "the enemy." *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* by Richard Reynolds states that "America's entry into World War Two gave the superheroes a whole new

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Sabin, *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Les Daniels, *Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1993), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Michael J. Vassallo, Introduction to *Marvel Masterworks: Golden Age U.S.A. COMICS Vol. 1* (New York: Marvel Publishing, Inc., 2007), vii.

set of enemies, and supplied a complete working rationale and world view. . .” that would allow for the creation even greater numbers of superheroes, particularly those of the patriotic-theme, such as Captain America.<sup>15</sup> While Reynolds’ statement that often times superheroes served as “proxies of U.S. foreign policy,” is true, it does little to explain the virulent imagery that accompanied the exploits of these heroes. Mike Benton’s *The Illustrated History: Superhero Comics of the Golden Age* recalls that there was a patriotic fervor in the nation, prior to Pearl Harbor, that allowed for the creation of more “foreign” characters as foils, and that their proliferation after the attack on Pearl Harbor was purely for propaganda purposes. Benton quotes comic artist C.C. Beck as having stated that his superiors demanded he draw “anything to make the Japs look ugly or the Nazis look like punks.”<sup>16</sup> Bradford W. Wright’s *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* argues that the heroes and villains that appeared in American comic books during World War II were intended to “unite the American people behind their government for the purpose of waging war;” in Wright’s view, the foreign enemy was a rather “recent” creation, whereas the enemy before the Second World War, in the years of the Great Depression had been the rich and the politically corrupt within America.<sup>17</sup> David Hajdu’s *The Ten-Cent Plague* offers the view that the appeal of the superhero during the war years was as “a simple, democratic, home-grown symbol of American might and surety of purpose.”<sup>18</sup> In *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books*, Arie Kaplan describes

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Reynolds, *Super-Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Mike Benton, *The Illustrated History: Superhero Comics of the Golden Age* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1992), 55.

<sup>17</sup> Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 42-43.

<sup>18</sup> David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic Book Scare and How it Changed America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 47.

the depiction of German brutes and savages as the work of American Jews in the comic book industry of the time (of which there were many, if not an outright majority) who gladly depicted “their alpha-male superheroes sweeping the floor with Nazi spies and saboteurs,” not to mention Nazi soldiers and, on more than one occasion, even Hitler himself.<sup>19</sup> Kaplan advances comic book historiography by giving the creations of the Golden Age more of a background than as simple answers to unbridled American racism and opportunistic propaganda. *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book* by Gerard Jones follows a similar trend, in emphasizing the importance of American Jews to the creation, and continuation of the comic book industry. Jones’ work focuses more on the personalities (and eccentricities) behind the artist’s easel and writer’s desk, pointing out how many of the ideas that were floating about in the post-World War I landscape, including fascism, socialism and scientific innovation (as well as eugenics) influenced the mindset, and therefore artistic output, of the earliest comic book creators.

William W. Savage, in *Commies, Cowboys and Jungle Queens: Comic Books and America, 1945-1954* (one of the few works to specifically address comic books published during the Korean and Cold Wars) succeeds where other works have failed, in assigning comic books a place as a kind of barometer of the confusion facing America after the Second World War. The main problem is that Savage, in using predominately the works of E.C. Comics (a company, even during the height of its popularity, known to be “out there” and to be pushing limits) as the central focus of his discussion of war comics of the 1950s, assigns to the totality of the industry what he finds in the work of a singular company: a terrified, anti-war America who was

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<sup>19</sup> Arie Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008), 58.

emasculated and left impotent by the ambiguous nature of the Korean War, in comparison with the more traditional goals of World War II. Savage rightfully credits a great deal of 1950s comics' imagery to uncertainties about changing societal situations occurring at the time, such as divorce rates, but does not place enough emphasis on the changing nature of "Americanism."

As the preceding analysis of secondary works clearly shows, there has not been a great deal, if any, serious work concerning the issue of depictions of foreigners and wartime enemies, and certainly none that make an effort to connect such imagery to any multifaceted reasons other than simple racism.

## Purpose

This work will provide a survey of a wide variety of primary sources consisting of pulp magazines and comic books and will show that simple racism on the part of the majority white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant population of the United States from the formal end of the First World War to the years following the end of the Korean War is not a sufficient answer as to why demonized and highly-exaggerated caricatures of foreigners permeated the popular youth literature of the time. It will show that these stories, culled from the pages of both the pulps of the 1920s and 1930s, and the comic books of the 1940s and 1950s, drew their definitions of heroism and villainy from an overarching fear of outsiders that had existed before the Great War, but intensified afterwards. These depictions were transferred to America's "new" enemy following the Second World War, as the Cold War began, leaving behind the ethnically-based origins of such imagery, showing that racism was not the sole and simple reason for such exaggerated visages. These depictions were based on what was seen as un-American, ungodly,

and undemocratic, more so than they were indicative of any race. A process of change, in regards to America's nativist sentiment, so virulent after the First World War, will be explained by way of the popular, inexpensive escapism of the time, the pulp magazines and comic books of the early to mid-twentieth century.

# Appendix I

## Illustrations

Fig. I – Cover of *The San Francisco Illustrated Wasp* – December 8, 1877

Fig. II – Cover of *Aladdin; or the Wonderful Lamp* – 1889 (NVM)

Fig. III – Cover of *Puck Magazine* – August 8, 1900

Fig. IV – Cover of the *Golden Argosy* – February 5, 1887 (PSP-GC)

Fig. V – Cover of *The Argosy* – October, 1896 (PSP-GC)

Fig. VI – Cover of *New Nick Carter Weekly* No. 633 – February 13, 1909 (NVM)

Fig. VII – Cover of *New Nick Carter Weekly* No. 674 – November 27, 1909 (NVM)



Immigrants of any ethnicity, and especially the Chinese, were often the target of American hostility in relation to economic frustrations and nativist aggression.

Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hon, ed. *The Coming Man – 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Perceptions of the Chinese*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 96.



Exaggerated Asiatic features appeared early in American story periodicals, as shown by this adaptation of the Aladdin myth (whose primary character is Chinese in the original tale) from 1889.

# Puck

Entered at N. Y. P. O. as Second-class Mail Matter.



III

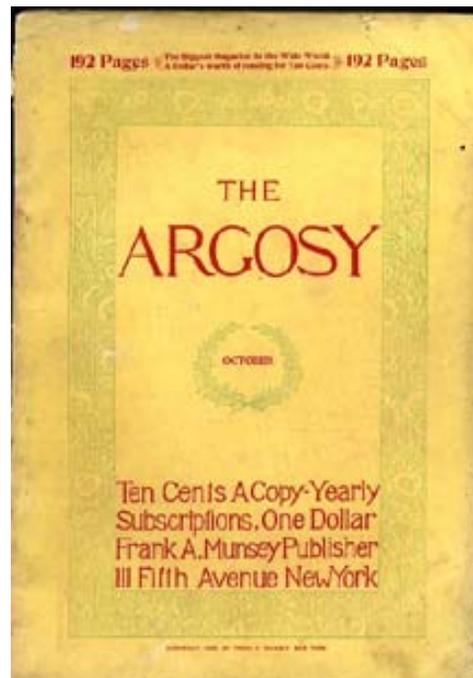
The cover of this issue of the news magazine *Puck* shows the personification of human civilization (as a white woman) telling the Chinese Emperor, "That dragon [The Boxers] must be killed before our troubles can be adjusted. If you don't do it I shall have to."

Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hon, ed. *The Coming Man – 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Perceptions of the Chinese*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 69.

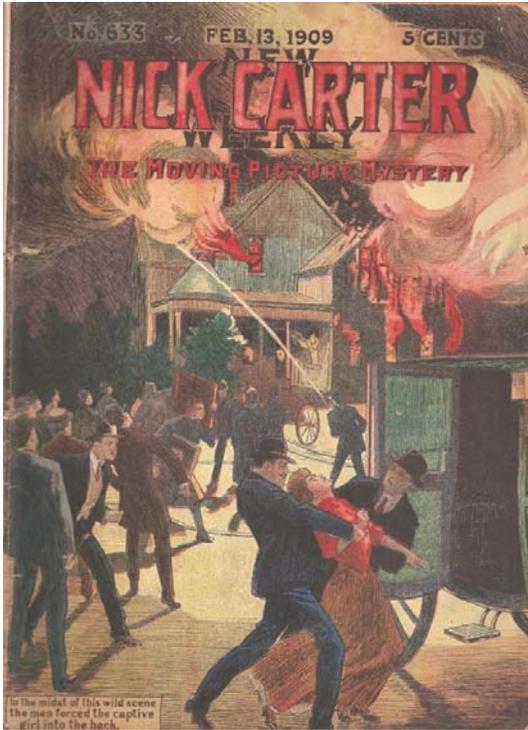


IV

*The Golden Argosy*, began in 1882 by Frank A. Munsey, was at first primarily a “boy’s fiction” magazine; with the October 1896 issue (Fig. V), the title had changed, not only its name, but also its content to become a more mature, general fiction title, and paved the way for the future pulp magazine industry.

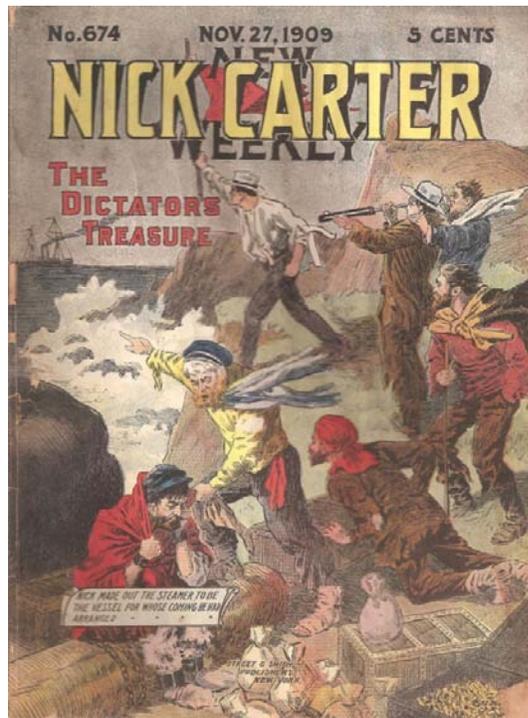


V



VI

Nick Carter, who first appeared in 1886, was the most popular dime novel character, appearing in thousands of stories, over several decades. His popularity helped ensure the success of later pulps, which would be print's primary vehicle of nativist fiction.



VII

# I

## The Yellow Peril:

The American Pulp Between the World Wars

1919-1935

1920. The previous year, the Treaty of Versailles brought an end to the First World War. The Treaty, however, did little to justify the enormous loss of life that the War had incurred. The United States, entering the conflict rather late, in 1917, did not suffer nearly the amount of casualties as the nations of Europe. Despite its late entry, America had still lost a great many of her sons; a loss increased by the deaths of over 600,000 Americans during the Spanish Influenza pandemic that swept across the nation in 1918. In fact, the large number of deaths incurred by American Expeditionary Force members led to Allied propaganda that the disease was an act of biological warfare on the part of the enemy.<sup>20</sup> Representative John E. Raker, in 1920, argued before Congress the intrinsic link, in his mind, between immigrants and foreign diseases, such as the Spanish Flu: "With the large numbers of contagious diseases that are prevalent in the Old World, many hundreds of persons afflicted with those diseases are bound to land on our shores. . ."<sup>21</sup> American deaths as a result of both World War I and the 1918 Pandemic instilled fears in the minds of many Americans about what was happening to the country and the rest of the world. Many who held a Hegelian worldview of forward human progression had their beliefs in such an idea shaken to the core by the destruction the war had wrought, as well as the changes that were coursing through America after war's end.<sup>22</sup> By 1920, America was a very different place than it had been prior to the beginning of the First World War. As a central character in Fred MacIscac's "Sabotage," published in the December 30, 1933, issue of the pulp magazine *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, stated: "It seems down in Greenwich Village they think that

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<sup>20</sup> Howard Phillips and David Killingray, ed. *The Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19: New Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Loren Baritz, ed. *Culture of the Twenties* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 66.

<sup>22</sup> The "Scopes Monkey-Trial," the free-wheeling lifestyles of the flappers and their literary counterparts found in the works of writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis announced changes in American culture that concerned many. The consumer culture that would come to define America was beginning to emerge in earnest. – for a more complete understanding of the changes in the 1920s, see Baritz.

communism is the solution of everything earthly, and that the only gods are Lenin and Stalin.”<sup>23</sup>

One result of these changes, of the concern as to what was happening to the traditional American identity can be found in the era’s rise in nativism.

Southern Nazarene University sociologist and author Brian N. Fry defines nativism as “a collective attempt by self-identified natives to secure or retain prior or exclusive rights to valued resources against the challenges reputedly posed by resident or prospective populations on the basis of their perceived foreignness.”<sup>24</sup> In the case of the post-Great War worldview, the “valued resources” can be understood as the very meaning of the term “American,” in the face of what appeared, to many of the time, as a bombardment of foreign ills and corrosiveness upon the traditional American identity. On the floor of the United States House of Representatives on April 20, 1921, Lucian Walton Parrish of Texas, in arguing for the ratification of new limitations upon immigration into America, pleaded:

These who are out of sympathy with our Constitution and the spirit of our Government will be here in large numbers, and the true spirit of Americanism left us by our fathers will gradually become poisoned by this uncertain element. . . There can be nothing so dangerous as for us to allow the undesirable foreign element to poison our civilization and there thereby threaten the safety of the institutions that our forefathers have established for us.<sup>25</sup>

This understanding, that unmitigated and unassimilated immigration threatened the existence of the Republic, appeared in many forms over the course of the succeeding years.

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<sup>23</sup> Fred MacIssac, “Sabotage,” *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, 30 Dec. 1933, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Brian N. Fry, *Nativism and Immigration: Regulating the American Dream* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2007), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Baritz, 51.

What came about in the wake of arguments such as those expressed by the gentleman from Texas were the “Quota Laws” of the 1920s. The Quota Laws, passed in 1921 and renewed in 1924, placed numerical limits on immigrants allowed into the United States; 3% of a country’s immigrant representation in the 1910 American census were allowed into the United States each year, with this percent being lowered to 2, and the census year pushed back to 1890 during the 1924 revision.<sup>26</sup> Such laws only added to earlier Anti-Asian legislation, dating back to the 1870s that deemed Asian immigrants, of any nationality, “aliens ineligible to citizenship,” barring them from becoming naturalized citizens for almost the next one hundred years.<sup>27</sup>

In *A Nation By Design: Immigration Policies in the Fashioning of America*, Aristide R.

Zolberg argues that:

Although reaction such as these are attributable in large part to prejudice and xenophobia that tend to exaggerate the problematic aspects of the situation, it should be recognized that the settlement – or prospective settlement – of any substantial group of people whose culture diverges markedly from the hosts’ is likely to call the established ‘cultural compromise’ pertaining to religious, linguistic, and racial diversity into question, and hence is a legitimate source of concern.<sup>28</sup>

In Zolberg’s understanding, there is a clear demarcation between out-and-out racism, and the fear that foreigners will subvert the traditional order of a society. This fear, to some degree is “legitimate,” in that change is indeed occurring. Whether or not the traditional society is truly threatened is more so dependent on the situation in question.

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<sup>26</sup> Robert F. Zeidel, *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 138.

<sup>27</sup> Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 45.

<sup>28</sup> Aristide R. Zolberg, *A Nation By Design: Immigration Policies in the Fashioning of America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 16.

Applying Fry's and Zolberg's definitions and examinations of nativism to America after the First World War and the isolationist and anti-foreign sentiment that were a major part of it, two things can be understood, or at least proposed. First, that after the Great War many Americans felt that a valued resource (the American identity, and everything connected to it) was being compromised, in large part, by the influx of foreigners and foreign ideas; second, that such a fear, while certainly containing elements of racism and xenophobia, cannot be completely defined in such terms. The fear pertaining to the loss of this "valued resource" is, as Zolberg states, somewhat legitimate when it is threatened by new people (or ideas) being introduced to what was once (or even, imagined to be) a homogenous community.

This is not to suggest that early twentieth century racism in America is justified, then, or at any point in the nation's history; such a belief runs counter to what a truly democratic society hopes to develop. What is being suggested, however, is that racism is not adequate-enough of an explanation for the seemingly racist imagery that appeared during the post-war years in America. European liberalism, Hunnish barbarism, Bolshevik violence, and Asiatic craftiness – these were the ideologies and stereotypes that the popular culture of the time, and the American pulp fiction magazines in particular, used to define the enemy that seemed to be encroaching upon America's "valued resources." To quote Zolberg again, "[nationality and nationalism] entails the elaboration of a boundary between 'us' and 'them': thus, we are who we are by virtue of who we are not."<sup>29</sup> The stories found in the pulp magazines of the time, under close examination, can be shown to elucidate the threats Americans found in the foreign

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 17.

“other,” and Zolberg’s emphasis on a question of “religion, linguistic, and racial” differences can be seen in these works.

An assessment of the stories found within the pages of America’s popular pulp magazines reveals that, while racism certainly played a factor, it was rather the “otherness” of what Americans considered to be inherent in foreigners, and what threats they posed to the American system of values and society that drove the growth of such caricatures and imagery, rather than simple racial prejudice. The pulp magazines, so named for the cheap “pulpwood” paper on which they were printed, were the descendents of the nineteenth Century’s popular “boy’s adventure” and “dime novels,” and continued their tradition with tales of adventure and excitement, while also crossing over into a wider spectrum of genres, including romance, western, horror, war, and science-fiction. The pulps’ heyday was in the years immediately prior to, and following, the First World War; their success as cheap, popular fiction began to diminish in the early 1940s due to both the rise of comic books, and the ever-growing motion pictures audience.

The most common “foreign” threat to be found in popular literature of the time is that of the “yellow peril,” the fear of the ancient Far East, envisioned as an eternal puzzle to the Westerner. Many popular pulp magazines, such as *The Thrill Book*, *The Shadow*, *Adventure* and others featured images reflecting the yellow peril theme on the covers of their inaugural issue, demonstrating the popularity of such stories; if one is going to stake a great deal of capital on a the success of a new publication, it would be wise to go with the genre that has the most commercial appeal. The “otherworldliness” of the Orient is what many popular literature authors fostered in the minds of their readers. While pulp magazines and other media of the

day certainly, and somewhat unsurprisingly, depicted Germans as villains, such caricatures were not as exaggerated and lavished with racial imagery as “the Yellow Peril” (possibly due to white America’s aversion to depicting someone so similar, racially, in a negative light, despite past aggressions), and were, for the most part, found in only two roles: German spy or Imperial German soldier. The return of the brutish “Hun,” found in countless American propaganda posters from World War I, would occur, for the most part, only with the rise of fascism in Germany in the mid-1930s, a period to be examined in the following chapter. For reasons that are more racial in nature than anything else, Anglo-America did not harbor the level of disgust and hatred for the fellow, white German, as it did the “Oriental.” In the 1920s, the Yellow Peril was the prominent threat to American identity and Anglo-Saxon, Protestant hegemony.

## Morality and Criminality

“That Jap. Never did like his looks. Bet he’d kill his own mother for the gold in her teeth”

- *“The Tallow Devil”*(1934)

Using Zolberg’s observations, the first “difference” to be examined will be how the pulps portrayed Asians. In the examination of Asian religious and moral beliefs as characterized in the pulps, two trends can be quickly seen. Religiously, the “Oriental” is a godless pagan for the most part, who worships only idols and ancestors. Second, the Asian is depicted as a person in whom any sort of moral creed is nonexistent – with the Asian character (usually Chinese in the earlier pulps) claiming devotion only to criminality and the furthering of violence and murder in the

pursuit of riches and power. For the pulps, life in the Orient was something to be disposed of quickly, especially if it got in the way of any profits. “The yellow man,” says one pulp protagonist, “on the other hand, comes from a country where there is an excess of population, where life is held cheaply, and where the criminal element will butcher for next to nothing.”<sup>30</sup> Religion (or lack thereof) and an innate propensity to crime and violence is what made up most of the Asian characters to be found in the pulps. Fu Manchu, the Oriental Emperor of Crime and arch-nemesis of two British detectives (and, by default, of the Anglo-Saxon world itself) was the most popular of the yellow peril characters, and his heirs in the American pulps follow his lead to the letter. Originally published as a British magazine serial in 1912, Sax Rohmer’s *Fu Manchu* stories saw publication in a number of subsequent magazines and books, and would eventually come to America, where their popularity was only heightened with both film adaptations of Rohmer’s works and a multitude of literary imitations.

“Here’s the kindest race in the world, and yet the most callous; the noisiest and yet the most silent; the most beautifully ugly barbaric civilization that ever contradicted itself,” begins the story “The Escape,” by Robert J. Pearsall, from the August 18, 1920 issue of the pulp fiction magazine, *Adventure*.<sup>31</sup> *Adventure* was founded in 1910 by Trumbull White, an adventurer whose exploits were as wide and as varied as those of the characters that appeared in his periodical. Published by the Butterick Company, a conglomerate already deeply entrenched in the magazine business, *Adventure* outlived many of its contemporaries, not ceasing publication

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<sup>30</sup>A.E. Apple, “Mr. Chang, Man Trapper,” *Detective Story Magazine*, 25 Oct. 1924, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Robert J. Pearsall, “The Escape,” *Adventure*, 18 Aug. 1920, 166.

until 1971.<sup>32</sup> In “The Escape,” two heroic, Anglo-Saxon males (Hazard and Partridge) in the fashion of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson (or, more appropriately given the subject matter, Nayland Smith and Dr. Petrie of Sax Rohmer’s *Dr. Fu Manchu* stories) are hot on the trail of Koshinga, the evil “spirit of the East, past all Western understanding” in an attempt to upset his plot to destroy the fledgling democracy in China and establish “his despotic rule on the ruins of the republic.” Partridge (Watson to Hazard’s Holmes, in the role of both sidekick as well as narrator), is constantly perplexed and dumbfounded, both by the evil of their nemesis and the unspoken deductions made by his adventurous companion. After following several clues, convinced they are close to foiling a heinous plot the pair are led into a secret cave in which the evil Koshinga dwells and, unknowingly, release the madman from imprisonment, having played into his hands the entire time.

Two references found in this story provide an indication of how contemporary events could have influenced the manner in which the villain is characterized. One such allusion is to Koshinga’s dealings with “old Boxer underground workings,” a reference to the Boxer Rebellion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Boxer Rebellion, which saw its highest levels of violence in the summer of 1900, was retaliation on the part of Chinese nationalists against the foreign legations and Christian settlements that had crippled Chinese sovereignty.<sup>33</sup> The Boxer Rebellion (or, more accurately, Uprising), certainly would have been in the memories, both first-hand and second-hand, of many Americans (and Caucasians in general) and would have been remembered as a savage, Oriental attack on the “civilizing” Western

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<sup>32</sup> For fascinating insight into the origins of both the pulp magazine industry, and the varying publishers and creators who occupied it, see: Ron Goulart, *Cheap Thrills: An Informal History of the Pulp Magazines* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1972.)

<sup>33</sup> Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion* (New York: Walker & Company, 2000), x.

population of the Foreign Legations. Koshinga's tie to the Boxers is interesting in what it shows concerning America's memory (or rather, what the nation chose to remember) about recent Chinese history, and China's interactions with the West.

The second important characterization of Koshinga is his position as "the head of the Asiatic Ko Lao Hui, maddest of the revolutionary tongs." The tongs were a collection of Chinese secret societies in America, predominantly found in the nation's "Chinatowns" that first appeared in the late nineteenth Century. The tongs traced their origins to ethnic Han Chinese revolutionary groups dedicated to the overthrow of the foreign, Manchurian Ch'ing dynasty that ruled the empire from 1644, until the revolution and overthrow of the Emperor Pu Yi in 1912.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, into the twentieth Century, the tongs in China retained their revolutionary status as a major supporter of the nationalist policies of "the Father of Modern China" and provisional first president of the Republic of China, Dr. Sun Yat-sen. In America, these groups, while offering assistance programs and services to newly arrived Chinese immigrants (such as aid in finding housing, and in maintaining contact with the homeland), were, in the eyes of many Americans, connected more with crime and vice than anything else.<sup>35</sup> In short, they were seen as a Chinese mafia, and for the better part of the early 1900s, rightfully so. By 1920, the tongs had relinquished the criminal and vice trades, in favor of the more lucrative market of encouraging Caucasian tourism in their Chinatowns.<sup>36</sup> However, as is often the case, what reality is, and what the public perceives to be reality can be two very different things, and the press and the public at large could always see any isolated incident as a resurgence of Asiatic

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<sup>34</sup> Victor Nee and Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californin' : A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 68.

<sup>35</sup> Roger Daniels, *Asian America – Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1988), 24-25.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981), 147.

tong violence. As late as 1925, *Time* magazine was publishing articles detailing the violence in America's Chinatowns, on the part of the dreaded tongs:

Authorities throughout the country tried hard last week to end the animosity of the two great Tongs – the On Leong and the Hip Sing – which broke out two weeks ago. . . That night Que Yee, a Hip Sing, was met by three pellets of steel as he walked upstairs in his house. He rolled to the bottom and died. Wong Hong, a young Hip Sing gunman, was entering his lodging house. A hatchet came down on his head from behind and his brains were crushed. They found a revolver lashed inside his vest.<sup>37</sup>

News stories such as this appeared throughout the 1920s. Despite the fact that, by the time of this article's publication, the tong "threat" had mostly disappeared, it is obvious that the imagery it presented still held onto the mainstream American imagination.

Such isolated events paled in comparison to instances of tong violence which initially created the fear of these Chinese gangs in the early twentieth century, such as the "Bow Kum" incident in 1909, what historian Herbet Asbury calls the "most disastrous war the tongs ever fought in New York, with a casualty list of about fifty dead and several times that number wounded, and with considerable destruction of property by bombs. . ." <sup>38</sup> The Bow Kum incident involved a young Chinese immigrant, Bow Kum (or "Sweet Flower") who was sold in San Francisco's Chinatown to one tong member. This marriage was subsequently voided by the authorities, with the young girl later remarrying a member of a rival tong. A gang war soon erupted between the two groups, which resulted in a multitude of deaths, including that of young Bow Kum, barely twenty-one years old, stabbed to death in her husband's home, her

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<sup>37</sup> "Crime," *Time*, Time Magazine Archives for September 21, 1925, last accessed November 8, 2010, [www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,721093-1,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,721093-1,00.html)

<sup>38</sup> Herbet Asbury, *The Gangs of New York: An Informal History of the Underworld* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1970 [1928]), 289.

body horribly mutilated.<sup>39</sup> While the activities of the tongs, by the mid 1920s may have diminished greatly, American popular culture retained the image of the bloodthirsty, criminal “hatchet-man” of the Chinese tongs. By combining aspects of the Boxer Uprising with the more contemporary fear concerning the Chinese tongs, the author of “The Escape” produced in Koshinga a character that would have inspired a very real fear in the minds of its intended audience.

While the pulp vision of the tongs appeared before World War I, as evidenced by *Detective Story Magazine’s* 1916 publication of stories detailing the exploits of the criminal-villain Li Shoon, the atmosphere of isolationism and xenophobia that existed after the war aided in the flourishing of such caricatures.<sup>40</sup> The idea of the tong, and the overall criminality and lack of (Christian) morality in the Oriental character can be seen throughout the years of the pulp magazine’s heyday.

In the December 27, 1930, issue of *Street & Smith’s Detective Story Magazine* (another long-lasting pulp, running from 1915 to 1953) A.E. Apple’s “Mr. Chang’s Tong War” appeared. In it, two heroes, (or rather, protagonist and deuteragonist, as neither is depicted as very “heroic”) Chinese Doctor Ling and his partner, the “Mongolian torture specialist,” Doctor Hip Yee seek to capture the diabolical Mr. Chang, “the notorious. . . archcriminal king of the hatchetmen of the man-killing tong.”<sup>41</sup> Mr. Chang, through “Oriental craftiness” discovers a secret passage between his hideout and that of a rival tong, and enters, in the hope of stealing the society’s treasure that has been saved to aid in the Chinese Republic’s defense against “the

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<sup>39</sup> For a more detailed account of the Bow Kum incident, see Asbury, *The Gangs of New York*.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Sampson, *Yesterday’s Faces: A Study of Series Characters in the Early Pulp Magazines – Volume 3: From the Dark Side* (Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1987), 14.

<sup>41</sup> A.E. Apple, “Mr. Chang’s Tong War,” *Street & Smith’s Detective Story Magazine*, 27 Dec. 1930, 1.

rising monarchist movement, headed by war lords of Mongolia.”<sup>42</sup> Mr. Chang eventually does succeed in stealing the loot, only after killing one of his pursuers and escaping capture by the other, to thwart justice and to plan countless future attacks upon civilization. In May 26, 1934’s issue of *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, Singapore Sammy, Anglo-Saxon adventurer in the Far East, matches wits with several Asiatic criminal organizations in “Buddha’s Whisker,” by George F. Worts, a pulp fiction writer known for the *Singapore Sammy* series, as well as a multitude of other tales dealing with the criminality of the “yellow menace,” including the adventures of Peter the Brazen, who appeared in the pages of *Argosy* in 1918 and 1919, and, after a decades’ long respite, from 1930 to 1935.<sup>43</sup>

At the height of the pulps’ prime years, the genre of the “pulp hero,” the costumed vigilante sworn to fight crime, had appeared. Like his more generic counterpart in the general fiction titles, he too had to contend with what the popular culture considered to be the intrinsically criminal world of the Orient. In “The Tomb of Death,” published in the November 1934 issue of *The Phantom Detective* and written by Robert Wallace (a pen name utilized by a host of authors who worked on the magazine), the titular character is pitted against Li-Hung, a villain who “other by reputation, no white man knew the mysterious leader of the underworld forces of Chinatown, the undisputed leader of the lawless element of the Orientals in the city.”<sup>44</sup> In the story, the Phantom Detective is called upon to investigate the death of a famed

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<sup>42</sup> This is one of the instances of the pulps not sticking too close to reality, as there was no such rebellion going on in China at the time. Glaring inaccuracies can also be seen by the author’s reference to “the Period of Giants, back in the fabled era that proceeded the twenty-two thousand years of authentic Chinese history.” Again, in the case of popular culture, it is not necessarily important what was true or what was not; but rather, what the public believed, or was willing to accept, to be the truth. Or, at the very least, what made for a smashing story.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Sampson, *Yesterday’s Faces – Volume 5: Dangerous Horizons* (Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1991), 201.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Wallace, “The Tomb of Death,” *The Phantom Detective*, Nov. 1934, 17.

aviator who died under mysterious circumstances after crashing in China during an attempted flight around the world. From the very beginning of the tale, almost as soon as “China” is mentioned, the criminal tongs make their appearance, with the Phantom being captured and taken to the tong headquarters, wherein torture by a “vicious crowd” of “cruel, beetle-browed, slant-eyed men who had gathered at the orders of their leader” awaits him. After escaping such a menacing collection of villains, as well as a giant, ax-wielding “Oriental,” the Phantom continues in his quest to bring the murder of a fellow white-man, at the hands of the Asiatic criminal element, to justice. And, as expected, in the end, the Phantom prevails against the “King of these slant eyed thugs.”

In some stories, such as the weird fiction genre of fantasy and horror, the foreigner’s (usually read “Asian’s”) lack of morality and innate criminality combined to produce a type of devilish magic that threatened the civilized world and that of the white race in particular. This genre found its audience predominately among the readers of the long-running, and appropriately named, *Weird Tales*, which began in 1923 and has continued, with varying occasion and through various publishers, up through the present day. *Weird Tales* featured the writings of several authors well-known today, such as Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, and Howard Phillips (H.P.) Lovecraft. These three men formed a kind of “triumvirate” of weird fiction (and knowing Lovecraft’s predisposition to antiquity, he would certainly relish such terminology), and often contributed separately to Lovecraft’s menagerie of monsters, the Cthuhlu mythos.

The January 1927 edition of *Weird Tales* featured the Lovecraft short story, “The Horror at Red Hook,” wherein a New England police detective named Thomas Malone is sent to

investigate the large amounts of illegal immigrants that seem to be flooding into the area via the notorious and seedy “Red Hook” district of a sleepy, Rhode Island town. Lovecraft discusses the Red Hook area thus:

The population is a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and negro elements impinging upon one another, and fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant. It is a babel of sound and filth . . . from this tangle of material and spiritual putrescence the blasphemies of an hundred dialects assail the sky. . . Visible offences are as varied as the local dialects, and run the gamut from the smuggling of rum and prohibited aliens through diverse stages of lawlessness and obscure vice to murder and mutilation in their most abhorrent guises.<sup>45</sup>

Over the course of his investigation, Malone encounters a plethora of suspect foreigners:

“unclassified, slant-eyed folk,” “squinting physiognomies,” and those of “Mongoloid stock” who reminded the detective “of the Yezdis, last survivors of the Persian devil-worshippers.” Malone also encounters one Arthur Suydam, an elderly recluse who, after being seen venturing into the deepest recesses of Red Hook, and engaging in orgies of “Alexandrian decadence,” mysteriously begins to somehow grow younger and younger. Following Suydam’s trail, Malone uncovers, deep underneath his residence, a subterranean dock where both illegal immigrants and demonic monstrosities from alternative, hellish dimensions gather for Black Sabbath-like ceremonies and the sacrifice of “blue-eyed, Norwegian” children.

At this time it should be pointed out that there are particular circumstances pertaining to H.P. Lovecraft that need to be taken into account when reading this, and other pieces of his work, the latter of which are considered masterpieces of modern American horror. Lovecraft, at best, was a devout Anglophile and a lover of classical education; at worst, he was what a

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<sup>45</sup> H.P. Lovecraft, “The Horror at Red Hook,” *The H.P. Lovecraft Archive*, last modified August 20, 2009, [www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/hrh.asp](http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/hrh.asp).

modern reader may or may not call an overt racist. Lovecraft belonged to a once-influential Rhode Island family, and regarded himself as something of a patrician, floundering in an era that no longer recognized the nobility of aristocratic New England. One of Lovecraft's biographers and fellow pulp-fiction writers, L. Sprague De Camp, credits Lovecraft's views on racial hierarchy to both "the general ethnocentrism of Old Americans of his time," as well as his reading of such Anglo-Saxon centric works as Houston Stewart Chamberlain's 1912 publication, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* and Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race*.<sup>46</sup> Lovecraft was known for having a particularly hierarchal view of races and societies, even among his contemporaries, and his views should not be applied to all pulp writers, or even the majority of Americans. The fact does remain, however, that Lovecraft's work, and others in a similar vein, found an audience among readers of pulp magazines and of weird fiction in particular.

The pulps also depicted Asian immorality through the characters' predisposition to torture, and the use of it in almost any situation, whether necessary or not. One particularly interesting example of this depiction can be found in the pulp magazine understood to be the "father" of them all. *Argosy*, first published in 1882, was a general fiction magazine, with short stories, novelettes and serials that reached across a wide spectrum of genres. In one of the many "real world" segments found in a variety of pulp periodicals, a November 1928 edition of *Argosy All-Story Weekly* contained an article entitled "Combating 'Crime Wave' in Tibet." The piece explains various systems of Chinese torture, in an apparent attempt to offer a contrast to the more humane treatment one might expect in Christian (white) America:

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<sup>46</sup> L. Sprague De Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), 101.

While America is not likely to adopt Oriental ways, it is still interesting to speculate on what the results would be were this country to model the criminal laws after those effective in the Chinese province of Tibet. . . In that primitive country, beheading is not unusual . . . while lesser crimes are punishable by the cutting off of a limb. . . Murder is often punished by immersing the murderer in a boiling oil bath. However, the more common punishment is crucifixion.<sup>47</sup>

It is true that beheading and other forms of capital punishment and torture were common throughout China's long history; such acts, however, had been, for the most part, forbidden since the Revolution of 1911 and, later officially in 1927, with the establishment of the Kuomintang (or Nationalist) government in Nanjing.<sup>48</sup> Regardless of whether such events were (still) taking place in China, articles like this suggested that they were, and the writers of pulp magazine stories would incorporate such ideas into their works, to further demonize the Eastern "other."

Just as the preceding "factual" text does, the pulp fiction of the time further barbarized the Orient. Lemuel L. De Bra's 1920 short story "The Mystery of the Missing Hands" chronicles acts of torturous violence enacted by a pair of Chinese brothers, in return for atrocities they themselves endured at the hands of a blood-thirsty Chinese pirate. The brigand proudly exclaims that he "was sired by a dragon and born of a typhoon; and the sharks whom I feed with fools like you worship me as their ancestor."<sup>49</sup> The October 6, 1928 issue of *Argosy All-Story Weekly* contains the tale of "The Crime Circus," by George F. Worts, in which a lone Anglo-Saxon protagonist was warned by a criminal that, if cooperation was not attained, he

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<sup>47</sup> Harold J. Ashe, "Combating 'Crime Wave' in Tibet," *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, 24 Nov. 1928, 493.

<sup>48</sup>For fascinating insight into the penal system of China during its revolutionary and republican periods, see – Frank Dikötter, *Crime, Punishment, and the Prison in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002)

<sup>49</sup> Lemuel L. DeBra, "The Mystery of the Missing Hands," *The Blue Book Magazine*, Dec. 1920, 63.

would “first describe some of the methods of torture used by Orientals.”<sup>50</sup> Worts’ “The Silver Fang”, published in a Winter 1929 issue of the same magazine, tells the story of Malabar Mackenzie, a wealthy American playboy who loses his inheritance and follows in his grandfather’s footsteps as a pirate of the South Seas and contains dire warnings of Oriental tortures. “The Chinese,” Malabar is told by one of his grandfather’s former crewmen, “are a brutal race. They love torture, when it’s applied to the other fellow.”<sup>51</sup> In the previously-mentioned “Tomb of Death,” the Phantom Detective encounters the savage brutality of Oriental tortures, one such method being his suspension off the ground, via piano wire wrapped about his thumbs, while a horde of starving rats gnawed away at his dangling feet.

The Orient’s seeming inclination towards criminality and violence was only one way that the nativist pulp literature of the 1920s and 30s demonized Asians. Inability to speak “proper” English, and the possible subversive acts the use of one’s native language could conceal, was another method of vilification.

## Language and Communication

“Luby- Pagan. . .”

- “*The Pagan Ruby*” (1928)

“Luby- Pagan” are the last words of a dying Chinese man, uttered to pulp hero Jack Eastman. This simple mangling of “l”s and “r”s would propel Jack Eastman into an adventure of international proportions, and into the clutches of the evil Wily Chun Wah and his “Oriental

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<sup>50</sup> George F. Worts, “The Crime Circus,” *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, 6 Oct. 1928, 411.

<sup>51</sup> Worts, “The Silver Fang,” *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, 12 Jan. 1929, 700.

cleverness.”<sup>52</sup> The broken English of the dying Asian of the story reveals another aspect of early twentieth Century nativism’s attack on the foreigner: linguistics. The question of nativism, or rather, the subject of language and its importance to nativism, can be recognized throughout the early twentieth century, most visibly in a sociopolitical arena known as “Americanization.” The speaking of the English language, or the lack of an ability to do so, instantly aided in the differentiation between someone who was native-born, and someone who was not. Beginning prior to World War I, and continuing with zeal afterwards, there was a drive throughout various parts of American society to “Americanize” immigrants, in regard to language. English language schools appeared throughout the country, and many school districts enacted measures to teach children in English, and English only, regardless of their primary language. Such “traditionally American” groups, such as the Freemasons and the Daughters of the Confederacy, pushed for such acts to be sanctioned by federal legislation.<sup>53</sup> Henry Ford provided for his workers, many of whom were foreign in origin, Americanization schools within the walls of his factories. The first lesson consisted of learning the phrase “I am an American.”<sup>54</sup>

In 1922, the state of Oregon passed a controversial law that required all children, between the ages of eight and sixteen, to be taught in public schools, as opposed to private schools (many of which were Catholic, and were already distrusted as being part of a conspiracy to reduce America to a Papal State). Such legislation would have forced “Americanization” curriculum on all children affected.<sup>55</sup> The law, however, was eventually overturned by the United States Supreme Court three years later. On the subject of pontifical conspiracies, it is

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<sup>52</sup> J. Allan Dunn, “The Pagan Ruby,” *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, 13 Oct. 1928, 497.

<sup>53</sup> Dale T. Knobel, *America for the Americans* – *The Nativist Movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 250.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

important to note that language was also understood to be an instrument not only of foreigners in general, but of foreign radicals as well. Someone speaking only Italian could be an emissary for the Pope, and many of the radical journals and newspapers of the time, owing to their mostly immigrant membership, were printed in foreign languages. The well-known anarchist Emma Goldman, while being fluent in English, often presented her fiery orations in her native Russian or Yiddish.<sup>56</sup> English, and, most importantly in the case of depictions of foreigners in the pulps, “proper” English was a sign of “Americanism,” with anything less signifying possible, or even probable, foreign loyalties. Furthermore, the inability to speak English correctly could also be seen as a sign of a child-like mentality on the part of the speaker.

Throughout a majority of the 1920s pulps, any Asian language is regarded as sub-human, a degeneration of human speech that is more akin to the grunts of wild beasts or an unintelligible “sing-song.” The term “sing-song” was used almost to the point of exhaustion in pulp narratives to describe the language of Asian characters. The protagonist of Horace Howard Herr’s “A Daughter of the White Star”, serialized from May 28 to June 25, 1921 in *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, remarks on the “open vowels and singsong characteristics I had often observed in conversations of Chinamen,” and, later, in speaking of an Oriental he has just encountered “his words were unintelligible to me, being in that vowel-marked sing-song language.”<sup>57</sup> Instances of “sing-song phrases” and of an Asian “coo[ing] his broken English” abound in this story, and can be observed in many others of the time. Mr. Woo, an Asian detective in America, in the vein of Charlie Chan and Mr. Moto, while a sleuth of Holmes-like proportions, was still

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<sup>56</sup> Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1910), 20.

<sup>57</sup> Horace Howard Herr, “A Daughter of the White Star,” *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, 28 May 1921, 297.

separated from his all-white supporting cast by his appearance as well as his use of improper English (*see Figure IX*). Mr Woo used what has come to be known recently as “Engrish,” so named because of the stereotyped understanding that many Asian speakers will jumble “r”s and “l”s in their speech. While speaking to a prospective client of his detective agency, Mr. Woo suggests, in order to get closer to a suspected murderer, “I will invite my miselable self to visit honolable mansion of Mist’l Meldon.”<sup>58</sup> In “Crooks is Crooks,” a 1921 story by Lemuel L. DeBra about two American criminals attempting to run an opium ring between Mexico and the United States, an opium dealer with whom the crooks hope to do business says of their product “Aw lite. . . Not numba one chop, but aw lite. I buy.”<sup>59</sup> (*see Figure X*) The hero of “The Tale of the Bat-Dragon,” while investigating the scene of a crime overhears the “expressionless, sing-song voice . . . of two Orientals.”<sup>60</sup>

The early twentieth century saw this separation of the “white” and “yellow” races along the lines of what each is capable of mentally and linguistically reach into the scholastic and public spheres of American consciousness. In the 1920s, there was a good deal of discussion concerning “Mongoloid imbecility,” a genetic disorder known today as Down Syndrome. In *The Mongol in Our Midst*, a work that gained quite a following in the United States following its 1924 publication, English physician F. G. Crookshank attempted to provide evidence that the reason Down Syndrome occurred in particular individuals was due to the presence of Asiatic, particularly Mongolian, ancestry within their bloodline.<sup>61</sup> Such an idea was not invented by Crookshank, but, in the post-war world, his seemingly-authoritative work on the subject, which

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<sup>58</sup> Hector Gavin Grey, “Steel Skeletons,” *The Phantom Detective*, May 1935, 111.

<sup>59</sup> Lemuel L. DeBra, “Crooks is Crooks,” *The Blue Book Magazine*, Jan. 1921, 87.

<sup>60</sup> Nels Leroy Jorgensen, “The Tale of the Bat-Dragon,” *The Danger Trail*, June, 1927, 181.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel J. Kevles, *In The Name of Eugenics – Genetics and Uses of Human Heredity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 160.

received praise from scholarly journals in both the United States and the United Kingdom, reached a new audience who had come to see nativism, and the protection of America's Anglo-Saxon heritage, as the only pathways to preserving the country.

Pseudo-intellectual works and "scientific" research were not the only avenues in which the idea of the threatening or "devolved" "otherness" of the Orient manifested itself: educational tools, for children and adults alike, also gave such a notion a seeming air of legitimacy. Physical differences, especially those regarded as "primitive" could be construed as evidence of the mental and/or linguistic lacking on the part of the "Oriental." *Dodge's Advanced Geography*, written by Columbia University Professor of Geography Richard Elwood Dodge presented "academia's" view of the "white vs. yellow" mentality, in a book, of which "no better text-book in geography" could be found by a reviewer in the *Harvard Graduate Magazine*.<sup>62</sup>

The largest number of people belong to the Caucasian or White Race. . . They are the most active, enterprising, and imaginative race of the world. . . The next largest number of people is found in the Yellow Race. . . the people of the yellow race are shorter than those of the white race, and have coarse, black hair, small noses, and small black eyes, with the outer corners a little elevated. As a rule they are not progressive and include some of the most backward tribes of the world.<sup>63</sup>

Dodge's textbook, initially published in 1906, with reprints through 1920, was a part of many school districts' required reading, as can be seen from its inclusion in a 1921 middle school "Course of Study" list of reference books for all public schools in Baltimore County, Maryland.<sup>64</sup>

Another "academic work" that placed "the yellow race" subservient to the white race

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<sup>62</sup> "Literary Notes," *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, Vol. XIV 1905-1906, 546.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Elwood Dodge, *Advanced Geography* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1920), 79.

<sup>64</sup> Maryland, *Course of Study – Baltimore County, Maryland Public Schools – Grades I to VIII* (Baltimore: Warwick & York, Inc., 1921), 200.

was Harmon B. Niver's *Complete Geography*, initially published in 1915 and reprinted through 1922, in which Asians' "broad faces, high cheek bones . . . slanting eyes " and "short, broad noses" are emphasized over any other characteristics or traits, with the Japanese being described as "more active and intelligent than the Chinese."<sup>65</sup> Such an understanding is reflected in many pulp stories, such as W. Wirt's 1933 story "The White Warlords," in which the Japanese are portrayed as either controlling Chinese politics, or as a force of superior (more advanced) military might that are capable of completely overrunning China. As was the case with Dodge's book, Niver's work was used in school districts throughout America, and was even listed in a 1923 bulletin as being a recent acquisition of Ohio State University's Library for the Bureau of Educational Research.<sup>66</sup>

Adults, and specifically immigrant adults, were not left outside the bombardment of such views. Nina Jay Smith Beglinger's 1922 text *Constructive Lessons in English for the Foreign Born* was a textbook made for recent immigrants, written to both aid in the user's understanding of the English language, as well as, seemingly, to instill in them many of the views of race predominate in America at the time. "The Mongolian or Yellow race are natives of Eastern Asia and are recognized by their black eyes set slantingly, their straight black hair, and their yellow skin," writes Beglinger.<sup>67</sup> Beglinger also makes a point to clarify that Chinese and Japanese immigrants "are barred from becoming citizens of the United States under present laws."<sup>68</sup> It is not unreasonable to see the inclusion of such a statement as something of an

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<sup>65</sup> Harmon B. Niver, *Complete Geography* (New York: Hinds, Hayden & Eldredge, Inc., 1922), 104.

<sup>66</sup> Ohio State University, College of Education, Bureau of Educational Research, *Educational Research Bulletin – Volumes II* (Columbus: The Bureau of Educational Research, 1923), 150.

<sup>67</sup> Nina Jay Smith Beglinger, *Constructive Lessons in English for The Foreign Born* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1922), 160.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

appeal to any of the “preferred” stock of immigrants (those of Anglo-Saxon or Western European origin) to see Asians in America, just as many native-born Americans saw them: as “lesser” and incapable of being “real” Americans.

Non-pulp magazines of the time (usually referred to as “slicks” in pulp circles, due to the glossy covers, and pages, their publishers could afford) also ran stories that, while not directly endorsing ideas of Anglo-Saxon supremacy, still put the issue into the national conversation. The June 28, 1926 issue of *Time Magazine* devoted an (albeit relatively small) amount of space to a scientist’s recent claims that he could prove evolution to be true by breeding members of the “yellow race” with their closest relatives, orangutans.<sup>69</sup> The NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*, in May 1926, presented criticism of former British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and his comments concerning “the brown and yellow races” resisting the colonization efforts of the Western world, and the July 1929 issue of *Popular Science* chronicled the exploits of a Rockefeller-funded mission providing aid to the “backward yellow race” in China.<sup>70</sup> The stereotypes concerning language had a two-fold affect, an external and an internal labeling. First, it delineated who was a “native-born” American, from someone who obviously was not; in a nativist atmosphere, such a demarcation implied the presence of not only a recent immigrant, but an immigrant who was hostile to America. Why else would he or she not bother to correctly learn “our” language? Second, the lack of proper English implied an inability to understand it, or a physical incapability to pronounce certain phrases, reducing the mentality of

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<sup>69</sup> “Science: Men and Apes,” *Time*, Time Magazine Archives for June 28, 1926, last accessed November 8, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,846609,00.html>

<sup>70</sup> David Lloyd George, quoted in the article “The Hegemony of Race,” *The Crisis*, May 1926, 248; Henry Morton Robinson, “What John D. Rockefeller Has Done for Me,” *Popular Science*, July 1929, 150.

the foreigner in question to that of a child, or an invalid; in either case, someone who is not on “our level.”

## Physicality and Racial Antagonisms

“Wu Fang turned and let his green, slanted eyes rest upon her fondly.”

- *“The Case of the Suicide Tomb” (1935)*

“In our case. . . civilisation. . . forms the central point; a good characteristic, in so far as it promises durability, but a somewhat perilous one, in that we run a risk of becoming Chinese, a risk which would become a very real one if the non-Teutonic or scarcely Teutonic elements among us were ever to gain the upper hand.”

- *The Foundations of the nineteenth Century (1913)*

The most obvious, and most-often employed, descriptor of Asians found in the pulps, is that of race, both in physical descriptions and in what are considered “Asiatic” physical characteristics (see *Figures II – VII*). The “yellow” terminology was used not only to distinguish “them” from “us”, but, for many of the era, also as a line drawn, a kind of Rubicon that preceded an impending race war between the two. The pulps offered not only stories that depicted this future war, but also featured a multitude of ads offering memberships in “book clubs,” solely dedicated to the yellow peril genre (see *Figures XI and XII*). Such antagonisms can be seen in the years prior to the pulps of post-World War I America; in 1910, celebrated author of *Call of the Wild*, Jack London, published “The Unparalleled Invasion”, a science-fiction tale set

in 1976 that documented a war between the West and an awakened China, ending in the complete eradication of the “yellow race” via biological warfare.<sup>71</sup> The emphasis on the physical distinctions separating the races was a part of both scholarly and public discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century, and continued, with renewed interest, into post-war America.

The depictions found in pulp magazines, novels, films, and other media, did not originate out of a vacuum. Racist and exaggerated to say the least, they appeared at a time, not only when nativism and a fear of foreign “pollution” was at a fever pitch, but also when ideas concerning eugenics and “race suicide” were being published and widely read. Eugenics was a scientific discipline (or rather, a scientific approach to a pseudo-scientific worldview) that sought to understand, and then exploit, differences in genes and breeding methods, in order to evolve mankind into the better, higher race it is, theoretically, supposed to be. For many followers, under such a view any “lower” races, which at the time consisted of nearly everyone who was not Anglo-Saxon, were to be driven to extinction. The idea of race suicide, not nearly as formal a science as eugenics, was simply the fear that, if other races are not properly controlled (or destroyed, in some cases) the white race would disappear from the Earth. An understanding of the philosophies and writings that appealed to the nativist views of the time can better elucidate the atmosphere in which the pulps were created, and thrived.

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<sup>71</sup>After all survivors of plague had been shot on sight; “And then began the great task, the sanitation of China. Five years and hundreds of millions of treasure were consumed, and then the world moved in – not in zones, as was the idea of Baron Albrecht, but heterogeneously, according to the democratic American program. It was a vast and happy intermingling of nationalities that settled down in China in 1982 and the years that followed – a tremendous and successful experiment in cross-fertilization. We know today the splendid mechanical, intellectual, and artistic output that followed.” – Jack London, “The Unparalleled Invasion,” ed. I.F. Clarke, *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871-1914 – Fictions of Future Warfare and of Battles Still-to-Come* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 270.

The idea of Anglo-Saxon supremacy was nothing new, and was an idea that filtered down through time, from the Enlightenment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through to the years following World War I. Philosophers of the Enlightenment, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, had written of Teutonic superiority and the backwardness of the Orient in works that had come to influence many ideologies of the early twentieth century, including Bolshevism and Anarchism.<sup>72</sup> The early 1900s saw the publication of many works which further espoused Anglo-Saxon superiority; works that, after the end of the First World War, saw higher levels of publication and popularity than had been the case previously.

Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race: or, The Racial Basis of European History* suggested that all previous successful (i.e. white) civilizations had succeeded only because of their ability to maintain Anglo-European stock, and that any large infusion of foreign (namely, Oriental) blood was the reason for their eventual downfall.

With the expanding dominion of Rome the native elements of vigor were drawn year after year into the legions . . . while the slaves and those unfit for military duty stayed home and bred. In the present great war while the native Americans are at the front fighting the aliens and immigrants are allowed to increase without check and the parallel is a close one . . . In America we find another close parallel . . . [the] Oriental races, who throughout history have shown little capacity to create, organize or even comprehend Republican institutions.<sup>73</sup>

Grant's view that "the Roman became . . . less and less European and more and more Oriental until it, too, withered and expired," spoke volumes to a nation that was still reeling from the losses of a foreign war and the apparent loss of its traditional Anglo-American stock, or at the

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<sup>72</sup> Philosophy of history

<sup>73</sup> Madison Grant and Henry Fairfield Osburn, *The Passing of the Great Race: Or, the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 218.

very least, its values.<sup>74</sup> The book, initially published in 1916, saw several subsequent reprintings, with sales shooting noticeably upward after the end of the First World War.<sup>75</sup>

The overtly-prejudiced depictions of the physical traits of Asians, due in part to writings of such authors as Madison Grant and his followers, appear in popular literature before the heyday of the pulps, and continued to appear in other media that were the pulp's contemporaries. Once again, we may refer to Sax Rohmer's *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu* as containing many of the characteristics later Oriental pulp villains would follow.

He wore a plain yellow robe, of a hue almost identical with that of his smooth, hairless countenance. His hands were large, long and bony, and he held them knuckles upward, rested his pointed chin upon their thinness. He had a great, high brow, crowned with sparse, neutral-colored hair. Of his face. . . I despair of writing convincingly. It was that of an archangel of evil, and it was wholly dominated by the most uncanny eyes that ever reflected a human soul, for they were narrow and long, very slightly oblique, and of a brilliant green. But their unique horror lay in a certain filminess (it made me think of the *membrana nictitans* in a bird). . .<sup>76</sup>

This description, given by Dr. Petrie upon his first encounter with "the yellow devil," provides nearly all of the ingredients needed to compose the stereotypical yellow peril villain of the later pulp magazines. The emphasis on the color of the skin and the shape of the eyes; an appearance of stoic calculation and emotionless self-control: and a comparison of the Asian individual to an animal of some kind: all of these characteristics, and more, appear in the pulp periodicals. The Oriental villains, Wu Fang and Long Sin, of Arthur Benjamin Reeve's 1916 novel *The Romance of Elaine* (which inspired a silent film of the same name, now lost) were described

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>75</sup> Knobel, 259.

<sup>76</sup> Sax Rohmer, *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu* (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1920), 71- 72.

as having long “bony fingers” and of moving in a manner that is decidedly “monkey-like.”<sup>77</sup> John Charles Beecham’s 1920 novel *The Yellow Spider*, a contemporary of the pulp magazines, featured a character in the manner of Fu Manchu; a story that, once again, places the Anglo-Saxon hero out of his element, deep into the depths of the East where “Ah Sing, the Yellow Spider, lay, watching events and spinning webs.”<sup>78</sup> Works such as those of Rohmer (first published as a serial in 1912) and Reeve, written in a time of lower, yet certainly still existent, xenophobia and fear of a “yellow menace” set the foundation for the type of villainy that would appear in Beecham’s, and others’ novels and the pulps, in which such fears were only heightened and inflated after the first World War.

A yellow, taut skin and bony, alien-like appendages were the most common, most exaggerated features ascribed to Asians in the pulps. Countless stories, too many to be fully enumerated here, contain references to “yellow devils,” “yellow heathens,” and “slinking Orientals.” The term “yellow” is used as a descriptor of any Asian characters, whether applied to global masterminds in the vein of Fu Manchu, or simply a humble Chinese “coolie.” Many story titles used such descriptions in their titles, to give any prospective readers an idea as to just what type of story awaited them, as can be seen in pulp stories such as “Yellow Ghosts,” “Yellow Men and Gold,” and “The Tallow Devil.” The “splash”, or opening, page of the T.T. Flynn story “The Evil Brand” alerted readers that the following story revolved around the “hall-mark of a saffron skinned terror tong that brought death to those who wore it.”<sup>79</sup> The villain Koshinaga, of “The Escape” is described as having “yellowish eyes” set in a “huge, misshapen

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<sup>77</sup> Arthur Benjamin Reeve, *The Romance of Elaine* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1916), 11, 13.

<sup>78</sup> John Charles Beecham, *The Yellow Spider* (New York: W.J. Watt and Company, 1920), 140.

<sup>79</sup> T.T. Flynn, “The Evil Brand,” *Dime Detective Magazine*, 15 Nov. 1934, 40.

face. . . black and diabolical . . . utterly hostile to all that mankind envisages as good.” Mr. Chang, villainous star of A.E. Apple’s “Mr. Chang’s Tong War” (as well as other stories penned by Apple), is presented in similar fashion to Fu Manchu, with the prerequisite emphasis on yellow skin, and “inscrutable, black eyes [that] gave the impression of being thousands of years old.” Li-Hung, the villain of *The Phantom Detective’s* “The Tomb of Death,” had “a long, thin-fingered hand that loomed ghastly and evil in the moonlight” and “unseeing, almond-shaped eyes . . . a face that was unmistakably Oriental.” The Phantom Detective, in this and other stories, regularly did battle with henchmen who possessed stereotypical Asian features (see *Figure VIII*). In “The Kalgan Road”, first published in the Winter of 1930-1931, Anglo-Saxon adventurer Jim Crane attempts to kidnap the Dalai Lama from his “yellow brethren,” in a convoluted plot to secure ammunition to a besieged garrison of foreigners during (what is assumed to be, but never disclosed clearly as) the Boxer Uprising. Before Crane can get to the fortress, the wife of one of its commanders kills herself, “rather than face these yellow devils.”<sup>80</sup>

The practice of comparing Oriental characters to animals is also commonly found in the pulps, in an obvious attempt to make them more monstrous; men, yet still in the grasp of some primeval, animalistic influence. Mr. Chang, the criminal mastermind previously referenced, was a regular villain of author A.E. Apple’s stories. In an appearance in the October 25, 1924 issue of *Detective Story Magazine*, in “Mr. Chang, Man Trapper,” the tong-man is not as cunning, or as highly placed in the tong underworld as in later stories. He is, however, depicted as being highly untrustworthy and particularly animal-like in both appearance, and mannerisms.

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<sup>80</sup> William Doughty, “The Kalgan Road,” *Oriental Stories*, Feb.-March 1931, 344.

He ran a narrow red tongue around the edges of his dry parted lips. . . Languidly Mr. Chang shuffled back and forth in the shadows at the far end of the veranda, keeping under cover from inquisitive Caucasian eyes. Somewhere in the distant woods sounded a shrill snarling scream; something in his catlike temperament quivered in response. He was half-tempted to answer.<sup>81</sup>

Throughout the story, in which Mr. Chang's first (printed) criminal enterprise involves the murder of a security guard, and the theft of a local mine's gold shipment the unfortunate guard was transporting, the zoomorphism of Mr. Chang is rampant. Mr. Chang is "catlike" in his actions, his eyes "glow phosphorescently in the darkness," he leaps about "like a panther," and, at one point, he "hissed in his nostrils," like some sort of serpent. In fact, references to Mr. Chang in some sort of animal-like context appear in nearly every single paragraph where he is mentioned.

In "The Warlords of Darkness," Mow Jie, the sidekick of Anglo-adventurer and All-American Man-of-Action Jimmy Harder, is also feline in appearance, to an almost superhuman degree. "And by some strange whim of subconscious suggestion," author Erle Stanley Gardner explains, "Mow Jie had grown into a human cat. He had eyes that could see in the dark, ears that were abnormally acute, a sense of smell that was more than human, and he moved through the night upon feet of velvet."<sup>82</sup> Such descriptions delve further into the nativist view of what separates "us" from "them." Mr. Chang's reptilian mannerisms and bestial urges place him (and, directly, all of those like him) in a primitive, animalistic state, bordering on humanity, but still answerable to the savageness of beasts.

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<sup>81</sup> Apple, "Mr. Chang, Man Trapper," 8.

<sup>82</sup> Erle Stanley Gardner, "The Warlords of Darkness," *Adventure*, July 1934, 5.

The catlike aspects of both Mr. Chang and Mow Jie can also be seen, not only as a dehumanizing agent, but also as the feminization of an entire race. Such feminization can equally be seen in descriptions of Asian characters that involve extremely-long nails, slender faces and figures, and clothing wherein robes are described more along the lines of dresses. All of these descriptors can be found in the pulps. Historian Robert G. Lee has noted that feminization such as this of a person (or entire race) can add to the overall subjugation of that person, or race, in the mind of the reader, especially in contrast to a character of traditional, masculine composition, of which nearly all of the heroic (white) figures of the pulps certainly were.<sup>83</sup> This was a time wherein women were quickly advancing in political rights, as evidenced by the passing of women's suffrage in 1919, and the outcome of a World War that resulted in the depletion of the nation, and world's, supply of "old-stock" men. Combine such realizations with the seeming passiveness on the part of many (in nativist's eyes) in relinquishing the traditional American, white man's hold on authority; such a feminization of the enemy is not that surprising. Such a "reassurance" of masculinity can also be found in the pulps via the multitude of advertisements they published, promising everything from secrets to greater sexual abilities, to courses in attaining Charles Atlas-like physiques and heightened levels of "manliness."

The American pulps also contained the exploits of a number of characters that are able to adopt, using (sometimes simple, sometimes not) disguises to infiltrate Chinese tongs, Japanese temples or any other number of exotic locales that, normally, the white man is restricted from entering. Such plot devices speak to the importance that American popular

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<sup>83</sup> Lee, *Oriental: Asian-Americans in Popular Culture*, 17.

fiction of the time placed on “physicality;” on the idea that the most important aspect pertaining to a foreigner was his physical differences “from us.” An early example can be found in the April 15, 1919, edition of *The Thrill Book*, in the story “The Hidden Emperor,” by George C. Hull. The story begins with two high-ranking officers in the American government discussing the threat posed, if intelligence is to be believed, by the creation of a “Pan-Asian” confederation, led by America’s obvious enemy in the Pacific, Japan. Upon an intelligence officer’s suggestion that they indeed have someone who can infiltrate the inauguration ceremony of this conspiracy, a general asks “And who is this man? Some two-faced Oriental taking money from both sides?”<sup>84</sup> At that moment, in a disguise of such completeness that the general is startled from his seat, in walks Captain Nullus Nemo, American adventurer and servant of Uncle Sam. With the aid of his Indian sidekick Runjeet Singh, Nemo embarks upon his journey to kidnap a descendant of Genghis Khan who is to be named emperor of this unholy alliance, assume his identity, and enter into the inner chambers of the mastermind of this operation, the dreaded “Yellow Pope,” the Dalai Lama. By the end of the tale, a terrific battle ensues in the depths of a Tibetan temple, and eventually the intentions of both the Dalai Lama and his Japanese co-conspirators are thwarted. “The Hidden Emperor” is but one of many tales in which a white man is able to “blend” in with the Asian (often criminal) community, by simply altering his physical appearance.

In “The Hidden Monster,” published in the Winter 1932 issue of *Oriental Stories*, an amateur sleuth is fascinated by the stories coming out of the nearby Chinatown of a new, golden deity that the local Chinese are flocking to in throngs, foregoing the traditional worship

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<sup>84</sup> George C. Hull, “The Hidden Emperor,” *The Thrill Book*, 15 April 1919, 37.

they have held for centuries. After a rejection by the local constabulary of his request for an investigation into this bizarre new religious practice, which involves the placing of the devotee's head into the gaping maw of the deity's statue, the sleuth decides to investigate the matter himself. "After an intensive and nauseating diet of carrots to yellow his skin to the appropriate shade," the amateur adventurer is able to ingratiate himself into the Chinese community, and even becomes respected by many there who believe him to be a powerful tong leader.<sup>85</sup> Several months later, after faking the death of his tong alter ego, the former Chinaman reappears at the local police station, informing the astonished local authorities that the "worship" is actually a cover for the smuggling of opium: the devout wear hats so that an unseen hand is able to place their pre-purchased amount of opium under their hat, freeing their hands from any incriminating evidence. Finishing his report to the police, the man proclaims "I am tired of being a Chinaman. I think I will enjoy being a white man for a while." The Phantom Detective would also often disguise himself many times as a "Chinaman" in order to infiltrate secret societies, such as in "The Tomb of Death," and the hero of the previously-mentioned "The Kalgan Road" does the same.

The plot-device of "The Kalgan Road" wherein a white woman kills herself in order to avoid capture at the hands of the "yellow devils" also shows another aspect of the "white versus yellow" scenario; that of an antagonism, not just between individual Caucasians, and the Asians they encounter, but also of a larger, almost "racial" war, between the two. "Yellow Ghosts," penned by Robert E. Pinkerton for a 1928 issue of *Argosy All-Story Weekly* uses not only "yellow" as a physical descriptor, but also as a major plot device, showing a loyalty that

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<sup>85</sup> David H. Keller, "The Hidden Monster," *Oriental Stories*, Winter 1932, 414.

two white men are expected to share, dependent solely on the fact that they are both Caucasian. While prospecting for gold in Vancouver, rough-and-tumble outdoorsman Danny Sherburn comes under the employment, as a guide, to Vernon Kinnersley, a wealthy United States businessman who is interested in the rumors of a derelict Chinese junk that is said to have come to rest in the vicinity of Sherburn's encampment. Sherburn, who throughout his time in the area has seen "wraithlike, slant-eyed ghosts" creeping about near the shipwreck, has already, unknowingly, pilfered the treasure stored in the junk, by removing planks he used for his shelter that were actually filled with gems from the court of the late-Manchu dynasty.<sup>86</sup> When a group of tong-men arrive searching for the treasure as well, Kinnersley is kidnapped, while Sherburn and his companions flee into the nearby woods. Danny however, decides to return to rescue Kinnersley. "He's a white man, and so are we. Those Chinks are capable of torturing him. There's at least ten, and they're armed," Danny admits, "But I never saw the time yet when a white man wasn't worth ten Chinamen and there's two white men." The protagonist's rescue is cut short when it is revealed that there is more than meets the eye, and that Kinnersley and the tong are actually working together to attain the loot. When things begin to turn sour, between Kinnersley and his Oriental co-conspirators, he is once again left in the hands of the tong, this time, not as a partner, but as a prisoner. Upon realizing, once again, that Kinnersley faces torture at the hands of the "Chinamen," Danny states that, despite his wrongdoing and double-crossing, Kinnersley deserves aid, because it is a case of "a white man in the hands of those yellow devils . . . he's white, whatever else he is." In the end, as is to be somewhat expected at this point, Sherburn defeats the machinations of the evil tong leader

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<sup>86</sup> Robert E. Pinkerton, "Yellow Ghosts," *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, 13 Oct. 1928, 439.

Bing Choy, and gains possession of the gems as well as the affections of Kinnersley's hired female navigator.

Robert E. Howard, best remembered as the creator of "Conan the Barbarian," and member of the "weird fiction" triumvirate of pulp writers, also wrote several tales that pitted the yellow race against the white. In the opening scene of "Skull-Face", first published in the October-December, 1929 issue of *Weird Tales*, the protagonist, white man Stephen Costigan awakes from a dream-like state, having witnessed a supernatural horror of the "yellow" variety:

And then the Face intruded itself into my sight. I thought at first it was merely a skull; then I saw that it was a hideous yellow instead of white, and was endowed with some horrid form of life. Eyes glimmered deep in the sockets and the jaws moved as if in speech. The body, except for the high, thin shoulders, was vague and indistinct, but the hands, which floated in the mists before and below the skull, were horribly vivid and filled me with crawling fears. They were like the hands of a mummy, long, lean and yellow, with knobby joints and cruel curving talons.<sup>87</sup>

Inside the opium-den in which he is currently a boarder, Costigan meets the bearer of this gruesome visage, and is given a mission: to assassinate a British officer of great importance in the administration of the Crown's far-flung East African colonies.

The one issuing these directives is the owner of the building, and a reputed tong leader, in both Great Britain, and throughout the world. After at first refusing to comply with the assignment he had been given, Costigan is given the honor (or horror) of seeing his Master's face for the first time, the same demon-like visage he saw in his nightmares.

A tall gaunt figure stood before me, a figure arrayed grotesquely in a silk brocaded gown which fell to the floor. From the sleeves of this gown protruded hands which filled me

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<sup>87</sup> Robert E. Howard, "Skull-Face," *Project Gutenberg*, last modified December 2007, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0608141.txt>

with crawling horror – long, predatory hands, with thin bony fingers and curved talons – withered skin of a parchment brownish-yellow, like the hands of a man long dead. The hands – but oh God, the face! A skull to which no vestige of flesh seemed to remain but on which taut brownish-yellow skin grew fast, etching out every detail of that terrible death’s-head. The forehead was high and in a way magnificent, but the head was curiously narrow through the temples, and from under penthouse brows great eyes glimmered like pools of yellow fire. . . . A long, bony neck supported this frightful vision and completed the effect of a reptilian demon from some medieval hell.

This Master, to whom Costigan owes both employment, and the ending of his hashish cravings which had brought him to the opium den in the first place, is revealed as the mystic and “yellow” warlord, Kathulos of Egypt.<sup>88</sup>

Costigan, determined to release himself from the bonds held by his Master, conspires with a veteran of Scotland Yard to arrange a situation wherein Kathulos may be apprehended. However, with the failure of his plan and his eventual capture, Costigan is shown the true nature of Kathulos, and his goal of white-servitude.

Know you who I am? Kathulos of Egypt! . . . I reigned in the dim misty sea lands ages and ages before the sea rose and engulfed the land. I died, not as men die; the magic draft of life everlasting was ours! . . . And you, you white barbarians, whose ape-ancestors forever defied my race and me, your doom is at hand! And when I mount my universal throne, the only whites shall be white slaves!

As Kathulos is extolling to Costigan his plans, and those of his brethren still sleeping, the detective with whom Costigan had secretly been working arrives with a cadre of officers, and, after a terrific battle and earth-shattering explosions, Kathulos is either killed... or escapes. As is often the case in stories of the “yellow peril,” the villain survives, to plot against mankind another day.

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<sup>88</sup> The intimacy in which the “weird fiction” trio worked is evident in this name, as it is extremely close to the creature for which H.P Lovecraft is best known for, the evil monstrosity found in the Cthulhu Mythos.

Academic works of the time seemed to enforce the idea of a perpetual “race-war,” as seen in Costigan’s battle with Kathulos. A protégé of Madison Grant’s, Lothrop Stoddard, in *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*, first published in 1921, echoed his mentor: “What is absolutely certain is that any wholesale Oriental influx would inevitably doom the whites, first of the Pacific coast, and later of the whole United States, to social sterilization and ultimate racial extinction.”<sup>89</sup> The same year, William McDougall’s *Is America Safe for Democracy* addressed the threat posed by the “yellow millions” of the Far East. McDougall also voiced his reasoning as to why exactly the white race was superior: the white race’s survival and triumph in the Great War demonstrated, to McDougall at least, that it had passed a kind of litmus-test for Darwinian survival, and was thus deserving of having dominion over the Earth. The fact that the First World War, for the most part (with the exception of fighting in Anatolia and other parts of the East) was predominately a “white vs. white” war did not seem to enter into McDougall’s thoughts.

As with the other manner of depictions, the exaggerated and monstrous physical features attributed to Asians by the pulps’ authors worked to further alienate them from the “real” Americans, and to make them appear as subhuman, if not outright bestial. The physical depictions, however, go one step farther, as they are the most capable of providing a backdrop for a “race-struggle” between white and yellow, the most basic interpretation of the “yellow peril” theme. The solidarity of whites and the yellow menaces bent on their destruction were the two factors at the very heart of the “yellow peril.”

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<sup>89</sup> Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color – Against White World Supremacy* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921), 289.

## Conclusions

As has already been seen, America popular culture and politics were hostile to foreigners, and in particular, Asians, during this time period. The Immigration, or Quota Laws, of 1921 and 1924, respectively have already been discussed; the origins of these laws can be found in the xenophobia of the late nineteenth century, and its own immigration laws, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which limited the amount of Chinese allowed into America. In 1922, the Cable Act was passed, which stated that the marriage of a foreign national to a female American citizen would result in the revoking of that female's citizenship in the United States.<sup>90</sup> In 1924, with the aid of eugenicist Harry Hamilton Laughlin, the state of Virginia passed the Racial Integrity Act, which made it a crime for members of one racial group to marry a member of another, and also provided state sanctions to the sterilization of "undesirables." This law stayed in effect in Virginia until 1967.<sup>91</sup>

In such an atmosphere, what do the stories found in the pulp magazines of the 1920s and the 1930s tell us about Americans, and, specifically, about their views of Asians, and foreigners in general? It is difficult, and rash, to simply assign racism to such a time period that differs from the current in so many ways. One reason for this difficulty, aside from the error of attempting to impose early twenty-first century political correctness upon those living in the early twentieth century, is the contradicting evidence of racial tolerance, and even racial acceptance on the part of many Americans at the time. For every act of the federal government

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<sup>90</sup> Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian-Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 108.

<sup>91</sup> Nikki L. M. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford, *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), 275.

that attempted to impose immigration restrictions, there was an outcry from many, bemoaning the racial intolerance such acts legalized. While still using somewhat degrading terms (“Japs,” “Chinese coolies”) G. K. Chesterton’s *Eugenics and Other Evils*, published in 1922, presented warnings about the notion of the creation, or even existence, of an ideal, perfect human race.<sup>92</sup> In response to legislation, such as the 1922 Oregon law that, more or less, enforced Americanization on all grade school children in the state, there were various groups, such as the Knights of Columbus, and, interestingly enough, a joining of the Catholic and Lutheran churches to argue against them.<sup>93</sup> A number of United States senators argued against the Immigration and Quota Laws of the 1920s on the grounds of intolerance. William E. Mason of Illinois argued that “if this bill had been passed 50 or 100 years ago hardly any of the House would have been here.”<sup>94</sup> In 1924, the year of its publication, Crookshank’s *The Mongol in Our Midst* was decried by The University of North Carolina’s *Journal of Social Forces* as being based on “slim evidence” and only believable by those who were already committed to the idea of white superiority, a position the author of the article obviously did not hold.<sup>95</sup> Earl Derr Biggers, author of the 1925 detective novel *The House Without A Key*, which featured the first appearance of Charlie Chan, stated that his impetus in creating the Chinese sleuth was to combat the “yellow peril” imagery prevalent at the time, and to portray a character of Asian ancestry that was just as capable of solving a crime as any of his Caucasian counterparts.<sup>96</sup> In response to the rallies against his 1915 epic, *The Birth of A Nation* for its racially-insensitive depictions, director D.W. Griffith

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<sup>92</sup>G.K. Chesterton, *Eugenics and Other Evils* (London: Cassell and Company, 1922), 142.

<sup>93</sup>Knobel, 251, 253.

<sup>94</sup>Baritz, 70.

<sup>95</sup>F. H. Hankins, “Book Notes,” *The Journal of Social Forces* 3 (November 1924) : 184.

<sup>96</sup>Catherine Ross Nickerson ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 140.

released the appropriately titled *Intolerance* (1916), which told of the devastating impacts that prejudice has wrought on humanity over the course of the previous two thousand years.

Griffith's 1919 film *Broken Blossoms* portrayed its Chinese central character (albeit, performed in yellowface by Richard Barthelmess) as sympathetic and full of "a pure and holy" virtue, with the murderous antagonists of the film all "Barbarous Anglo-Saxons, sons of turmoil" who hate "those not born in [their] great country."

Stories found in a variety of pulp magazines also offered sympathy and respect to the Asian people and their civilizations. "The Broker of Marriages," by Lemuel L. DeBra, published in the November 1920 issue of *The Blue Book Magazine*, provides, through the veil of a somewhat humorous and light-hearted tale, a sympathetic view of Chinese women, for whom arranged marriage was still common. When the local marriage-broker of a Chinatown hears the pleas of a young woman for release from the arranged marriage to which she has been "sentenced," the broker feels apologetic for imposing the traditional ways of her culture on this emissary of the next generation. "It was as though they felt but could not voice," writes DeBra, "the age-old cry of their sex – the cry of protest against 'the custom,' that custom which the tears of Chinese women for forty centuries have neither changed nor softened."<sup>97</sup> In the end, the young woman, who wants "to marry like the white women – for love" is removed from the obligations of the arranged marriage, in part due to the aid of the marriage-broker, and is allowed to marry the man whom she had personally chosen.

The May, 28, 1921, issue of *Argosy All-Story Weekly* contains the first chapter of the five-part serial "A Daughter of the White Star," in which the three protagonists are an

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<sup>97</sup> Lemuel L. DeBra, "The Broker of Marriages," *The Blue Book Magazine*, Nov. 1920, 53.

American, a girl of mixed Chinese and American ancestry, and her Chinese assistant, all of whom are fighting to aid in Sun Yat-sen's (who is referred to in the story by the Chinese as "our George Washington;" a sentimentality still held today by many in China) revolution for a free and modern China. The heroine extols the wish of China to join America in democracy. In reference to the Japanese fear of a strong, nationalistic China that could threaten the invader's hegemony in the region, the story's heroine proclaims: "And yet the foreign usurpers who rule the people of China would call it treason. . . I am working for a free China, a China governed as the United States is governed. Liberty is for those who love her and dare for her, and if you are a friend of liberty there is no America, or China – there is only liberty!"<sup>98</sup> After unwittingly getting himself embroiled in the life and death struggle for Chinese democratic revolution, the main character, Thomas Munford, fights side by side with Asians "in whose veins flowed the blood of courage and devotion," and those "doing yeoman service in the cause of Chinese liberty" who are "brave beyond the average man." In the form of Leota Jackson, the girl of biracial ancestry who has dedicated herself to the liberation of her mother's homeland, Munford observes that "it seemed to me the splendor of the Orient had been availed of by the modiste of the Occident to make her altogether elegant." Despite the fact that "A Daughter of the White Star" does contain a few references to "singsong" speak and "hop heads" in an opium den, references of this sort are far and few between over the course of the entire story. These instances are nowhere near as prevalent, or derogatory, as are found in the majority of pulp stories that feature Asian characters. The hero fights alongside many Chinese to whom he has given a great deal of respect, and has, over the course of the story, grown less frightened

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<sup>98</sup> Horace Howard Herr, "A Daughter of the White Star," *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, 28 May 1921, 467.

and more interested and respectful of the culture of the Orient, and has found it worth his life to fight for a republican China.

The November 1929 issue of *True Strange Stories* features “Fifty Murders for the Love of Sweet Flower,” by Clarence Reynolds, an account of the Bow Kum incident referred to earlier. Bow Kum, or “Sweet Flower,” was “only a twelve-year-old Chinese girl, but her beauty wrung men’s hearts,” and through her unfortunate connections to the tongs of New York’s China town, was murdered in one of the worst incidents of tong violence in American history; a death that hopefully, in the author’s words, granted innocent Bow Kum “a peace that was denied her on earth.”<sup>99</sup> While, to be sure, part of the story’s purpose is to engender fear of the tongs, as many “yellow” stories tended to do, “Fifty Murders for the Love of Sweet Flower” is defined more so by the sympathy it showers on the unfortunate figure of Bow Kum. The unfortunate girl is depicted as innocent and naive, happy in both of her relationships and heartbroken by their dissolution and the violence they wrought. Again, while the story does contain such phrases as “singsong” and “yellow-faced,” and the cover of the magazine depicts a rather stereotypical view of “lustful Orientals,” the story is overwhelmingly sympathetic to both Bow Kum, and the men who loved her during her brief life (*see Figure 1*).

Frank Owen’s 1931 short-story “Della Wu, Chinese Courtesan” is another piece of pulp fiction wherein a female Chinese character is intended to be the object of the reader’s sympathy. In China, where “a boy is cause for rejoicing, but the birth of a girl is looked upon. . . as something approaching disgrace,” Della Wu is born, the product of a loveless marriage, and

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<sup>99</sup> Clarence Reynolds, “Fifty Murders for the Love of Sweet Flower,” *True Strange Stories*, Nov. 1929, 32.

is eventually put into service as a courtesan.<sup>100</sup> Through cleverness, she is able to avoid the advances of many suitors, except one, who sees through her various ploys and steals her away from her home. Della Wu escapes her kidnapper, through a final act of trickery – convincing him to cross a particular bridge while carrying her; a bridge she knows cannot hold a great deal of weight. Della Wu, along with her attacker, both drown, the author giving the suggestion that for a creature such as Della Wu, whose Asiatic beauty is praised throughout, death was more of a release than a tragedy.

Even the letter columns of the pulps provide evidence of tolerance in an otherwise nativist atmosphere. *Adventure* magazine, in an issue from 1920, published a letter written by a reader, who was enraged by a previous reader's letter that demanded a particular author be restricted from submitting work to the title, on account of his name, Liebe, being Germanic in origin. The editor, in a reply to both letters stated that he "would not have discriminated against any German-named or German-born loyal Americans," in what can certainly be understood as quite a bold statement, given the nativist atmosphere of the time.<sup>101</sup> In the editorial and letters column of *Oriental Stories*, for its February-March 1931 issue, the editor expressed dismay at the seeming loss of traditional cultures in the Orient, and that "modernization is slowly forcing the world into a common standard of customs."<sup>102</sup> In the Summer 1932 edition of the same title, a reader wrote in to complain that he did not believe a recent story of Robert E. Howard's depiction of Muslims was accurate, or fair. "But Timur (Tamerlane) was an Orthodox Moslem," Francis X. Bell, from Chicago, explains, "and

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<sup>100</sup> Frank Owen, "Della Wu – Chinese Courtesan," *Oriental Stories*, Feb-Mar. 1931, 417.

<sup>101</sup> "Camp-Fire," *Adventure*, August, 18 1920, 178.

<sup>102</sup> "The Souk," *Oriental Stories*, Feb-March 1931, 292.

consequently never drank at all. Mr. Howard should know, if he has studied the history of Islam, that drinking alcoholic liquors is expressly forbidden by the Koran. . .”<sup>103</sup>

Again, it must be noted that many of the stories that do present an overall positive (or at least, not quite as negative) view of Asians, in America and abroad, still suffer from the terminology and views of the time, with language such as “yellow,” “singsong,” “hatchet-men.” Even in light of these shortcomings, when compared to the majority of stories in which the very humanity of Asians is called into question, and at times outright denied, this smaller collection of narratives can be considered fairly tolerant and sympathetic. These offerings of respect, or at least tolerance, reveal that, while xenophobia and nativism were high, the foundations of such views were being questioned by some, those lending a more tolerant voice, to an otherwise intolerant landscape.

By the mid 1930s, many of the ideas such as those of Madison Grant’s and F.G. Crookshank’s had begun to fade from academic discussion (even though related depictions still continued to occur in the pulps, and other media). This change was in part due to the rising threat of Japanese aggression in Asia, which created a sympathetic figure in the form of China as a victim of Japanese imperialism. As will be seen, by the time of America’s involvement in World War II, the “Grantian” view of race collapsed under the onslaught of both academia and nationalism. The 1920s, especially the years immediately following the end of World War I, however, saw nativism in America, and its message of Anglo-Saxon sanctity, reach its highest level, and as a result, the majority of both academic and popular publications concerning the

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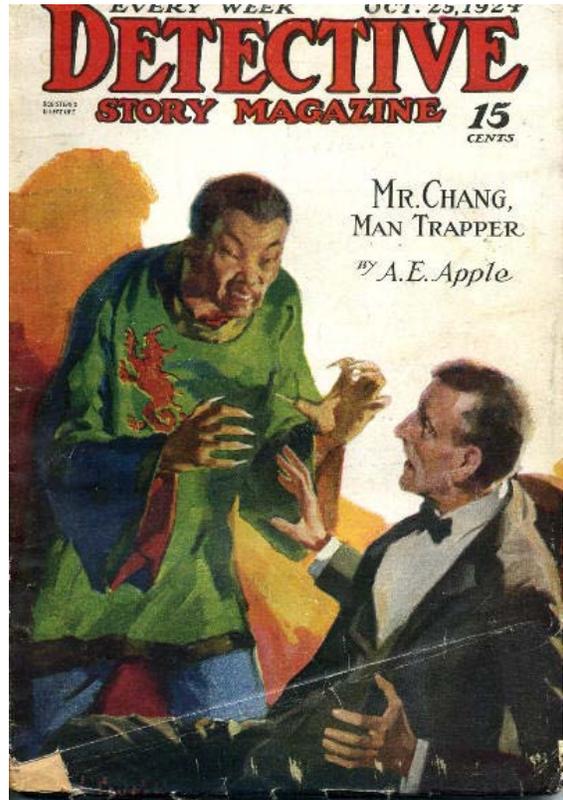
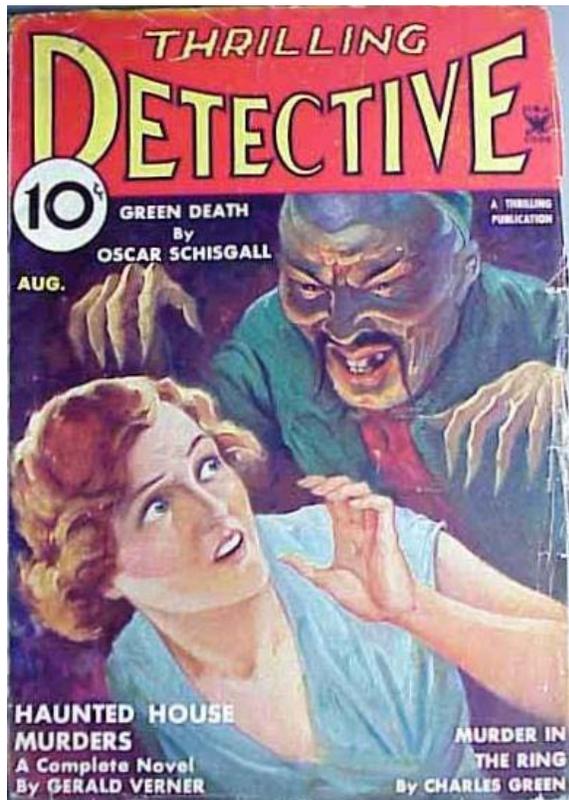
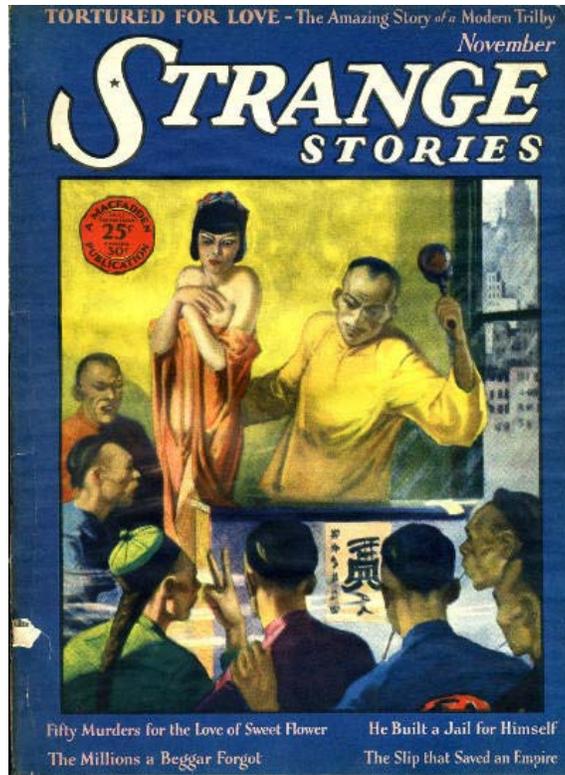
<sup>103</sup> “The Souk,” *Oriental Stories*, Summer 1932, 425.

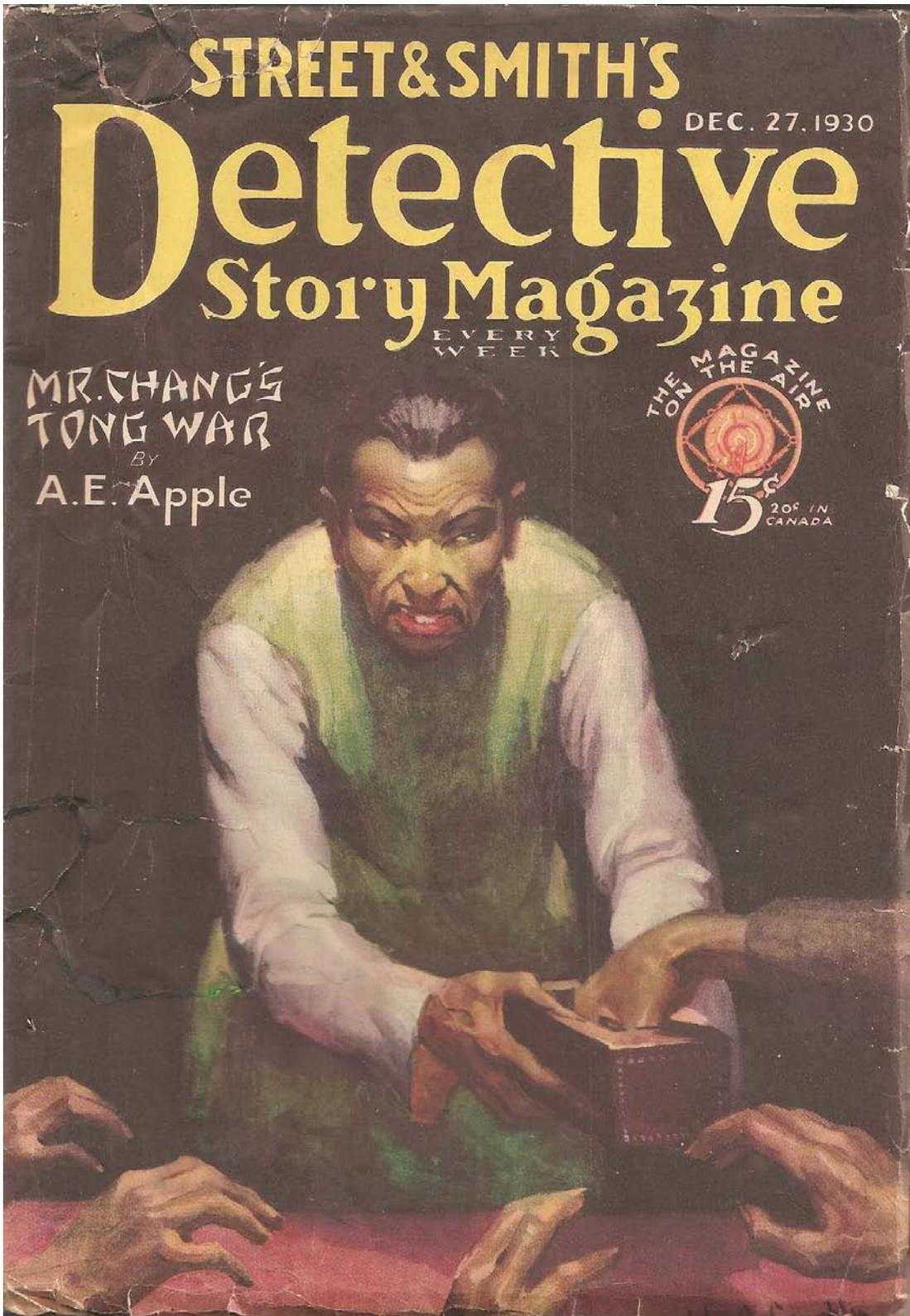
“white” and “yellow” races appeared in the early years of that decade, with their influences lasting far longer.

# Appendix II

## Illustrations

- Fig. I -Cover of *True Strange Stories* – November, 1929 (PSP – GC)
- Fig. II – Cover of *Thrilling Detective* – August, 1935 (PSP – GC)
- Fig. III – Cover of *Detective Story Magazine* – Oct. 25, 1929 (PSP – GC)
- Fig. IV - Cover of *Detective Story Magazine* – Dec.27 1930 (NVM)
- Fig. V – Cover of *Adventure* – November, 1910 (PSP – GC)
- Fig. VI – Cover of *Adventure* – August 18, 1920 (NVM)
- Fig. VII – Illust. from “The Tallow Devil” – *The Phantom Detective* - Oct. 1934 (LOC)
- Fig. VIII – Illust. from “The Tomb of Death” – *The Phantom Detective* – Nov. 1934 (LOC)
- Fig. IX – Illust. from “Steel Skeletons” – *The Phantom Detective* – May, 19 1935 (LOC)
- Fig. X – Illust. from “Crooks is Crooks” – *The Blue Book* – January, 1921 (LOC)
- Fig. XI – Ad. appearing in pulps published by the Munsey Co. (LOC)
- Fig. XII – Ad. appearing in pulps published by the Popular Fiction Co. (LOC)

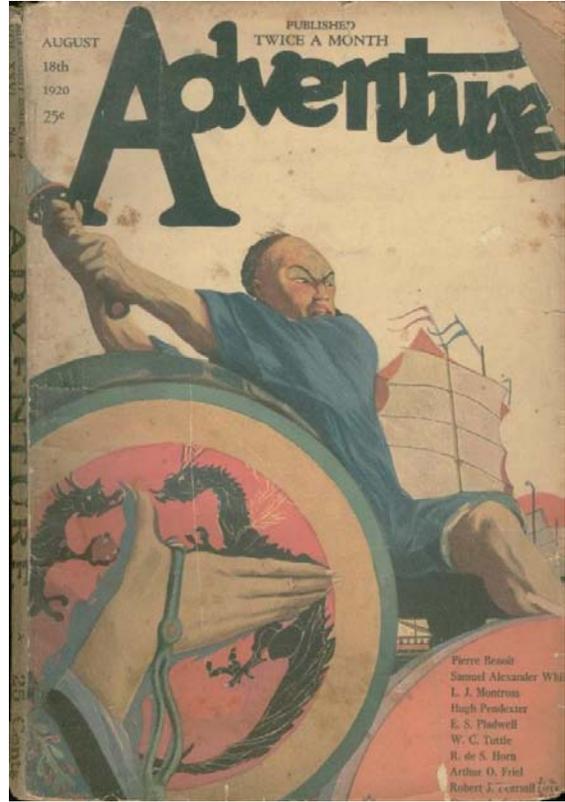




IV



V



VI



VII



*His lithe body lifted in  
a long leap*

VIII



*Raising his hat high. Mr. Woo saw the blade come down*

IX



X



# "She is Yours, Master!"

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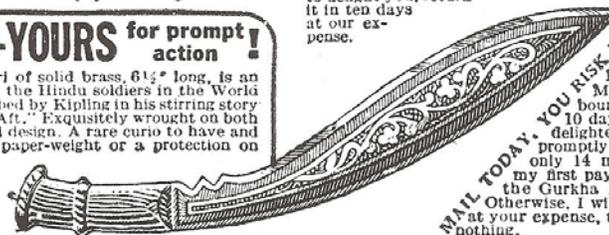
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XII

# II

## The Hun and the Nipponese Hordes:

The American Pulp and Comic Books of World  
War II

1935-1945

1937. Beginning on December 13, the Armed Forces of the Empire of Japan launched an offensive against the beleaguered capital of the Republic of China, Nanjing. Having first landed on China's coast at Hangzhou Bay, the Imperial Army marched west to Nanjing, a passage that was strewn with the corpses of any man, woman, or child unfortunate enough to find themselves in its path.<sup>104</sup> Condemnation on the part of the world's governments followed the Rape of Nanjing, but little else. This was, after all, the era of appeasement. The following year the *Anschluss* of Austria, followed by Czechoslovakia later that same year, saw Nazi Germany grow in territory, and in power. Europe was not alone in its appeasement policies. Isolationist America had long offered verbal rebuttals, but not much else, in the face of Japan's aggression in China and imperialism in the Pacific.<sup>105</sup> The Stock Market Crash of 1929 that had brought an end to the "Roaring Twenties" had dealt a staggering blow to the American mindset, as well as to the economy. As much as one may think such circumstances would draw America inwards,

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<sup>104</sup> In the name of its self-promoted Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere, the Japanese forces besieged Nanjing, an under-defended and thoroughly-shelled capital that Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had already abandoned following his relocation of China's capitol farther inland, to the city of Chongqing in advance of the Japanese army. The undermanned city soon fell, and the Japanese descended upon its civilians, embarking upon a vicious melee of rape, torture and murder that would have made most Nazis grimace in disgust; in fact, it was John Rabe, German national, member of the National Socialist Party, and ardent follower of Adolf Hitler, that led any remaining survivors of Nanjing to refugee safety zones outside the city and who, along with other Westerners of various nationalities, did their best to protect the refugees from the advance of entire battalions of murderous, invading troops. Rabe also defended survivors from the lone stragglers attempting to carry women off in the middle of the night. For more information on the Japanese atrocities in China, see – Honda Katsuichi, *The Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).

<sup>105</sup> The early 1930s were not years that saw the world teetering on the brink of war; war had already begun. Japan's desecration of Chinese sovereignty had begun years earlier with its invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and the founding of the puppet state Manchukuo, with former Qing Emperor Aisin Gioro "Henry" Pu Yi as Emperor. Benito Mussolini, fascist dictator of Italy, had launched a campaign of colonization in Ethiopia in 1935, and Hitler, having been granted the Chancellorship of Weimar Germany by a decrepit and politically-inept President Paul von Hindenburg, had been threatening war unless his thirst for Austria, Czechoslovakia, and ultimately Poland, was quenched. With the signing by these three nations of the Tripartite Pact in September 1940, the long dreaded war that the failure of Versailles had promised, and America had long-feared, was a growing possibility, if not an outright probability. For more information on the years that led up to World War II, see – Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley – A Panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002).

to focus on internal dilemmas, such was the growing turmoil internationally that no amount of nativism present could keep America, or its popular fiction, out of transnational matters.

The nativist imagery of the 1920s and early 1930s was still very much alive during the years of Hitler's rise and continued economic stagnation. What differed, as the 1930s drew to a close, were the targets of this imagery. The pulp magazines, with their yellow emperors and blood-thirsty tong-men, had begun to die out by the early 1940s, for a variety of reasons. This growing void in cheap, popular literature was filled by a narrative media that, in many ways, had been inspired by the success of the pulps: comic books. Likewise, the imagery prevalent in the pulps, of "Fu Manchus" and "Mr. Changs," was, not necessarily going away, but rather underwent an interesting augmentation. In the late 1930s, the comic books followed the pulps with imitations, and licensed adaptations, of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu and similar yellow peril characters; as the years went on, the formally "generic" Asiatic villain (usually Chinese) was given a concrete nationality, and more importantly, an ideology. The "Yellow Emperor" was no longer Dr. Fu Manchu; it was the Showa Emperor, Hirohito. And his followers were no longer the teeming hordes of a "sleeping" China; but instead the mad, fascist legions of the Rising Sun. As Japanese aggression mounted in the East, and Imperialistic advances were made in the Pacific, the Japanese became the sole targets of the racist imagery previously reserved for all Orientals. Furthermore, Asian characters of other nationalities, such as Chinese and Korean, began to be depicted in more positive lights, as fellow democratic brethren fighting against foreign invasion.

In addition to the amalgamation of the "Yellow Peril" with the "Nipponese Peril," a second villainous depiction appeared; or rather, reappeared, in the form of the Hun, the

monstrous (in both depravity, and appearance) Teutonic brute of World War I propaganda. The Hun, having appeared here and there in the pulp magazines of the 20s and early 30s (appearances far eclipsed in number by the “Yellow Peril”) was brought out once again to the forefront of American popular literature, now sporting a Swastika, as opposed to the Prussian Eagle of the Hohenzollern dynasty.

The resurgence in “Hun” depictions (or rather “Nazi Hun”) and the change of the “Yellow Peril” to the “Nipponese Peril” is contemporaneous with an overall shift in racial views occurring in America at the time. Most important to this shift was the decline in “scientific racism” in intellectual circles. In both the academic and wider public spheres, this “scientific racism” proved too similar to the ideology of Nazi Germany. These two reasons overlapped, and either one can be considered a response to the other. Elazar Barkin, in *The Retreat of Scientific Racism – Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* points out that, for many in academic circles, an antagonism to the Grantian view of race had been held for a good while, but pressures such as the weight of public opinion and obstacles to publication hampered the printing of such works for years, and possibly decades.<sup>106</sup>

The scholarly attack on ideas such as those of Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard had begun as soon as their works were published, but the critique did not reach a height until the late 1930s and early 1940s. By 1939, academic work on dismantling the “Great Race” view of anthropology had begun, with the closing of eugenics study centers at various schools, including the Carnegie Institution which had forced famed eugenicist Harry Hamilton Laughlin into retirement by year’s end, and had ceased publication of the widely-read (among

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<sup>106</sup> Elazar Barkin, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism – Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 332.

eugenicists circles) *Eugenical News*.<sup>107</sup> The scientist most credited with helping to overturn the wide acceptance of such views was Ashley Montagu, an anthropologist who would eventually teach at Rutgers. In 1942, Montagu published the first edition of his attack on the Anglo-American superiority complex, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth – The Fallacy of Race*:

Not one of the great divisions of man is unmixed, nor is any one of its ethnic groups pure; all are, indeed, much mixed and of exceedingly complex descent. Nor is there any scientific justification for overzealous or emotional claims that any one of them is in any way superior to another. . . Far from being “well-grounded,” this is a view [speaking of Nazi- Aryan superiority] which no biologist and no anthropologist with whom I am familiar would accept. It is today generally agreed that all men belong to the same species, that all were probably derived from the same ancestral stock, and that all share in common patrimony.<sup>108</sup>

Attacks on racial basis of 1920s and 30s racism such as this was not limited to the general public's understanding of race. Montagu also attacked the work of Carleton Stevens Coon, an American anthropologist at Harvard. In 1939, a new and completely rewritten edition of an earlier, 1899 work by William Z. Ripley, *The Races of Europe*, was published by Coon. Both versions of the text argued in favor of varying origins for the different “races” of man (and, in many minds, varying levels of intelligence and importance).<sup>109</sup>

Another pioneer in the dismantling of the “Grantian” understanding of anthropology was Franz Boas, a Jewish refugee from Europe and a member of Columbia University's faculty. Boas, a longtime critic of the Grantian view of race, pushed for the drafting of a “Scientist's

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<sup>107</sup> Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak – Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 395.

<sup>108</sup> Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth – The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 5-7.

<sup>109</sup> *The Races of Europe* is full of detailed measurements of subjects' heads, from a variety of ethnicities, comparing one group to another, and analyzing the differences between sub-groups that belong to larger “familial” groups. – Carleton Stevens Coon, *The Races of Europe* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939).

Manifesto,” that would, hopefully, once and for all, expunge “white dominance” views from the center of academia, and relegate them to the fringe. The Manifesto was drafted in December of 1938 and signed by over 1,284 scholars and scientists, including three Nobel Prize winners and sixty-four members of the National Academy of Sciences.<sup>110</sup>

This push to rid scholarly, and eventually all, American literature of the eugenicist view of race was in part a product of, as well as a rider of, the widespread resentment Americans felt towards Nazi Germany. The regime’s rhetoric concerning a “master race,” was an ideal that (in the popular imagination, if not in actual, daily life for minorities) went against the egalitarian notion of America itself. With the hatred of Nazi Germany accelerated by America’s entry into the war, and the need to cement an understanding of what separates “us” from “them,” the rejection of the “master race” mentality was one of the first things to be jettisoned from the popular American mindset.

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the aspects of “legitimate” nativism, as defined by Zolberg and covered in the previous chapter, carried over into the “new” enemies of the Second World War, the Nazis and the Japanese (with the other Axis powers, such as Italy, usually being lumped together with the Nazis.) Assaults on the morality, language, culture, and physical characteristics of the “other.” Nativist imagery survived (with some exceptions) in the depictions of the Nazis, and, to a larger extent, the Japanese. Not only did the yellow peril transfer to the Japanese in particular, but this transition affected other Asiatic groups (Chinese and Koreans, for example) in that their depictions were less demonic, and in many cases, noble and heroic. This chapter differs from the previous in that an examination of the heroes (as

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<sup>110</sup> Barkan, 337.

opposed to primarily the villains) is undertaken, to better elucidate what was considered “good” and “American.” It is also the purpose of this chapter to show a shift in America’s collective response to racial differences, to show an augmentation of the nativist view that had dominated the decades prior to the Second World War. This is not to say that blatantly-racist imagery and actions had disappeared. The creation of internment camps such as Manzanar during World War II, and the continued use of “yellow-face” acting in Hollywood is proof of that not being the case. Nevertheless, taking into account a wider view of the period, a definite change can be seen if one compares the themes found in works from the early pulps, such as “Yellow Men and Gold” (*Adventure* magazine, 1910), with those of the 1940s, such as “How Japan Debauches Chinese Girls” (*Argosy*, 1942).

## The Heroes

“Extremely dark of hair, of eyes and skin, moderately tall, and shaped with that compact, breathtaking symmetry that the male figure sometimes assumes, a brilliantly devised, aggressive head topping his broad shoulders, graceful, a man vehemently alive, a man with the promise of a young God.”<sup>111</sup>

- *Gladiator* (1930)

Thus was described the protagonist of Philip Wylie’s *Gladiator*. Wylie’s Hugo Danner is a character whose importance to the entire idea of the fictional, American superhero cannot be underestimated. The product of natal bioengineering on the part of his father, Hugo showed tremendous strength, unbelievably fast reflexes and the ability to leap great distances. All such

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<sup>111</sup> Philip Wylie, *Gladiator* (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1974), 58.

capabilities were later shared by Superman, whose creators made no secret of the book's influence on them. Danner was just one of a number of heroes to appear in the popular literature of the time that supplemented the definition of what was American, by what it was not. The American (and the American hero) was not of a weak frame. He had no physical associations with "degenerates" from Asia or Eastern Europe. Rather, he was a near perfect individual, his perfection defined by both his actions, as well as by his physical, "ultra-Caucasian" attributes.

In October, 1912, pulp magazine *All-Story Weekly* (prior to its absorption into *Argosy* in 1919) began publishing the adventures of Tarzan of the Apes, by Edgar Rice Burroughs. The titular character was an Aryan-like being, who both educated himself, and ruled over his jungle kingdom, with an innate sense of civilization. It was as if, regardless of his upbringing, his ethnicity precluded him from the savagery Burroughs attributes to Tarzan's enemies. The "black warriors," whose "yellow teeth were filed to sharp points, and their great protruding lips added still further to the low and bestial brutishness of their appearance," are portrayed as the very antithesis of the noble, Caucasian king of the jungle.<sup>112</sup> Burroughs's other Anglo-American "super-man" was John Carter, who first appeared in "Under the Moons of Mars" in 1912, again in *All-Story Weekly*. Later collected and reprinted in novel form as *A Princess of Mars*, the initial John Carter story spawned an ever-increasing library of Martian fiction that would see publication in a series of novels and pulps, as well as in film and radio dramas. John Carter was a gentleman of Virginian origins, whom his neighbors praised and whose slaves "fairly worshipped the ground he trod." After being accidently transported to the planet Barsoom

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<sup>112</sup> Edgar Rice Burroughs, *Tarzan of the Apes* (New York: A.L. Burt Company, 1914), 107.

(Mars), Carter begins a war of conquest that pits him against races of black, red, yellow and green Martians.<sup>113</sup>

After World War I, during the years of America's extreme levels of xenophobia and nativism, the pulp magazines used both the heroism of the Anglo-American and evil of the "other" to add further nativist elements to general fiction series, and later to magazines devoted solely to the exploits of the archetypal, American hero. Published in the August 1928 issue of *Amazing Stories*, "Armageddon 2419 A.D." by Philip Francis Nowlan was a work of fiction in which the superiority and righteousness of the Anglo-American would be displayed, not in the present, but in the far future.<sup>114</sup> Anthony "Buck" Rogers, an American who had fallen into a state of suspended animation after a toxic mine cave-in, awakes in the twenty-fifth century and finds America in ruins, due to the ravages of "the Han."

World domination was in the hands of Mongolians, and the center of world power lay in inland China, with Americans one of the few races of mankind unsubdued – and it must be admitted in fairness to the truth, not worth the trouble of subduing in the eyes of the Han Airlords who ruled North America as titular tributaries of the Most Magnificent.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Edgar Rice Burroughs, *The Martian Tales Trilogy* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 3. – It is interesting to note that in the John Carter tales Mars is filled with such chaos between the myriad of races, due to the previous, highly-civilized race of Martians allowing inbreeding among the colors to occur, therefore creating a "bastardized Mars," devoid of any of the higher achievements or civilization of the earlier, pure Martian race. (81) Carter is also given something of a messianic quality. Burroughs points out, after Carter's adventures on Mars and subsequent death, that his tomb is constructed in such a fashion so that it "can be opened only from the inside." (6)

<sup>114</sup> The pulp magazine *Amazing Stories*, which began publication in April of 1926, is, along with its editor Hugo Gernsback, credited with the creation of both modern science fiction, and its related fandom. First calling the new field "scientification," *Amazing Stories* nurtured a small, devoted fanbase, made of readers who would eventually go on to strengthen the genre, such as Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, and novelists Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov. See Michael Ashley, ed., *The History of the Science Fiction Magazine – Vol. 1 1926-1935* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1976); Everett F. Bleiler, *Science-Fiction – The Gernsback Years* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1998); and Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York: Basic Books, 2004) for more insight into *Amazing Stories'* impact, and the history of science-fiction in America.

<sup>115</sup> Philip Francis Nowlan, "Armageddon 2419 A.D.," *Project Gutenberg*, last modified May 26, 2010, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32530/32530-h/32530-h.htm>.

With the aid of other “wild Americans”, left alone in the forests that once were home to their former glorious cities, Rogers fights to unite the scattered tribes of Americans and battle against the hegemony of the conquering Han.

Rogers’ exploits in the far future against the Han, mirrored, racially at least, the battles fought in the present by his contemporaries in the pulps, such as *Argosy’s* Peter the Brazen and *Adventure’s* detective duo of Hazard and Partridge. Robert E. Howard’s Conan the Barbarian, another character who evoked the image of the strong, virile Caucasian male as the lone vestige of civilization in an otherwise uncivilized world, also appeared during this time period, in the pages of *Weird Tales* in 1932. As the popularity and readership of the pulps increased in the 1930s, titles devoted to a single, titular character were introduced. Masked vigilantes such as The Shadow, The Phantom Detective, and The Spider appeared in the early 30s, and all were of the same stock. They were all strong and powerful caucasians who also happened to be quite wealthy, a combination of the traditional American ethnic distinctiveness with that of the American capitalist identity. Doc Savage, who first appeared in his own magazine in 1933, was the very definition of the “great, white” caucasian hero, whose skin gleamed a godly bronze and to whom all manner of scientific and philosophical discoveries were attributed. As the 1930s progressed comic books, first appearing in 1933, became the obvious successor to the pulp’s position as the primary form of popular, printed escapism. In the decade between the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the Empire’s 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, among growing fears of both Japanese imperialism in the East and Nazi aggression in Europe, the Nazi and the Japanese became increasingly visible as the enemy that the clean-cut, American hero would be forced to battle, sooner or later. Barbarous belligerence, in the late 1930s and 1940s

became just as much an identifying marker of the un-American “other” as race had been in years past.

## Pulps and Comics before America’s Involvement in the Second World War

“Super-American – One Man Against  
the Mad Dogs of Europe!”

- *Fight Comics No. 15 (October, 1941)*

Despite diplomatic overtures intended to reassure the Axis that America had no intention of getting involved in the Second World War, United States participation was understood by many to be an eventuality by the beginning of the 1940s. America had already made clear who its enemies were, first by the 1940 oil embargo against Japan following the Empire’s seizure of French-Indochina, and followed by the initiation of the Lend-Lease program in the spring of 1941. In the popular culture, the battle lines were being drawn as well. While Superman, Batman, and the other superheroes were originally created to right domestic, societal ills, as the likelihood of American involvement in World War II increased, so too did the number of comic characters sent preemptively sent to the European and Asiatic fronts.<sup>116</sup> Such use of the heroes was both patriotic and idealistic. According to Captain America co-creator Jack Kirby, “Captain America was created for a time that needed noble figures. . . We weren’t at

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<sup>116</sup> In his first appearance (*Action Comics* No. 1 – June, 1938), Superman saves an innocent woman from execution, beats a wife-batterer into submission, and journeys to Washington D.C. to face a corrupt politician. In his inaugural story (*Detective Comics* No. 27 – May, 1939), Batman solves a case involving a wealthy “captain of industry” who has murdered his business partners for monetary gain.

war yet, but everyone knew it was coming. That's why Captain America was born; America needed a superpatriot."<sup>117</sup> And, indeed, Captain America was only one of many "superpatriots" to appear in comic books in the years preceding 1941. This patriotism, however, also reveals a sense of idealism. It represents a manner of fantasy on the part of isolationist America, the idea that possibly America's involvement in the war could be avoided. The hope that someone would arrive, just in the nick of time as many superheroes did, to avert the coming disaster. The fact that many superheroes battled first nationally ambiguous proxies of Germany and Japan, followed by those countries directly named, reveals both this sense of idealism, as well as the pragmatic realization that, eventually, America could not avoid entanglement.

The threat of war also appeared in the pulp magazines of the time. Some pulps presented short fiction that foretold near-apocalyptic levels of destruction in America's future as a result of the coming war. Others featured stories of valiant heroes either preventing such a conflict, or emerging from the rubble to rebuild the country. With a few exceptions (such as the *Thrilling Wonder Tales* pieces to be examined later), the pulps featured more realistic, albeit somewhat depressing images of future war, usually describing scenes of future American subjugation. For the most part, the more hopeful imagery of the costumed comic heroes was absent from the pulps.

*Argosy Weekly*, in its July 16, 1938 issue, premiered the first installment of a six-part serial, "The Invasion of America," by Frederick C. Painton, with the ominous descriptor: "This is the story of the second World War – the conflagration kindled by the world's unrest and fanned into flame by one man's ruthless ambition to become master of mankind. Beginning a powerful

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<sup>117</sup>Ron Goulart, *Great American Comic Books* (Lincolnwood: Publications International, Ltd., 2001), 117.

novel of Fascism tomorrow.”<sup>118</sup> (see *Figure I*) The narrator explains the international scene that neutral America faces in the story, an image that was not too different from the real world:

Hitler was threatening Czechoslovakia, and demanding colonies on pain of drastic action. Mussolini was mobilizing troops on the Libyan border, threatening to invade Egypt. England was having another cabinet crisis and the anti-America prime minister, Joseph St. John, was castigating the United States bitterly for failing to back up England’s protests to a new Japanese invasion of China. The Spanish Rebels had launched the final offensive against Valencia. Russia was purging itself of anti-Stalinites.”<sup>119</sup>

Despite continued negotiations between Secretary of State “Crull” and Japan, relations between the two nations remain tense. Unfortunately, all efforts at peace are shattered with the deaths of Japan’s crown prince and his wife, an act of assassination that receives sympathy from both Hitler and Mussolini, and is blamed on the U.S. After days of silence on the part of the Japanese Emperor, the story’s first installment ends with radio broadcasts reporting a Japanese attack on the Philippines and the taking of Manila. By the end of the story several issues later, the American republic had been toppled and reorganized into a monarchy.

The May, 27, 1939 edition of *Argosy Weekly* contained the short novelette “Tomorrow,” by pulp mainstay Arthur Leo Zagat. The cover illustration forecast a foreboding view: a screaming Asiatic soldier, bearing a (seemingly) Japanese uniform and a bayoneted rifle, standing astride a burning continental United States, and a question, printed to the left of his head; “Will your children walk in chains as slaves of the Yellow Horde?” (see *Figure II*) Similar in vein to Buck Roger’s inaugural story, “Armageddon 2149 A.D.,” “Tomorrow” paints a picture of a wild and backward America, destroyed by “yellow men” who “had come out of the East to

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<sup>118</sup> Frederick C. Painton, “The Invasion of America,” *Argosy Weekly* July 16, 1938, 4.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

make this world a Hell,” and populated by the remnants of that bygone world, white Americans.<sup>120</sup> It is not quite clear how long it has been since America had been conquered. Children are living in caves, speaking of “Old Ones” and “the yesterday,” while airplanes and rifles are still in use by the enemy, which is composed of both “yellow” and “black” men. While America has been destroyed, it is prophesied that the white man will once again reclaim his own land from the “yellow horde.” The story concludes with the protagonist Dikar’s promise to lead the American revival. “I have to,” Dikar explains “because down there is the America of which the man spoke, an[d] this is the tomorrow he talked about, an[d] we are the children of yesterday who will re-conquer those green and pleasant fields for democracy, and liberty, and freedom.”<sup>121</sup> “Tomorrow” must have proven popular with audiences, as a sequel story, “Children of Tomorrow,” also written by Zagat, appeared in the June 17, 1939, issue of *Argosy*. “They are the hope and promise of America – these Lost Children who by a miracle survived the destruction of their generation,” reads the sequel’s tagline. “But before their Tomorrow can come they shall destroy the Barbarians who ravage their country’s green fields and rolling hills – for the night cannot last forever.”<sup>122</sup> “Children” covers the battle between the surviving Americans and “Captain Li Logo,” leader of the “hordes who came out of the East” and commander of the “yellow and black men,” whom Dikar defeats by the end, bringing America one step closer to regaining her sovereignty. Zagat’s saga of future Americans battling an evil, Asiatic horde continued to be successful with readers, as evidenced by the stories’ continuation into four more installments, the final chapter “Long Road to Tomorrow” published almost three

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<sup>120</sup> Arthur Leo Zagat, “Tomorrow,” *Argosy Weekly*, May 27 1939, 26.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>122</sup> Arthur Leo Zagat, “Children of Tomorrow,” *Argosy Weekly*, June 17, 1939, 5.

years after the first, in the March 1, 1941, issue of *Argosy*, with the entire epic eventually being collected and titled “The Tomorrow Trilogy” (with the six short stories being combined so as to create three, larger installments).

Even the science fiction-centric magazines got in on the act. In an issue dated a month after Hitler’s September invasion of Poland, the October 1939 edition of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, billed as “The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction,” offered Oscar J. Friend’s “Experiment with Destiny,” which provided a fantastical and idealistic solution to the belligerence of Europe. A recent German émigré and imminent scientist, who believes in “the destiny of humanity, a great destiny which transcends national boundaries and the selfish greed and ambition of any one race,” creates both a device that can instantly transport individuals from one location to another, as well as a ray that is able to greatly extend the life of anyone it “zaps.”<sup>123</sup> Using these two innovations, the scientist transports the “mad dictators of Europe” to his laboratory in America, and offers them a choice: take advantage of his life-extending ray, and continue the relative stability they had brought to their countries (despite their ruthless policies), or die, right then and there. The world leaders choose long life. It would seem that the ray also had a secondary affect, of making those who it touched more sympathetic to the world-egalitarian views of its creator. Upon awakening again in the United States, all of the leaders promptly call for a peace council in Washington, and the protagonist of the story is hopeful concerning the world’s future: “From all appearances these were fit men indeed to rule Europe for a period of a full one hundred years, molding their countrymen into such an inflexible pattern of peace and

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<sup>123</sup> Oscar J. Friend, “Experiment with Destiny,” *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, October 1939, 69.

charity and good will for four or five more generations that hatreds and prejudices and wars would become things accursed.”<sup>124</sup>

The September 1940 issue of *Amazing Stories* contained stories that both spoke to America’s fear of an Oriental invader, as well as the ambitions of power-mad European dictators. Robert Moore Williams’s “Fifth Column of Mars” combines the fear of foreign saboteurs plotting from within, with an otherworldly, Asiatic menace appearing at the height of Japanese imperialism. The cover features a Martian of stereotypical Oriental design: a bald head, beset with gigantic ears, bushy eyebrows atop slanted eyes, and fangs protruding from a grimacing mouth surrounded by extremely long whiskers (*see Figure III*). While tracking a ring of foreign spies, a Federal agent is whisked away to Mars, and encounters a menace to America grotesque and evil in nature:

The creature looked a little like a man. There was one horrible exception – he had a fanged mouth! The fangs were like tiger teeth, curved, round and yellow. The face was malevolent, evil. The fangs made it more sinister. . . Displaying fangs, their captor answered. His voice was high and sing-song. It vaguely resembled Chinese. But it was in no language known to Keenan.<sup>125</sup>

While Martian, the villain of the story not only employs traditional “yellow peril” imagery, but also does so in such a way that, given the period in which it was created, creates a correlation with the fears concerning rising Japanese belligerence

The issue’s second feature story was “Blitzkrieg – 1950,” by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr. The story’s inspiration is apparent from its tagline: “Coale had the secret of U-235 in his grasp.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>125</sup> Robert Moore Williams, “The Fifth Column of Mars,” *Amazing Stories*, September, 1940, 11-12.

Then out of the sky came the minions of a conqueror seeking atomic power.”<sup>126</sup> The goal of every major world power by the beginning of the 1940s was to acquire atomic power for the use of military purposes. This goal, as well as the Nazi’s use of fantastically modern methods of warfare, such as the blitzkrieg and their eventual mastery of the dreaded V-2, provided the characterization for the story’s antagonist Grom, who, following the end of the “European War,” had become ruler over a federated “United Europe.” “In the old days,” one of the story’s protagonists recalls, “conquerors made slaves of the strong, put them to work. Grom’s modern. He’s made slaves of the world’s best brains, using their genius to perfect the greatest of all war machines, and to deprive his future enemies of scientists.”<sup>127</sup> The American hero eventually succeeds in preventing the secret of the volatile element from falling into the hands of the power-mad dictator, destroying the villain’s enrichment plant (as well as the villain himself) in a terrific explosion that ensures that with the secret of the unstable compound “in the hands of our government, America will remain inviolate!”<sup>128</sup> While both of these stories are based in the more fantastical realm of science fiction, they still relate the fears and hopes of the time. The fear of an alien invader (and, in many eyes, the Japanese were as alien as they come) and the hope that the ruthless warlords of Europe would eventually be stopped by American do-gooders are both present, even in narratives that are quite far from the “real” world of more general fiction.

The pulp magazines, by the beginning of the 1940s, were undergoing a change of sorts. Many genres were still popular, such as that of the “pulp hero” field, but it was in the pages of

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<sup>126</sup> Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., “Blitzkrieg – 1950,” *Amazing Stories*, September, 1940, 85.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

pulp-leader *Argosy* that one witnesses a profound change, in both purpose and content. While the other leading general fiction magazine, *Adventure*, was able to retain its identity as a primarily fiction-orientated periodical, industry mainstay *Argosy* was undergoing something of an identity crisis; with the sales of pulps dropping and the popularity of “slicks” and comic books rising, *Argosy* was attempting to redefine itself in a new market. These years saw the magazine shed its mostly “all-fiction” persona, and adopt more articles and “current event” pieces, until it converted to a “slick” magazine in 1943. In the months preceding Pearl Harbor, *Argosy* printed several “ripped from the headlines” style pieces. These articles generally followed a fairly similar formula: beginning with a fictitious account of warfare, wherein either Germany or Japan has attacked America, followed by details concerning the maimed and killed. The piece finally returns to “reality,” in order to posit several questions and possible answers concerning the impending attack *Argosy*’s editorial apparently believed to be inevitable. In its September 27, 1941 issue, *Argosy Weekly* printed “We Bomb Tokyo!” by Jay Hamilton, which predicted a Japanese attack on the American naval forces in the Pacific, how such an attack might be orchestrated, and what the American response would possibly be.

We Bomb Tokyo! . . . Who’s afraid of the Little Yellow Wolf? Not your Uncle Sammy! Let the war lords of Japan beware: America is through with appeasement. The Panay bombed? So sorry! The Embassy damaged? So very sorry! The Tutuila? It won’t happen again! . . . Well, it had better not; and here are the reasons why. . . The B-19’s roared their answer, and a holocaust spread through flimsy paper houses!<sup>129</sup>

“We Bomb Tokyo!” was one of many articles of the time that predicted a possible Japanese attack in the Pacific, and provided several options as to how America would retaliate.

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<sup>129</sup>Jay Hamilton, “We Bomb Tokyo!,” *Argosy Weekly*, September 27, 1941, 7.

The October 4, 1941 issue of *Argosy* followed with “Nazi Terror Over New York,” by Robinson MacLean, a rather ambitious attempt at predicting the when, how, and number of casualties, and possible reasons for, an attack on America by Nazi Germany. With illustrations depicting Nazi bombers bombarding New York City, the article’s tagline reads: “Plummeting, screaming tearing at the Nation’s vitals with parcels from Hell – oh, the Nazis can come: make no mistake about that. What every New Yorker – every American – wants to know is: What are the chances of being maimed, made homeless? *Argosy* tells the story.”<sup>130</sup> In answering his own question as to from where the first attack will come, Maclean responds:

Of course, Germany, since we’re talking about bombing of the continental United States. If we were to include Alaska, the Philippines, and Pacific wayports for the clippers, we’d have to consider Japan. But Japan has never distinguished herself as an adept operator of long-range motor aircraft. . . . If you want to bet that the first hostile bomb to burst on U.S. soil will come from any but a German airplane, you can get your money covered, at almost any odds, at almost any Army Air Corps field.<sup>131</sup>

After providing several reasons as to why Hitler may want to attack the United States as well as conveying the threat of “incipient fifth columnists” in the event of such an attack, the article ends with the prescient prediction that “. . . if an attack on America is made, it is unlikely that a formal notice, or declaration of war, would precede it. That is the modern method of war.”<sup>132</sup> *Argosy* continued to suggest that America would not be able to remain neutral for much longer with such pieces as “I Escaped the Nazis!” (November 1, 1941); “Destruction of the Panama Canal!” (November 15, 1941); “Veni, Vidi, - Vichy” (November 29, 1941), and, likely, the last

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<sup>130</sup> Robinson MacLean, “Nazi Terror Over New York,” *Argosy Weekly*, October 4, 1941, 6.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

issue to be distributed before Pearl Harbor, “Peril in the Pacific” (December 13, 1941). While pulps like *Argosy* struggled to stay relevant, a relatively new medium was growing in popularity.

The comic books were, in the words of comic historian and writer Arie Kaplan, “one of the few commercial success stories” to originate during the Great Depression.<sup>133</sup> Originally distributed as promotional material in the early 1930s and filled with reprints of popular newspaper strips of the time, the originators of the comic eventually realized the potential of selling new, original material. Thus, the comic industry was born. Anthology titles such as Dell’s *Popular Comics* (begun in 1936) continued publishing newspaper strips alongside original characters, while new companies such as National Allied and Timely released titles, such as *Action Comics* and *Marvel Comics* respectively, with all-new features. With the release of *Action Comics* No. 1 (June, 1938) and its introduction of Superman, the predominant mode of comic book storytelling was cemented; that of the superhero.<sup>134</sup> The comic books inherited from the pulps, among other things, the idea of the foreign “other” and, particularly, the “Yellow Peril.” Both detectives and super-human heroes battled Asiatic menaces. In the comic books, American heroes (usually of the ultra-patriot variety) were sent abroad to battle Axis powers, or their unnamed equivalents, long before America ever entered the conflict raging in Europe and Asia. Many comic book historians, such as Les Daniels and Ron Goulart, write of the early comic creators as something akin to visionaries, seeing that eventually, it would be

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<sup>133</sup> Arie Kaplan, *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews and Comic Books* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2008), 4.

<sup>134</sup> Superman’s unique place in the comic book/nativism discussion should be noted. Coming from an alien planet, Superman is the “ultimate other;” however, Superman can also be seen as the “ideal immigrant” in the eyes of many 1930s Americans. He is different, but has assimilated, and has accepted American culture and values. He comes from a working class background in Kansas, has come to Metropolis, and, in his both of his identities, fights for truth and the righting of societal wrongs. Far from being an outsider, Superman became an American through assimilation, thus reducing any nativist sentiments that could be brought against him.

America's purpose to stop Axis aggression, and therefore wrote their stories around a Hegelian worldview of progression and ideological "manifest destiny." There were probably a few writers putting this much forward-thinking thought into their stories; indeed, many of the "pre-war" war comics seemed to be speaking of spreading American ideals of freedom rather than actually preventing war. It is safe to assume, however, that the comics, as with all published media, were created with what the public was buying in mind. If the sales of pre-war comics are any indication, the public wanted both characters that appealed to the nation's rising patriotism, as well as stories that provided the hope that, in some fantastical way, war could be averted. Such "preventative" measures were performed on the part of comic book heroes, in both "real settings," such as China or Europe, and in fictionalized settings, and against fictionalized nations, proxies for belligerent nations themselves. The villains of these stories featured traditional nativist imagery of foreigners, transplanted onto America's (likely) enemies.

One aspect that should be taken into account when examining comic books (as well as many other periodicals, both then and now) is that the publication date printed on the cover and in the copyright indica was not exactly when the issue was released. In the case of comic books in particular, the publication date and the actual date that the issue arrived on newsstands varied from one, to possibly several months, so that an issue with a release date of October 1940, was more than likely released to the public at some point in September, or even August. The point of noting this is to show that the fear of foreign invasion on the part of Americans, as demonstrated by the growth of such stories in their popular literature, stretched back many months, and years, prior to Pearl Harbor.

Before superheroes fought Nazis and the Japanese, nationally and ethnically-ambiguous enemies were the villains, albeit in stories that made it quite possible to know who was being referenced. In the third issue of M.L.J. Publication's *Pep Comics* (April, 1940), the ultra-patriot The Shield, operating under orders directly from "Top Cop" J. Edgar Hoover, investigates the sinking of an Armed Forces vessel in New York Harbor (in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, no less).<sup>135</sup> The Shield discovers, not only that the vessel was sunk using a new type of underwater mine, but also that the mines themselves are being laid by a fantastic new type of submarine that can both maneuver underwater and fly through the air. A fear of a combined, international assault on America can be seen when the Shield stows away upon this craft, and is taken to a large, underground cavern and giant subterranean city contained therein. Upon seeing the crew exit the ship, The Shield exclaims, "Men of all races and lands, but in one uniform! It looks like an international army!"<sup>136</sup> Indeed, the following panel depicts the crew as belonging to African, Asian and Caucasian ethnicities, all garbed in the same, militaristic uniforms. While ostensibly international, the enemy is obviously intended to invoke German imagery, with their uniforms greatly resembling *Wermacht* uniforms, especially that of their leader, Count Zongarr, who, aside from the stereotypically German title of "Count," also wears a uniform of obvious Teutonic inspiration. The Shield's presence is discovered, and he is captured and incarcerated inside one of the gigantic mines to be placed in New York's harbor, but not before being told by Count Zongarr of how the mines work. Escaping from his spherical prison, The Shield uses that knowledge to transmit the mine's unique frequency, causing them

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<sup>135</sup> In *Shield-Wizard Comics* No. 1 (MLJ Publications, Summer, 1940), it is revealed that the Shield held a grudge against the Nazis, even before assuming his superhero identity; the Shield, alias Joe Higgins, gained his superior strength and reflexes from drinking a chemical concoction created by his father, who was murdered by Nazi fifth columnists during an attempt to steal the formula.

<sup>136</sup> "The Shield – G-Man Extraordinaire," *Pep Comics* 3 (MLJ Publications, April 1940).

to explode and obliterate the entire underground city (and presumably, Count Zongarr) before they even leave port. The story is notable not only for its unnamed, but obviously Nazi-inspired villains, but also for the Count's reasons for forming his army in the first place: "We will drive America into the war," the Count proclaims; "In the end, when all countries are weakened, we shall rise to power!"

Another hero that arrived just in time to fight a fictionalized (but obviously German) enemy was the Super-American, who first appeared in *Fight Comics* No. 15, in October of 1941 (see *Figure VIII*). In this debut story, war is raging overseas and "Even in America, totalitarian traitors destroy and murder for their power-mad masters." In the wake of all this, an American scientist constructs the "Chronopticon," a gigantic lens that allows him to see into the far future.<sup>137</sup> Contacting the President of "an amazing race of Future Americans" and pleading with them for help, a lone warrior from the future is sent back to help America, an unnamed soldier who takes on the mantle of the Super-American, just as "fifth columnists are marching on the Capitol!" Surrounded by exclamations of near-Messianic praise on the part of thankful Americans ("Lead Us!!" "He's the one we've been waiting for!"), the Super-American, all in one story, prevents a dam from being bombed, fights off a battalion of invading tanks, thwarts assassination attempts on several American senators, and rescues President Roosevelt from the foreign usurper who is responsible for all of the anarchy, Tyrannus. In the final panel of the story, Super-American reminds his readers that "Nobody can conquer America if we all stick together! Unity is the strength of democracy!" While the offending nation is not named, the German-styled uniforms (complete with armbands), the propensity on the part of dying

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<sup>137</sup> "Super-American – One Man Against the Mad Dogs of Europe!," *Fight Comics* 15 (Fight Stories, Inc., October 1941).

enemies to yell “ACH!”, and the Hitler look-alike that appears on both the cover, as well as the story’s splash page, point to the obvious state that the reader is intended to correlate with the totalitarian forces of Tyrannus. Other comic book characters, however, as the war drew ever closer to American shores, bypassed the national proxies such as Zongarr and Tyrannus, and instead attacked the Nazis and Japanese themselves.

In what is certainly one of the most iconic comic book images in the history of the medium, the cover of the March 1941 debut issue of *Captain America Comics* features Captain America smashing into Hitler’s war room. With a television screen in the background showing saboteurs blowing up an American munitions factory, the cover depicts the Captain punching the Fuehrer in the face. Captain America is both a product of, and a response to, Nazi aggression towards neutral America. Part of a secret “super-soldier” project created by President Roosevelt himself to combat a possible Nazi menace, scrawny “4-F” (rejected draftee) Steve Rogers is given a serum that, almost instantaneously, transforms him into the super-powered, blond haired, and blue-eyed Captain America. Before any more “Captains” can be produced, however, a Nazi spy in the program murders the doctor who created the formula, ensuring that Rogers is the first, and only, Captain that America will ever have.<sup>138</sup> Later joined by his youthful friend, Bucky Barnes, Captain America battles the evil Red Skull (second in power only to Hitler himself) and other villains of the Nazi and Japanese strain in one of the era’s most popular series, which ran from 1941 to 1949. Like Captain America, both new, and established heroes took the fight to the enemy, before the enemy could strike first.

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<sup>138</sup>“Case No. 1 – Meet Captain America,” *Captain America Comics* 1 (Timely, March 1941).

In the February 1941 issue of the anthology series *Popular Comics* (No. 60), the team of Professor Supermind and Son first appeared. American Dan Warren, upon seeing images via one of his father's unbelievable inventions of "submarines of a foreign power" invading American harbors, volunteers to be the test subject in the elder Warren's greatest experiment: the harnessing of fantastic, otherworldly energies inside a living being.<sup>139</sup> Now capable of flight, telepathy and incredible strength, Dan sets out to battle America's enemies, both foreign and domestic (see *Figure IX*). Even the "first" comic book super-hero, Superman, took pre-emptive measures to keep America safe from European belligerents. In a strip exclusively created for the February 27, 1940, edition of *Look* magazine, Superman flies, first to Germany to take hold of Hitler, and then to Soviet Russia, grabbing Stalin. He carries them both to Geneva, where the League of Nations condemns them for "modern history's greatest crime – unprovoked aggression against defenseless countries!"<sup>140</sup> (see *Figure X*)

Many characters, from a variety of publishers, faced the Nazi and Japanese menace prior to America's involvement in the Second World War. Timely's Namor, the Sub-Mariner, a half human Prince of Atlantis, who initially hated the surface world since his 1939 debut had, by the time of the first issue of his own self-titled series (Spring, 1941), taken to fighting Nazis.<sup>141</sup> In July of 1941, the first issue of *Daredevil Comics* featured the cover story, "Daredevil Battles Hitler," in which the acrobatic hero Daredevil fights against the combined might of Adolf Hitler,

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<sup>139</sup> "Professor Supermind and Son," *Popular Comics* 60 (Dell Publishing, February 1941).

<sup>140</sup> *Superman Sunday Classics – Strips 1-183: 1939-1943* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1999), 190.

<sup>141</sup> While National Allied, home of Superman and Batman, did not get too violent in their dealings with Nazis, Timely's Sub-Mariner was ruthless in his encounters with the fascists – see Figures XVII-XX. Comic historian Ian Gordon also points out that Superman and Batman were more associated with bond drives and homefront support, as opposed to other "frontline" characters. – Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 141.

and the Asiatic menace, The Claw. Even Ka-Zar, Timely Comic's answer to Burroughs's Tarzan, battled the Nazis when they invaded his jungle refuge, in the August 1941 edition of *Marvel Mystery Comics*, No. 22.

By the time the first superheroes appeared, Japan and the United States were on uncertain ground diplomatically. America's condemnation of Japanese atrocities in Nanjing and throughout China, in addition to the oil embargo the U.S. levied against Japan in late 1941, placed the two powers in a precarious situation. America's Lend-Lease program with the Allied Nations similarly deteriorated the United States' relations with Nazi Germany. With the December 7, 1941, attack on the Pearl Harbor Naval Base, and the declarations of war that flew, in both directions, across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Japanese and Nazi belligerence changed from a mere literary tool, to a very real threat; one that the pulp and comic book writers were only too eager to exploit.

## The German

“Smashing through, Captain America came face to face with Hitler...”

- *Captain America Comics No. 1 (1941)*

American depictions of the bloodthirsty and brutish Hun of Germany reach back to the First World War; propaganda posters and stories of the time detailed the barbarism of the German hordes, with images ranging from German soldiers carrying off American women, to Kaiser Wilhelm even accepting praise from Satan (*see Figures XI and XII*). After the war, a multitude of war pulps appeared in America, with stories telling of American heroism overseas.

The Germans in these stories predominantly fit into one of two categories. Either, the German was rather stupid and slow-witted, or he was a deadly enemy worthy of fear, as well as admiration. In neither case were physical exaggerations utilized, as they had been in the war posters past. *Action Stories*, in its May 1926 issue, contained the short novelette "Lady Luck," in which American doughboy Bud Nolan, after being separated from his regiment, finds himself in the company of a German soldier, also estranged from the rest of his detachment. The German (with the stereotypically German sounding name of Heinrich Hinkelhausen) and the American try to stare each other down, each trying to convince the other that it would be best to simply just accept the fact that he has been captured, and to come with him in search of his respective army; eventually, Nolan is able to beat the dim-witted German through card games, eventually betting both his own freedom, and the German's imprisonment, ending in Nolan's triumphal march back to his army's base, with the German prisoner in tow.

Another case of German stupidity in the pulps is found in a 1935 issue of *Spy Novels Magazine*, in the story "The Ace of Intrigue," by Dana R. Marsh. In this novelette, an American secret agent is able to dupe the Imperial High Command and members of the Prussian royal family itself, into thinking that he is in fact a German soldier who had been captured, and then escaped. Using the cover story that he was instrumental in the escape of one of the Kaiser's captured sons, the American ingratiates himself into the German hierarchy. Sitting at the same table as Kaiser Wilhelm and the "huge, ponderous von Hindenburg," the American (known only as Major -A, so that the hero of this "true" tale could retain his anonymity) learns of various plans and military arrangements while fooling the majority of the Germans in his presence.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Dana R Marsh, "Ace of Intrigue," *Spy Novels Magazine*, 1935, 42.

If not dimwitted, the German soldier of the pulps was a very astute and much feared warrior, usually to be found in the types of dogfights made famous by the exploits of the Red Baron. The September 1933 issue of *Lone Eagle* featured a tale describing the deadly menace of ace-German pilot “Adolf Goering” (an obvious allusion to two cotemporary Nazis who were seen as causing trouble) and the devilish “black- crossed wings of the German Fokkers commanded by Baron Stieger von Littman.”<sup>143</sup> The March, 1930 edition of *Flying Aces* contained the menace of “the arrogant double-eagles of Austria,” and the January 1934 issue of *Adventure* told the tale of “The Last Dispatch,” in which the Allies had to contend with German U-Boats patrolling off the coast of Scotland.<sup>144</sup> As German aggression in Europe intensified, more belligerent and threatening images of the Germans (or in some cases, unnamed European nationals) appeared, and in these cases, physical depictions, especially in the comics, were once again utilized in further “monster-ization.” “Hunnish” interpretations of Germans from years past, as well as the “uncivilized” and “barbarous” nature of many Europeans that warranted the “Americanization” programs of years past, were utilized to separate Americans from this newest incarnation of the “other.” (see *Figure XIII*)

Taking cues from the depictions found both in war propaganda and in the more-recent pulps, comic books following America’s entry into the Second World War in December of 1941 depicted Nazis in two distinct ways: that of the Nazi spy (the enemy within, the dreaded “fifth columnist”), and the Nazi mad scientist (or super-villain). The notion of the fifth columnist spoke to the nativist fears of an enemy from within, as well as to the xenophobia concerning

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<sup>143</sup> “Harold F. Cruiskshank, “Drome of the Living Dead,” *Daredevil Aces*, November, 1934, 106; Capt. Kerry McRoberts, “The Flying Kitchens,” *Lone Eagle*, September, 1933, 115.

<sup>144</sup> T.W. Ford, “Prisoners of the Plane,” *Flying Aces*, March, 1930, 185; Gordon Carrol, “The Last Dispatch,” *Adventure*, January, 1934, 77.

outside influences wreaking havoc within the United States. Both characters, but most commonly the mad scientist and super-villain, were depicted as abominable in physical appearance, rotund and muscular giants usually sporting a bald head with fangs and a pig-like nose, as well as the stereotypical German monocle. Such imagery's relation to the earlier, World War I depiction of "the Hun" is found, less in such physical deformities, and more so in their depravity and disregard for human life. The Nazi mad scientists and super-villains were performing deeds that were just as likely to give them thanks from Lucifer, as had been the actions of the Kaiser years prior. Such demonization was just as forceful as any visual depiction.

In the seventh issue of Standard Comics' *The Fighting Yank* (August, 1943), the Yank and Joan have been called, on behalf of the government, to aid in the investigation of a recent series of calamities striking at the heart of American defenses; the literal "breaking-up" of American defense planes, flying routine patrols throughout the country. The Fighting Yank was another of the Ultra-Patriots, who with the aid of his sweetheart Joan (and his deceased, Revolutionary-era ancestor), eventually discover the reasons behind the sudden disintegration of American aviation might: Der Talon. Der Talon is depicted as a Neanderthal-like brute, sporting a metal claw to replace the hand destroyed in the First World War. Der Talon's physical appearance, as well as the disregard he shows for American lives, is the World War II era's answer to the 1918 "Hun." In the third story of the same issue, The Yank, while attending a Bond Drive, foils the plot of several German spies to dynamite the Hoover Dam. In the ninth issue of *The Fighting Yank*, the titular character battles a group of Nazi spies that have infiltrated West Point, and, in a second story fends off arsonists who are using chemically-altered lottery raffle tickets in an attempt to incinerate American homes and infrastructure.

Another Standard Comics publication, *Exciting Comics*, was an anthology series that chronicled the exploits of several super-heroes, such as the Black Terror, The Liberator, and the American Eagle, to name a few. In *Exciting Comics* No. 23 (Dec. 1942), the Black Terror, a timid pharmacist who, alongside his sidekick Tim, is given super-human abilities via a special “druggist’s concoction,” uncovers a plot by Nazi saboteurs to distribute throughout American homes a new type of coal that, once burned in one’s fireplace, releases a toxic gas, capable of spreading throughout entire city blocks. In the same issue, the American Eagle foils a Nazi plot to blow up aircraft factories, and the Liberator breaks up a ring of saboteurs operating on the very grounds of the university campus where his alter-ego teaches. The combination of Hun-like belligerence and depravity, as well as the inability to “fight a fair fight” and resort to sabotage all speak to the previous war’s imagery surrounding the brutish and uncivilized “Hun.”

The Nazi mad-scientist, as well as his comic book counterpart, the Nazi super-villain, are the second most-common depictions of America’s German adversaries to be found in the literature of the time. G-8, hero of the pulp magazine *G-8 and His Battles Aces*, fought a host of mad Teutonic scientists in tales set during the First World War.

The Squadron of Death Flies High! Red are the skies over no Man’s Land as G-8 and his Battles Aces stake their lives on the strangest mission a warbird ever faced. What lies behind the fatal enigma of the masked flying Hun and his squadron of Death, each of whom is ranked on the Allied list of honored dead – but who has risen from the dust of a hero’s grave to strike back at the flag he once served?<sup>145</sup>

Herr Doktor Kreuger, Stahlmaske (a grotesque German soldier who had had half his face blown off by G-8’s sharp use of a firearm), Herr Doktor Wormer, Herr Feuer, and Baron von

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<sup>145</sup> Robert J. Hogan, “The Squadron of Death Flies High!,” *G-8 and His Battles Aces*, December, 1942, 1.

Todscmechker: all were villains of both the hideous and Hunnish variety that returned again and again to plague G-8 during the war years.<sup>146</sup>

The villainous Der Talon was just one of many crazed scientists that American heroes would face over the course of the Second World War in the comics. Captain Battle foiled the schemes of Nazi mastermind Baron Doom, and *Super-Mystery Comics'* Magno the Magnetic Man thwarted saboteurs led by "The Clown," a Nazi genius who had more than a passing resemblance to Batman's Joker.<sup>147</sup> Bill Barnes and Sandy, the pride of American military aviation (and also pulp heroes that had transitioned to comics), battled "Dr. Berlin, Arch-Enemy of America" and his attempts to remake parts of Arizona into a airfield for Nazi bombers, in the first issue of *Air Ace*, published by Street and Smith Publications in January of 1944. In the fall of 1941, several months before Pearl Harbor, Timely's Sub-Mariner, in the third issue of his own series, travelled to neutral Ireland in hopes of overturning the plans of "Mueller, evil genius of the Gestapo" and his plans to use a secret underwater society of druids as slaves in Germany's war machine. The American Eagle, in *Exciting Comics* No. 23 (Dec. 1942) fought against the "wildfire machine" (capable of destroying entire city blocks) and its creator, the nefarious Nazi scientist The Bludgeon, whose ultimate goal is nothing less than to "wipe every living creature from the face of America – and assure a Nazi victory and a great empire for myself!"<sup>148</sup>

The comic book creators of the 1940s left no avenue of dehumanization unchecked, and were often able to combine imagery, such as the joining of the Nazi scientist with the physically disfigured Hunnish brute. In the summer of 1942, the eighth issue of *Human Torch Comics*

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<sup>146</sup> Don Hutchison, *The Great Pulp Heroes* (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1996), 68-70.

<sup>147</sup> Kenneth R. Seppi, *The Magnificent Superheroes of Comics Golden Age* (Effingham: Vintage Features, 1979), 45, 61.

<sup>148</sup>"The American Eagle," *Exciting Comics* 23 (Standard, December 1942).

pitted the titular character, and his ally, Namor the Sub-Mariner, against the evil of Herr Python, a Nazi scientist who is also a half-human, half reptilian abomination of nature, or perhaps of Nazi eugenics gone horribly wrong. Ultra-patriot Captain Terror, in *U.S.A. Comics* No. 4 (December 1941) faced “Dr. Gustave Leech, Nazi Scientist of Sudden Death,” and his plan to prevent aid ships from reaching Britain, thus forcing the English to “think Der Fuehrer’s way when they starve!”<sup>149</sup> The Doctor is monstrous in appearance, with a bald head (covered in Frankenstein monster-like scars), rows of misshapen teeth, pointed ears and bushy eye-brows, under one of which sits the ever-present German monocle (*see Figure XIV*).

With the proliferation of American superheroes, the appearance of Nazi super-villains could not be far behind. Agent Axis threatened National Allied’s Boy Commandos, Hitler lieutenant the Red Skull battled Captain America and Bucky, and *Zip Comics* featured both the evil Baron Gestapo, a monocle-wearing, fanged monstrosity with a blazing swastika across his chest, and the Nazi torture-master Captain Murder. The Hangman faced the evil Captain Swastika in the June, 1942 issue of *Pep Comics* (No. 28); in an attempt to start a massive internal conflict that would hinder America’s ability to wage war, Captain Swastika (sporting a cape, swastikas covering both his chest and his face, and a rather fashionable dress-hat) plans to release all of America’s incarcerated criminals and let them loose upon an unsuspecting nation:

Once again the ominous figure of Capt. Swastika, with another plan of blood and strife. A plan so daring, so vast in scope as to appear impossible of achievement . . . Impossible, you say? Our country is too unified! Nothing is impossible for Capt. Swastika

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<sup>149</sup> “Captain Terror,” *U.S.A. Comics* 4 (Timely, December 1941).

[,] no stroke too bold to tear out the roots of our democracy. But there is still The Hangman to contend with. . . Beware the Hangman's noose, Capt. Swastika!<sup>150</sup>

Too late to prevent the success of the Captain's first phase of his devilish plot, The Hangman is able to infiltrate the Nazi's headquarters, and send a signal to all the crooks to return to base for new orders, where a police contingent is ready to re-arrest them. Of course, Captain Swastika manages to outwit The Hangman, and escapes to bring ruin to America another day.

One of the more popular Nazi super-villains among comic readers to appear during World War II (and, like the Red Skull, is still found in comics decades later) was Fawcett's Captain Nazi, who first appeared in *Master Comics* No. 21, in December of 1941. Captain Nazi was not grotesque like many of his Nazi contemporaries. Rather, he resembled an Aryan Superman. Clad in a green, militaristic uniform with a cape and a giant swastika where Superman's "S" would normally be, Captain Nazi's "Hunnish" characteristics is found in his depravity. He obeys the orders of Hitler to the letter, gladly murdering subordinates his Fuehrer no longer has use for, and regularly kills any American that gets in his way.<sup>151</sup> The character would appear in many of Fawcett's publications until the end of 1944.

The World War II depictions of Germans drew upon imagery already present from World War I, that of the brutish, uncultured Hun rampaging across the free world. When combined with the comic book's inherent science-fiction elements, that image was augmented to become the mad scientist, or even super-villain the bedeviled America's costumed

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<sup>150</sup> "Civil War," *Pep Comics* 28 (MLJ Publications, June 1942).

<sup>151</sup> In recoiling from one of Captain Marvel's punches, Captain Nazi kills an elderly man, and permanently cripples the man's grandson, Freddy Freeman. Moved by the young boy's spirit and courage, Captain Marvel endows him with some of his own abilities, so that whenever Freeman shouts his benefactor's name, he is transformed into Captain Marvel Jr., miniature version of his namesake and perpetual enemy of Captain Nazi. – *Whiz Comics* No. 25 (Fawcett, December 1941).

defenders. It is important to note, however, another important difference between the Hun of 1917, and the Hun of 1941; he was a Nazi first, and a German second, showing further the growing link between this imagery and its focus on ideology. As John Dower, in *War Without Mercy – Race and Power in the Pacific War*, points out, there are such things as good Germans, and bad Germans in the American mindset. Such an understanding, shows a shift in the nativist structure of thought that saturated the 1920s, that, perhaps, ideology mattered more, in some ways, than ethnicity. A good German was one who opposed the Nazis, such as Albert Einstein who was represented in comics by Professor “Reinstein,” the scientist who created the Super-Soldier serum that produced Captain America. In the case of the Axis enemies to be found in the Pacific, there was no such demarcation. While the Chinese were now allies, the comic books followed Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey’s statement in 1944 that “the only good Jap is a Jap who’s been dead for six months.”<sup>152</sup>

## The Jap

“We shall never completely understand the Japanese mind; but then, they don’t understand ours, either. . . He and his brother soldiers are as much alike as photographic prints off the same negative.”

- *Know Your Enemy – Japan (1945)*

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<sup>152</sup> John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy – Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.), 79. Dower explains how race was a major factor in the war, with Japanese atrocities committed against American servicemen, such as the Bataan Death March, seen by many as attacks on “white civilization” itself.

As the narrator from the government-produced film *Know Your Enemy – Japan*, explains, the Japanese were seen as a race apart from that of the American race during World War II, just as much of the Orient was during the nativist 1920s. “Strange” religious practices and styles of dress, fanatical devotion to their sovereigns, and the willingness to commit suicide during battle rather than be captured: all of these promoted, in American minds, the “otherness” of the Oriental.

Unlike the depictions of the Hun, the yellow peril did not fade into desuetude during the heyday of the pulps. Quite the contrary; it was one of the staples of the industry, and all of the pulps’ highest selling titles featured a yellow-menace story within their pages at least several times a year, or even several times a month if a weekly title such as *Argosy*. As suspicion and outright antagonism towards Japan grew, the pulps found a new vehicle in which to carry the Asiatic menaces; that of the militaristic, Japanese soldier, as evidenced by Zagat’s “Tomorrow” series of stories. Before Pearl Harbor, however, the traditional use of the yellow peril was still found in the pulps and the comic books.

The yellow peril featured prominently in the early comic books. The first issue of National Allied Publication’s *Detective Comics* (March 1937) featured on its cover the threatening Oriental Ching Lung, and introduced hard-hitting sleuth Slam Bradley (created by Siegel and Schuster while they were trying to find a buyer for their newest creation, Superman) who in his first appearance is seen fighting with a group of swarthy, Chinese hoodlums. National Allied’s ninety-six-page special commemorating the 1939 World’s Fair in New York City contained a feature starring super-hero/magician Zatara in a Yellow Peril adventure risking

death from “the curse of Ti-Lo.”<sup>153</sup> The eighth issue of *Detective Comics* featured “The Claws of the Red Dragon,” a story of the yellow menace that could have been lifted straight from the pulps, telling the tale of physically and morally-perfect sleuth Bruce Nelson battling against the tong-forces of the “Ruthless Chinese Lu Gong.”<sup>154</sup> The nineteenth issue of the same title contains an adaptation of Sax Rohmer’s *Fu Manchu*. Years later, in June of 1941 (*Detective Comics* No. 52), superheroes Batman and Robin uncovered “The Secret of the Jade Box.” The “secret” being the ring of Genghis Khan, an object of mystical power sought by a tong-leader (and heir to Khan, himself) in hopes of creating a new criminal empire. Ultra-patriot The Shield, before battling Nazis and Japanese, took the fight to sinister Chinese criminal tongs in *Pep Comics* No. 9 (1940). (see *Figure VII*)

The Yellow Peril was still prevalent in a number of other mediums as well. The pulps still featured villains of the Oriental and Tong varieties. A popular “Big Little Book,” *Dan Dunn*, dealt with the titular Anglo-American detective hot on the trail of the elusive Chinatown crime boss, Wu Fang.<sup>155</sup> (see *Figure IV*) Sunday comic strips also continued Asiatic imagery of years past. *Terry and the Pirates*, a popular newspaper strip created by artist Milton Caniff in 1934, featured the character of Connie, a Chinese servant who acted as comic relief, and spoke in broken English. Alex Raymond’s *Flash Gordon*, beginning newspaper publication in 1934 as well, featured as its antagonist Ming the Merciless, a kind of “intergalactic Fu Manchu.” (see *Figures V and VI*). The Sax Rohmer *Fu Manchu* stories were still enjoying profitable sales, with the

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<sup>153</sup> D.C. Comics, *D.C. Rarities Archives Volume 1* (New York: D.C. Comics, 2004), 96.

<sup>154</sup> “The Claws of the Red Dragon,” *Detective Comics* 8 (D.C. Comics, October 1937).

<sup>155</sup> The Big Little Books were small (3 ½ x 4 ½ inches), thick adaptations of comic strip characters wherein one page had text, followed by the next page with an image, usually from the adapted work, and so on, with each novel telling a story in roughly 300 to 400 pages; they were first produced by the Whitman Publishing Company in 1932 and lasted into the 1960s. – Ron Goulart, *Great American Comic Books* (Lincolnwood: Publications International, Ltd., 2001), 16.

original stories serialized in *Liberty* magazine in 1940, and a film adaptation, in the form of an episodic serial: *The Drums of Fu Manchu*. Starring Henry Brandon in yellowface as the evil doctor, this 1940 serial was compiled and re-released in 1943 as a feature film. Director Josef von Sternberg's *The Shanghai Gesture*, released in December of 1941, played on a stereotype related to that of the "Yellow Peril:" the "Dragon-Lady," an evil and conniving Oriental women who showed all of the depravity of her male, tong counterparts. While not quite "Yellow Peril," the *Charlie Chan* films, and their actors in yellowface, continued to appear on cinema screens unabated throughout the 1930s and 40s. Former silent film star Sessue Hayakawa, once a darling of Hollywood, was still unofficially black-listed from American cinema following the nativism of the 1920s.

After America's entry into World War II, the use of the yellow peril motif shifted almost completely. The dehumanizing terms and descriptors examined in the previous chapter as a part of a "legitimate nativism" that existed in the 1920s and early 30s, were all carried over to be used in relation to the Japanese. The imagery depicting Japanese during the war was often harsher than that of the pulps, fueled by both a wartime mentality, as well as the stream of reports in the press relating to Japanese atrocities committed against both Americans and their allies.<sup>156</sup> Japanese speech, supposed ideas of morality, and basic physical differences were all used in the depictions of the "Nipponese" enemy, just as they had been years earlier in the

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<sup>156</sup> A few such reports include: *Life* Magazine's printing of photographs of massacred Chinese civilians being looted by Japanese troops in its December 1, 1937, edition, and *Time* Magazine, in its November 7, 1938, issue, carrying stories describing the "brutal horrors perpetuated in the native quarters" of Hankow, Nanjing, and Shanghai. Both magazines carried sections describing the brutality Americans suffered following the fall of Bataan, in the Philippines, to the Japanese in 1942. – [www.life.com](http://www.life.com); [www.time.com](http://www.time.com). Such imagery was probably also fueled by the fact that comic books were being sent to American soldiers on the frontlines by the plane-load. See Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998).

pulps and early comics. Japanese villains either spoke in “Engrish,” or, as is more often the case, spoke in ways that reduced the entirety of the race to a single collective will, existing only to serve the Emperor. Everything is “honorable” (“Honorable Emperor!” “Honorable Suggestion!” “Honorable soldier,” and the like), or, if not honorable, then “Honorable.” Archaic language is frequently used by the “Japs,” to add a tinge of ancient evil to an already evil nemesis, and broken English is often utilized to portray the Japanese as stupid and childlike. “That is all I want know! You no longer chief! All finish for you now! Banzai!” screams a Japanese officer after killing a native chief of an unnamed Pacific Island in an issue of *National Comics* (January, 1944). Asking if his men thought the murder was “a good joke,” a soldier replies “Ha-Ha! Wonderful Joke, Honorable Colonel, Yesss!”<sup>157</sup> Engrish was also used in cinematic depictions of the Japanese, such as in the previously-mentioned U.S. propaganda film *My Japan* (1945), wherein a “yellowface” actor informs the viewing public as to “how long” they are about what they think they know about the enemy.

Following their “Fu Manchu” predecessors, the “Jap” villains of the comics showed a lack of the inherent morality and humanity of the West, shown by their depictions as lovers of torture and violence, purely for the sake of torture and violence. As was the case with the depictions of Nazis, Japanese officers were depicted as ruthless, miniature warlords, willing to kill underlings who don’t obey their slightest whim and innocent bystanders as well. Although the Japanese propensity towards violence against their own race was showcased often, the horrors of Japanese (formally “Oriental”) tortures provided a great deal of the threat posed by Eastern domination during World War II. The unique military culture that, in many Western

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<sup>157</sup> “The Unknown,” *National Comics* 38 (Quality, January 1944).

minds, defined the Japanese also factored into the imagery of the time. Often, the Japanese were depicted as near-mindless drones, gladly willing to die as long as the honor of the Emperor was maintained. Such an irrational and thoroughly undemocratic (and therefore, un-American) mode of thought further alienated the Japanese villain from his all-American enemies.

Timely's *Captain America Comics*, while always featuring stories of Japanese brutality within its pages, also excelled at portraying Nipponese cruelty on its covers, a practice that lasted almost through the entirety of the war. Examples include No. 14's suspenseful cover, making the reader wonder if "Cap" would arrive in time to prevent the hooded, fanged yellow men, with daggers drawn, from forcing his restrained partner, Bucky, to inhale their poison gas. No. 24's cover, showing Captain America smashing through just in time to prevent Bucky's fingers from being ripped out of their sockets by fanged Orientals, members of the "Black Dragon Society." Bucky wasn't the only one that needed saving by the Captain. The cover of No. 34 depicts the "Cap" and his sidekick crashing through the windows of a Japanese temple, complete with a hideous, blue Buddha statue in the background, and a pair of American soldiers about to have their hands crushed in a vice operated by a yellow, bespectacled creature in a red and green dragon-adorned kimono. In *The Fighting Yank* No. 7 (1943) the Yank, upon discovering that a traveling troupe of faux-Japanese performers are actually "Japs," is subsequently captured and tortured; tied to a searing coal furnace, the Yank's clothes and flesh begin to melt, his reprieve coming only in the form of his ever-present ghostly ancestor.

As was the case with the pulp magazines, a predilection towards cruelty and torture was not the only defining factor of the comic's newly re-imagined "Yellow Peril." Depicting Asians

(now, primarily Japanese) as subhuman by exaggerating or inventing physical differences was a staple of the 1940s comics. It is safe to say that the rigors of wartime pushed such depictions farther, as much of the imagery goes beyond anything that was seen in the pulps. Many pulp stories displayed the “Oriental” as human, subhuman, or at least something approaching human; the war comics, on the other hand, showcased an entity, more often than not, more bestial than human, in depravity as well as physicality.

Unarguably the most infamous and sensationalized caricature of supposed “oriental monstrosity” is that of The Claw, who first appeared several years before Pearl Harbor, in *Silver Streak Comics* No. 1 (December, 1939), but would continue to appear as a foil for publisher Lev Gleason’s superheroes throughout the entirety of World War II. The Claw was a monstrous giant, a “God of Hate” who ruled his minions from “Tibet, land of strange religions and mysterious customs. . . High on the pinnacle of a mountain far removed from prying eyes is poised the skull-like castle of The Claw!!”<sup>158</sup> A yellow goliath of Asiatic evil, with pointed ears, serrated fangs protruding from a sinister mouth, atop which are slanted eyes and long-knife eyelashes, the Claw orders his saffron minions, with inhumanly long fingers and nails, to do his bidding:

While Europe boils over with war, America has been stupid enough to think itself safe from invasion! It is the most unfortified country in the world!! It is ripe for attack! Yes Attack!! We, the forces of the Claw, are better equipped for war than was Hitler! But we must strike quickly! As America is beginning to arm and soon she will not be so easily overcome!”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Greg Sadowski, *Supermen! The First Wave of Comic Book Heroes 1936-1941* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2009), 141.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

Originally conceived as a traditional (if outlandish even by its own standards) “Yellow Peril” villain, the Claw, in subsequent battles with super-heroes Steel Sterling and Daredevil, would take on a more Japanese identity. (see *Figure XV*). Villains of similar grotesqueness could be found in a multitude of World War II comics, predominately in those of the superpatriot variety. (see *Figures XVI, and XXI – XXIV*)

On the splash page of *The Fighting Yank* No. 9 (1944) there is a striking image of The Fighting Yank choking a fanged “Jap.” (see *Figure XVIII*) As the story opens, Bruce and Joan are driving through downtown San Francisco, just about to cross the Golden Gate Bridge when, without warning, an airplane flies overhead, dropping a small round cylinder in front of the Yank’s car. The canister suddenly pops open, and out march a group of, as Joan announces “Tiny Japs!” who speak of destroying “the bridge for Honorable Emperor!”<sup>160</sup> Growing to full size (which, usually in the case of “Japs” was never quite as tall as their Anglo-American enemies), they are quickly beaten by the Yank, with the lone survivor of the attack committing ritual suicide, rather than revealing the plans of his masters. The scene then shifts to a Japanese base, where a monstrous Japanese soldier named Mojo is shrunk down to the same size as his lilliputian predecessors and is able to regain his normal stature by an exposure to oxygen. Inside the shrinking machine, it is explained to Mojo that the reduction in stature is affected by reducing “all living matter and objects to tiny size by removing Hydrogen and mixing air with some fiazama vapor invented by honorable scientists! Is clever, no?” Mojo and a battalion of miniscule invaders are sent to America, only to be confronted by the Yank upon their arrival. Once Mojo takes Joan captive, the Yank surrenders and the pair are sealed in cement blocks

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<sup>160</sup> “The Fighting Yank,” *The Fighting Yank* 9 (Standard, August, 1944).

and cast overboard. As is often the case in Fighting Yank stories, his ancestor's spirit arrives, and frees him, allowing the Yank to do battle with, and subdue, Mojo until the authorities can arrive.

In this story, Mojo is a horrendous beast, demonized much more than any other Japanese. As with many depictions of Japanese in the comics of World War II, exaggerated simian features are attributed to the villain. Mojo's head is sloped forward, large, but slanted eyes are set above an extremely wide nose. He possesses a monstrously large maw, full of razor-sharp canines. Even when his mouth is closed, the bottom and lower canines still protruded from his mouth. He wears not the standard uniform of the Imperial Army, but rather a green t-shirt and briefs, with a gigantic rising sun emblazoned across his chest. A similar character, in both fashion sense and hideous physicality, appeared a few years earlier in the twenty-ninth issue of *Pep Comics*, wherein ultra-patriot The Shield, and star-spangled sidekick Dusty, battle the forces of "The Fang," a murderous "Jap" agent who stowed away on an American transport and was "dispatched here by the Emperor himself!" The Fang, yellow in complexion and with giant, razor-like fingernails, bellows at his henchman from a mouth resembling that of a shark, with serrated teeth running the length of his massive gum line. He is, however, defeated in his plan to abduct President Roosevelt by The Shield and Dusty.

*Master Comics* No. 29 (August, 1942) pitted ultra-patriot Minuteman against the horrible experiments conducted by Japanese mad scientist and spy, Dr. I.M. Fear. "In a west coast hospital laboratory," Dr. Fear finally achieves his goal, the creation of an airborne toxin that makes those who inhale it hallucinate and become tormented by imaginary horrors. The Doctor is apparently undercover, working in full view of the nearby army base, and even

providing medical services to the officers there. His appearance is so monstrous, that one wonders how the soldiers did not recognize him as an enemy. He has bright, yellow skin, enormous buck-teeth that nearly encompass the entirety of his mouth, and protruding, monkey-like ears. He wears stereotypical Japanese round-glasses, and works with long, protruding nails that one would think might hinder his ability to conduct experiments.

Regardless, the Doctor tests his creation on one of the base commanders, and a personal friend of the Minute Man, in his alter-ego as Private Westin. Minute Man, summoned by the pitiful cries of his superior officer, arrives just in time to witness the Doctor's victim hurl himself out a window to his death. After escaping the Minute Man's retribution, Fear travels to what the narrator calls "the Oriental section of town" and "within, Doctor Fear worships a strange Shinto idol." "I return to the race of my forefathers, oh mighty. With fumes of fear," Fear prays, "I will defeat this nation of democratic upstarts." Ordering his all-Asian henchmen to steal a plan of the city, in order to more effectively distribute their fumes, Fear is attacked by the Minute Man. The ultra-patriot dons a gas mask, force feeds Fear his own concoction, and realizes, before hauling him away to the authorities that, "Why. . . He's a Jap!" only after the villain's spectacles fall away, revealing his deceitfully slanted eyes.

The prose of the nativist pulps and the four-color imagery of the World War II-era comics contained the same Asian stereotypes: the broken and "un-American" English, an inhuman sense of depravity, and physical attributes that make them more monsters, than men. The difference between the two mediums, however is found in who exactly is the recipient of the "yellow" label. The Japanese were now the "yellow hordes," the very real enemy that previously the yellow peril had created as an imaginary enemy. Fu Manchu was not real;

Hirohito and Tojo were. That realization, mixed with a changing understanding of the differences between races (or lack thereof), shows through in the comics, and their depictions of all Asiatic races. It would be highly erroneous to contend that race no longer played a factor in the depictions of Asians, Japanese or not. Again, to cite John Dower's profound work on the subject of race and war, *War Without Mercy*, the "vigor" that Americans, in service and not, displayed for a hatred of the Japanese overshadows that of the Nazis, and a fear of a rising "yellow horde," with Japan as its center was still present. With statements that the "white civilization was at stake" coming from Naval commanders, race undoubtedly played a factor.<sup>161</sup> Despite these seeming reversals of thought, the majority of sources found within the pages of America's popular fiction shows a significant change in the general mindset of Americans. The yellow hordes were now concentrated on a small island chain in the Pacific Ocean. While the other inhabitants of Asia were still "yellow," they were not *as* "yellow" as the Japanese. Even within this seemingly primitive observation, one can see the beginnings of the worldview that currently proclaims the imagery found within these pages as deplorable, and reprehensible.

## Reformed China and Transplanted Heroes

"History has proven that whenever Liberty is smothered and men lie crushed beneath oppression; there rises a man to defend the helpless. . . liberate the enslaved and crush the tyrant. . . such a man is BLACKHAWK. . ."

- *Military Comics, No. 1 (1941)*

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<sup>161</sup> Dower, 55.

The comic books of the 1930s and 1940s show not only a shift in discriminatory imagery from “Germans” to “Nazis” and from “Orientals” to “Japs”, but also a broadening of what Americanism can encompass. In both the few pulps of the era and the plethora of comics, one can find instances of “internationalism” that simply would not have been found in the popular literature of the 1920s. A “re-envisioning” of China, coupled with the inclusion of what can be called “international” or “transplanted” heroes, provides us with evidence that the nativist notions that defined the pulps had begun to fade in the popular consciousness. They were replaced with an international understanding of America’s place in the world, a redefinition that would continue into the later Cold War. It was still “us against them;” now, however, “us” was composed of a wider spectrum than it had been previously. The enemy was becoming defined less by ethnicity (although that continued to play something of a role), but more so by ideology, by what he did, or did not, believe in.

China, and the “Orient” in general, was redefined by the comics, in response primarily to Japanese aggression there in the late 1930s. Evidence of a sense of sympathy and camaraderie with China is also evident in the pulps. *Argosy* (at this point, more of a “slick” than a “pulp”) in its February 7, 1942, issue carried the article “How Japan Debauches Chinese Girls,” by Earl H. Leaf, in which not only is China praised as an ally of America in its fights against Japan, but the article stresses that the fortunes of China are intertwined with those of the United States and vice-versa.

Leaf’s exposé describes the effects of the opium trade in China, as a cash-crop of extreme importance for Japanese occupiers as well as its more individual effects on the

populace of the nation. An example is made of Hsiang-li, a young girl in the Hopei province of occupied China. The young girl is brutalized and sexually assaulted by the invading Japanese troops, who force her into prostitution and opium addiction, a fate that is worsened by the author's emphasis on the fact that she "attended the mission school" and "prayed to the great Foreign [Christian] God."<sup>162</sup> Not only was this girl a member of an Allied nation, but she was also Christian, like "us." The author continues on to show how, not only does the Japanese traffic in opium damage the integrity of America's partner in the Far East, but also that:

While opium is grown and prepared in most sections under Japanese domination, heroin and opium derivatives are manufactured mostly in North China. The Japanese Concession at Tientsin has long been known as the "heroin capital of the world." Tientsin is also the source of eighty percent of the heroin that illegally enters the United States in a steady, deadly stream.<sup>163</sup>

Thus, non-Japanese Asians are depicted as victims of a horrendous onslaught that not only threatens world peace but American internal security, as well. The same year, the pulp *Detective Fiction* ran an article entitled "Japs Making Sex Slaves of Women." The cover of an April issue of *Argosy* from 1943 depicts two Japanese soldiers lustfully prying a Chinese woman from her home, and an August 4 issue contains a section concerning "Jap Atrocities." In the "new and improved" *Argosy* of the war years, "The Streamlined Dragon," by Louis C. Goldsmith, was one of the few examples of the "old style" of serialized fiction to be featured in the magazine. It chronicled the exploits of the crew of the *Dragon*, an American ship serving Republican China, who sought to liberate Chinese soldiers that had been taken prisoner by the

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<sup>162</sup> Earl H. Leaf, "How Japan Debauches Chinese Girls," *Argosy*, February 7, 1942, 44.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

invading Japanese. One of the characters, a Chinese woman, is depicted as a sympathetic character, in opposition to the lustful and marauding Japanese (*see Figure XXV*).

Comic books were also depicting China and Korea as friendly nations. The Orient was no longer a haven for “Fu Manchus” and “Mr. Changs.” Rather, Asian nations other than Japan were depicted in comics as they were in the *Why We Fight* series of U.S. propaganda films depicted China. In the case of China, it was a cultured, long-lived, peaceful and democratic nation that was one of our most important allies in the war. A change in attitude towards the East, and China in particular, can be seen even before America’s involvement in the Second Sino-Japanese War. The premiere issue of *Military Comics* (August 1941) featured “Loops and Banks,” two American aviators fighting on behalf of China against the Japanese. *Top-Notch Comics* featured the adventures of the ace American pilot Dick Storm who, when asked to serve the Chinese government against an ally of “the invaders,” replies “I am always at the disposal of the forces for law and order!”<sup>164</sup> This plot device, of depicting non-Japanese Asiatic nations as allies with similar values would continue during the war years.

In the third issue of *The United States Marines – Authentic U.S. Marine Corps Picture Stories*, published by Magazine Enterprises in cooperation with the U.S. Marines Corps in Spring 1944, “Japan’s First Victim” informs the reader that: “There is a captive nation in the East, a nation owning the dubious distinction of being Japan’s *first* victim . . . This is the Jap-ruled country of Korea, described by realistic sons of Heaven as ‘a sword pointed at the heart of Nippon. . . !’”<sup>165</sup> Korea’s status as Japan’s “first victim” implies that America was the “second,”

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<sup>164</sup> “Loops and Banks,” *Military Comics* 1 (Quality, August 1941).; “Dick Storm in China,” *Top Notch Comics* 3 (MLJ Publications, February 1940).

<sup>165</sup> “Japan’s First Victim,” *The United States Marines* Vol. 1, No. 3 (Magazine Enterprises, Spring 1944).

thus providing solidarity between the two nations, as well as a shared hatred for the enemy. The narrative begins by providing a fairly brief history of Japanese-Korean relations, with the attempted invasion of Korea's Joseon Empire in the late sixteenth century by Japan, and its eventual failure due to the Koreans' use of armored battleships. The narrative skips ahead three centuries, to Japan's annexing of the entire Korean peninsula following the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 (annexation occurring in 1910) and the Japanese murder and incineration of the remnants of Korea's royal family, with the exception of its Emperor, who was soon forced to abdicate. Scenes of Japanese soldiers finding a great deal of enjoyment in torturing Korean civilians follow. Men are burned alive, fleeing civilians are ensnared with meat-hooks by Japanese on horseback, and children are shot down in the streets. Christian Koreans are crucified, and women are set ablaze in their own homes. A Japanese building is seen exploding in the last panel, with the caption:

This, then, is the background . . . today, in Chungking, Korea has a Provisional Government, its President that same Kim Ku [Gu] who strangled the Jap Tsuchida [a retaliation for the assassination of Korean Empress Myeongseong by the Japanese Army] . And it is the burning desire of President Kim Ku and his followers to establish the Korean Declaration of Independence as a living document of freedom . . . !<sup>166</sup>

This short, four-page story is significant for its depictions of Japanese barbarism, but also for the detour it takes from the traditional "Yellow Peril" tale of decades earlier. The Koreans are "patriots," Provisional President Kim Ku desires only "freedom" for his country, and a Korean Declaration of Independence has been drafted (*see Figure XXVI*). All of these terms are "American," in the sense that they would normally have been used to describe some aspect of

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

American history. The application of American qualities to the inhabitants of the “East” would have been, and was, quite rare in the decades prior to the Second World War. However, the times had obviously changed, and as this, and other stories displaying both sympathy for, and solidarity with, Allied nations in the East shows, the “other” was coming to be defined more so by ideologies, than by race or ethnicity.

As was the case before the war, Americans (in the comics and in reality) volunteered their aviation skills to serve in the routing of China’s Japanese invaders after America entered the fray. The Flying Tigers appeared in a series of stories in *Air Ace Comics* in 1944 with an early edition proclaiming: “China’s fight to exterminate the Jap disease invading her country is the fight of a peace-loving people aroused to hate-fervor, determined to sacrifice ALL rather than give up the freedom they cherish. . . . From the Western world came the Flying Tigers, in their hour of greatest need, to help defend this freedom.”<sup>167</sup> The second issue of *Headline Comics*, featuring “Uncle Sam’s Battling Nephews,” The Junior Rangers ( a group of adolescent boys whose leader’s family was murdered by Nazis) are joined in their mission by Chin Lee, a Chinese boy who becomes a full-fledged member and appears in subsequent adventures.<sup>168</sup>

Even superheroes were involved in the fight to aid China and protect the sovereignty of a fellow democratic republic. Captain Battle, first appearing in Lev Gleason’s *Silver Streak Comics* No. 10 (April, 1941), was a veteran of the First World War who fought for the Chinese in the early 1940s. In the first issue of his self-titled series (1941), Captain Battle, labeled as “The Savior of Chungking,” aids in the rescue of a Chinese diplomat from the clutches of an invading Japanese army. The Captain eventually returns the diplomat to the headquarters of

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<sup>167</sup> “Traitor’s Reward,” *Air Ace Comics* Vol. 2 No. 2 (Street and Smith Publications, March 1944).

<sup>168</sup> “The Junior Rangers,” *Headline Comics* 2 (American Boy’s Comics, March 1943).

Generalissimo “Mao Tung” (a likely amalgamation of Nationalist Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, whom the character is depicted as resembling, and of Communist enclave commander, Mao Tse-tung). After revealing a Japanese spy within the ranks of the Chinese high command, Captain Battle tells the Generalissimo that he is always at the ready to aid China against foreign invasion. In the thirteenth issue (April, 1942) of *Captain America Comics*, the titular hero and his sidekick battle “The League of the Unicorn.” The Unicorn is a monstrous “Jap” with a single, metal horn protruding from his forehead, who is determined to sour relations between the United States and China by killing a member of the Chinese nobility (the fact that no such royal family existed in China at this point was apparently not a hindrance). Under threats from the Unicorn, a Chinese princess (despite China’s having been a republic for the previous thirty years) responds that, though she is not afraid to die, she is saddened that it may cause a rift in the “friendship between East and West.”<sup>169</sup> The plot is foiled by “Cap,” and China and America remain allies, pledging to battle Japan to the very end.

Even fictitious Asian nations benefitted from American superhero support. The thirty-eighth issue of *National Comics* (January 1944) features the story of the oddly-named superhero “The Unknown,” who liberates a small, unnamed Pacific Island from the “diminutive warriors of the Son of Heaven.”<sup>170</sup> After murdering the island’s (strangely enough, white) chief, the Japanese go about torturing, raping and murdering the inhabitants, until The Unknown arrives, planting bombs and inciting the natives to revolt. The Japanese are all driven off (or killed), and the island is returned to peace, with a contingent of U.S. Marines stationed there “to keep it that way!”

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<sup>169</sup> “The League of the Unicorn,” *Captain America Comics* 13 (Timely, April 1942).

<sup>170</sup> “The Unknown,” *National Comics* 38 (Quality, January 1944).

Another manner in which the changing notion of what was acceptable as “American,” or “in step” with America is the transplanted American, or transplanted hero. This character is not of the traditional, Anglo-American stock, as is the case with Captain America, Batman, The Fighting Yank, or a host of others. Rather he, or she, comes from somewhere outside America, yet is able to achieve the popularity among readers through earned “Americanness.”

The best example of this “international American” is the character of Blackhawk, who first appeared in *Quality’s Military Comics* No. 1 (August 1941). Blackhawk’s origin story opens with Nazi planes bombarding the Polish countryside during Hitler’s invasion in 1939. A lone figure stumbles through the rubble of a shelled farmhouse, carrying the body of his younger brother, searching in vain for the corpse of his younger sister. After burying his siblings, the unnamed figure wanders off into the darkness:

Months pass by. . . Like a huge steamroller the Nazi war machine crushes all of Europe. . . One day a new name appears on the horizon . . . A name that strikes terror in the hearts of men . . . Blackhawk . . . Like an angel of vengeance, Blackhawk and his men swoop down out of nowhere, their guns belching death, and on their lips the dreaded song of the Blackhawks. . . <sup>171</sup>

The panels in which this introduction to Blackhawk appears shows the shadow of a mysterious, uniformed man overcoming Nazis all over Europe, from the craters of Poland to the cities of Vichy France. At a concentration camp in collaborationist Vichy, a prisoner is sentenced to execution, when, suddenly a shadow appears, looming over the firing squad range. Blackhawk finally emerges; a tall, robust figure, wearing a blue military uniform and a large, yellow and black hawk motif across his chest. He is soon joined by members of the

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<sup>171</sup> “Blackhawk,” *Military Comics* 1 (Quality, August 1941).

Blackhawk team, all wearing similar uniforms, but each one of a different nationality. Defeating the Nazi commander, Von Tepp, and his troops in hand-to-hand combat, Blackhawk spirits the trounced German to “Blackhawk Island,” an impenetrable fortress and airfield that his crew uses to launch their attacks against the Nazi hordes. Revealing that Von Tepp is the officer responsible for the bombings that killed his family, Blackhawk offers him the chance to beat him in a fair dogfight. The German eventually succumbs to the Pole’s uncanny volant abilities and is killed by Blackhawk after the former feigns injury upon landing. With his vengeance secured, Blackhawk and his team of international freedom-fighters go forth to battle the Nazi menace wherever it appears. The character was an instant hit, with *Blackhawk Comics* beginning publication soon after his initial appearance, a series that would last into the mid-1980s.

Blackhawk’s Polish ancestry is of note as this was one of the “undesirable” groups that numerous immigration acts wanted banned, or at least lessened in number, from immigrating to America following the First World War. Eastern Europeans, such as the Poles, were among the groups to receive the lowest “quotas” in the immigration laws of the 1920s. Eastern Europeans were also more readily suspected as being radicals and anarchist during the century’s earlier Red Scare. Leon Czolgosz, President McKinley’s assassin, was of Polish ancestry, and his (assumed) relationship with anarchist (and fellow Eastern European) Emma Goldman furthered the popular imagery of the Eastern European “socialist.” Nearly twenty-years after the drafting of the Quota Laws, Poland was no longer a place from where the atheistic hordes of Eastern Europe, long feared in nativist American press, may come. Rather, Eastern Europe is the home of allies in the battle against Nazism, an ideology more threatening

than any ethnicity. The Blackhawk series of comics may seem a contradiction in this regard due to the inclusion of Chop-Chop, Blackhawk's sidekick and cook who is a stereotypical Chinese coolie-character. Chop-Chop is rotund with buck teeth and slanted eyes. While Chop-Chop's presence does in fact show that the previous decades' worth of Oriental imagery had not fully receded, it nonetheless does not devalue Blackhawk as a significant diversion from the standard, Anglo-American heroism that populated most comic books and pulps in the previous years.

The Four Musketeers, originally appearing in the third issue of *Air Ace Comics* (Vol. 2, May 1944) also shows a great appreciation of "international flavor" in comic books. As The Musketeer's Creed reads:

Through faith, understanding, co-operation, blood, sweat and tears, our nations have crushed the enemies of freedom . . . only through those priceless qualities can our United Nations maintain the peace and freedom for which our united forces gave their blood. Therefore, we have this day pledged ourselves, our fortunes and our lives to the cause of world brotherhood, freedom and peace!<sup>172</sup>

As their preceding, splash-page introduction suggests, The Four Musketeers are a group of Allied soldiers who come together to fight the Axis menace, despite their varied international backgrounds: Bill Bright (America), Tommy Atkins (Great Britain), Ivan Igoroff (Soviet Russia) and Lee Chung (China) band together, through a series of adventures spanning successive issues, to battle the Japanese and Nazis, not in the name of American liberty, but rather in the name of freedom from militant aggression, for all the nations of the Earth. In the seventh issue of *The Fighting Yank* (1943) American superhero The Grim Reaper finds "The Heart of a

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<sup>172</sup> "The Four Musketeers," *Air Ace Comics* Vol. 2 No. 3 (Street and Smith Publications, May 1944).

Patriot,” not in a fellow American, but in Anton Gyssen, a native of Belgium and prisoner of a concentration camp, who the Reaper liberates and then recruits as his partner in an operation to destroy Nazi operations in Belgium. Senorita Rio, South American spy-extraordinaire and former Hollywood glam girl, appeared in the pages of *Fight Comics*, battling Nazis that threatened the security of both her homeland and her American allies.

The shift in the imagery regarding China and Korea, from sanctuaries of Yellow Emperors to friendly, democratic, and modern nations represents an important transformation occurring at the time. The popularity of “international” heroes such as Blackhawk speaks to this change as well. As the idea of a “master race” was being attacked academically, and linked to Nazism in the greater public sphere, the stereotypes and imagery concerning the previously “un-assimilable” alien were beginning to lose ground, as well. Friendships and partnerships between a variety of ethnicities, that would not be found in the majority of pulp stories of the inter-war years, were now being promoted whole-heartedly in the comics of World War II.

## Conclusions

At the end of the Second World War, the United Nations had been established and the world, for the most part, was at peace. The “Yellow Peril” villains of Sax Rohmer and the pulps had been re-envisioned as the emissaries of Imperial Japan, and the Hohenzollern Hun had been recast as “Schicklgruber’s” henchmen. These changes were both patriotic in nature and the result of the era’s changing understandings of race. In the case of the Japanese, the “Yellow Peril” had come to mean less the threat posed by those of the Asiatic races, and more so the threat posed by those of an entirely un-American ideology, who happened to be Asian. As for

the Germans, the World War I propaganda posters had painted the “German” as the Hun; during the Second World War, the notion of the German race being evil was downplayed, and was replaced with that of the Nazi, his identity determined not by race, but, again, by ideology. The “white domination” views of Madison Grant and Harry Hamilton Laughlin had been overturned, for the most part, both in academia and in the public consciousness. While their wholesale end would not come for several decades, the change that took place in popular fiction between Versailles and Yalta cannot be overlooked. The portrayal of one, or two Asians as allies of America would not have been out of the question in the nativist pulps of the 1920s and 1930s. The notion that appeared in the comics of the 1940s, however, that nations like China or Korea were equal allies in a battle against something as “un-American” as fascism, was something that would not have been found in the earlier pulps, and such a drastic departure from nativist rhetoric is of significant import.

# Appendix III

## Illustrations

- Fig. I – Cover of *Argosy Weekly* – July 16, 1938 (NVM)
- Fig. II – Cover of *Argosy Weekly* – May 27, 1939 (NVM)
- Fig. III – Cover of *Amazing Stories* – September, 1940 (NVM)
- Fig. IV – Cover of *Dan Dunn Little Big Book* – 1934 (NVM)
- Fig. V – Comic Strip – *Terry and the Pirates* – 1935
- Fig. VI – Comic Strip – *Flash Gordon* – 1938
- Fig. VII – Cover of *Pep Comics* No. 10 – December, 1940 (NVM)
- Fig. VIII – Cover of *Fight Comics* No. 15 – October, 1941 (LOC)
- Fig. IX – Cover of *Popular Comics* No. 66 – August, 1941 (NVM)
- Fig. X – Panels from *Look Magazine's* Superman strip – February 27, 1940
- Figs. XI-XII – American World War I Posters
- Fig. XIII – Splash page of *Headline Comics* No. 1 – February, 1943 (LOC)
- Fig. XIV – Splash page of *U.S.A. Comics* No. 4 – May, 1942 (LOC)
- Fig. XV – *Silver Streak Comics* No. 6 – September, 1940
- Fig. XVI – Cover of *Captain America Comics* No. 13 – April, 1942 (CB)
- Figs. XVII-XX – Panels from *Sub-Mariner Comics* No.5 – Spring, 1942 (LOC)
- Fig. XXI – Splash page of *The Fighting Yank* No. 9 – August, 1944 (LOC)
- Fig. XXII – Cover of *Daredevil Comics* No. 10 – May, 1942 (CB)
- Fig. XXIII – Cover of *Headline Comics* No 11 – Winter, 1944 (LOC)
- Fig. XXIV – Cover of *The United States Marines* No. 3 – 1944 (LOC)
- Fig. XXV – Illustration from “The Streamlined Dragon,” *Argosy* – May, 1942 (LOC)
- Fig. XXVI – Page from “Japan’s First Victim” – *The United States Marines* No. 3 – 1944 (LOC)

ARGOSY

A NEW  
NOVEL

*The* INVASION of AMERICA

10¢

# ARGOSY



JULY 16

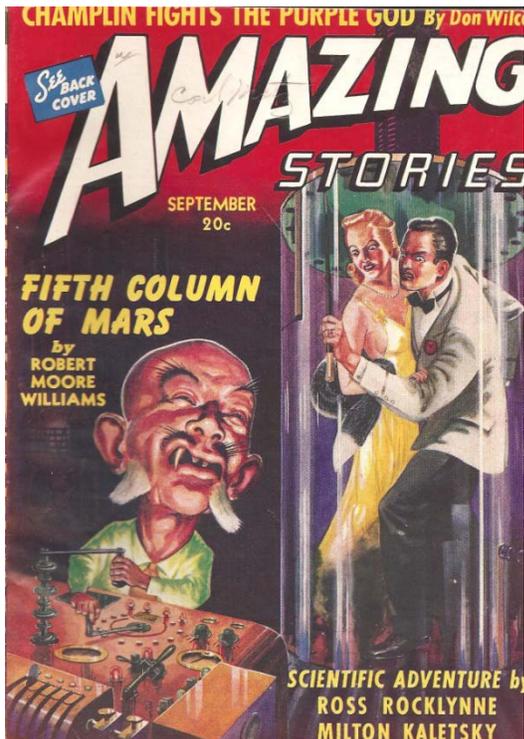
WEEKLY

**AMERICA  
AT BAY**  
*in a* **WORLD  
GONE MAD**

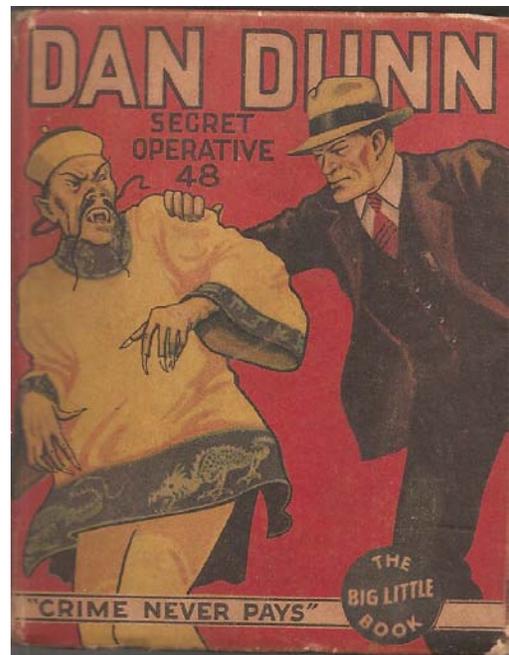




II



III



IV



V

*Terry and the Pirates* by Milton Caniff. The strip featured the humorous, yet still stereotypical Chinese character of Connie- reprinted in: Nostalgia Press, *Terry and the Pirates: The Normandie Affair*, (New York: Nostalgia Press, Inc., 1977), 8.



VI

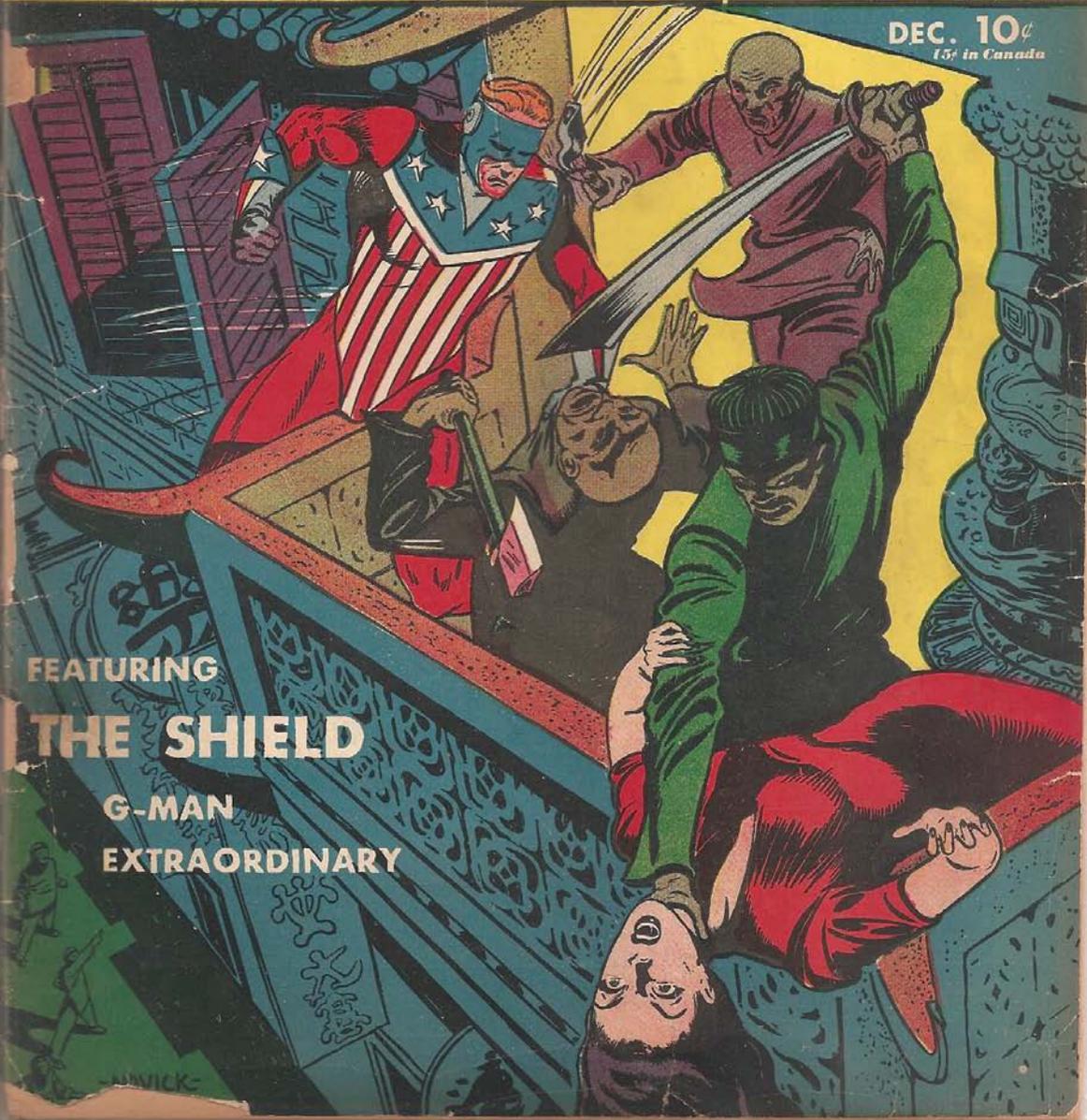
Flash Gordon featured the Asiatic villain, Ming the Merciless. *Flash Gordon* by Alex Raymond, reprinted in: Brian Walker, *The Comics Before 1945*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 206.

No. 10

# PEEP COMICS

ACTION  
DETECTIVE  
ADVENTURE

DEC. 10¢  
15¢ in Canada



FEATURING  
**THE SHIELD**  
G-MAN  
EXTRAORDINARY

VII



VIII

Super-American, and Professor Supermind and Son (Fig. IX) were a few of the many superheroes that were bringing the fight to the Nazis (or their nationally-ambiguous counterpart) before America's entry into the Second World War.

# POPULAR

10¢ AUGUST  
No. 66

# COMICS

8 Pages of  
SMILIN' JACK

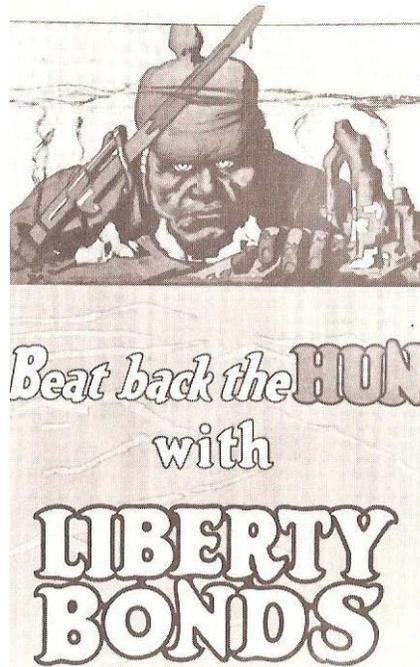


**PROFESSOR SUPERMIND AND SON • THE VOICE  
SMILIN' JACK • MARVEL MAN • HURRICANE KIDS  
GANG BUSTERS • MASKED PILOT and many others**

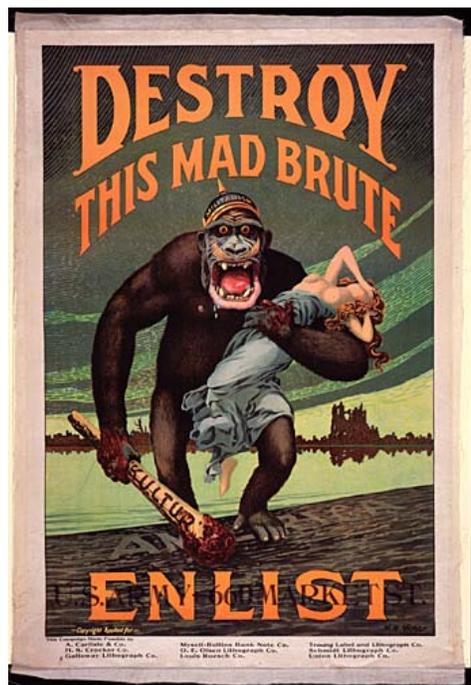
IX



X



XI



XII

X - *Superman Sunday Classics – Strips 1-183: 1939-1943* (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1999), 189;

XI- Paula Harper, ed. *War, Revolution and Peace – Propaganda Posters from the Hoover Institution Archives 1914-1915* (34);

XII - Harry Ransom Center – The University of Texas at Austin, *Poster Collection*, last accessed November 14, 2010, [http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/collections/art/holdings/poster/images/hopps\\_mad\\_brute\\_large.jpg](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/collections/art/holdings/poster/images/hopps_mad_brute_large.jpg).

# JUNIOR RANGERS

by  
Jack BINDER



"IS LIFE SO DEAR, OR PEACE SO SWEET, AS TO BE PURCHASED AT THE PRICE OF CHAINS AND SLAVERY?" --- AMERICA'S RINGING ANSWER TO THAT IMMORTAL QUESTION IS A SHOWER OF EXPLODING STEEL AIMED AT THE BLACK HEARTS OF THE WOULD-BE SLAVE MASTERS OF THE WORLD. THE INDUSTRY, THE GENIUS, THE COURAGE AND SPIRIT, YES, EVEN THE LIFE-BLOOD OF THIS NATION IS TODAY MARSHALLED IN THE TITANIC STRUGGLE BETWEEN FREE MEN AND THE VENOMOUS FASCIST FANG OF OPPRESSION --- INTO THIS SAVAGE BATTLE PLUNGE THE JUNIOR RANGERS, DRIVEN ONWARD BY THE GRIM AMERICAN DETERMINATION THAT ITS FREE WAY OF LIFE MUST, AT ALL COSTS, BE FOREVER PRESERVED !!!

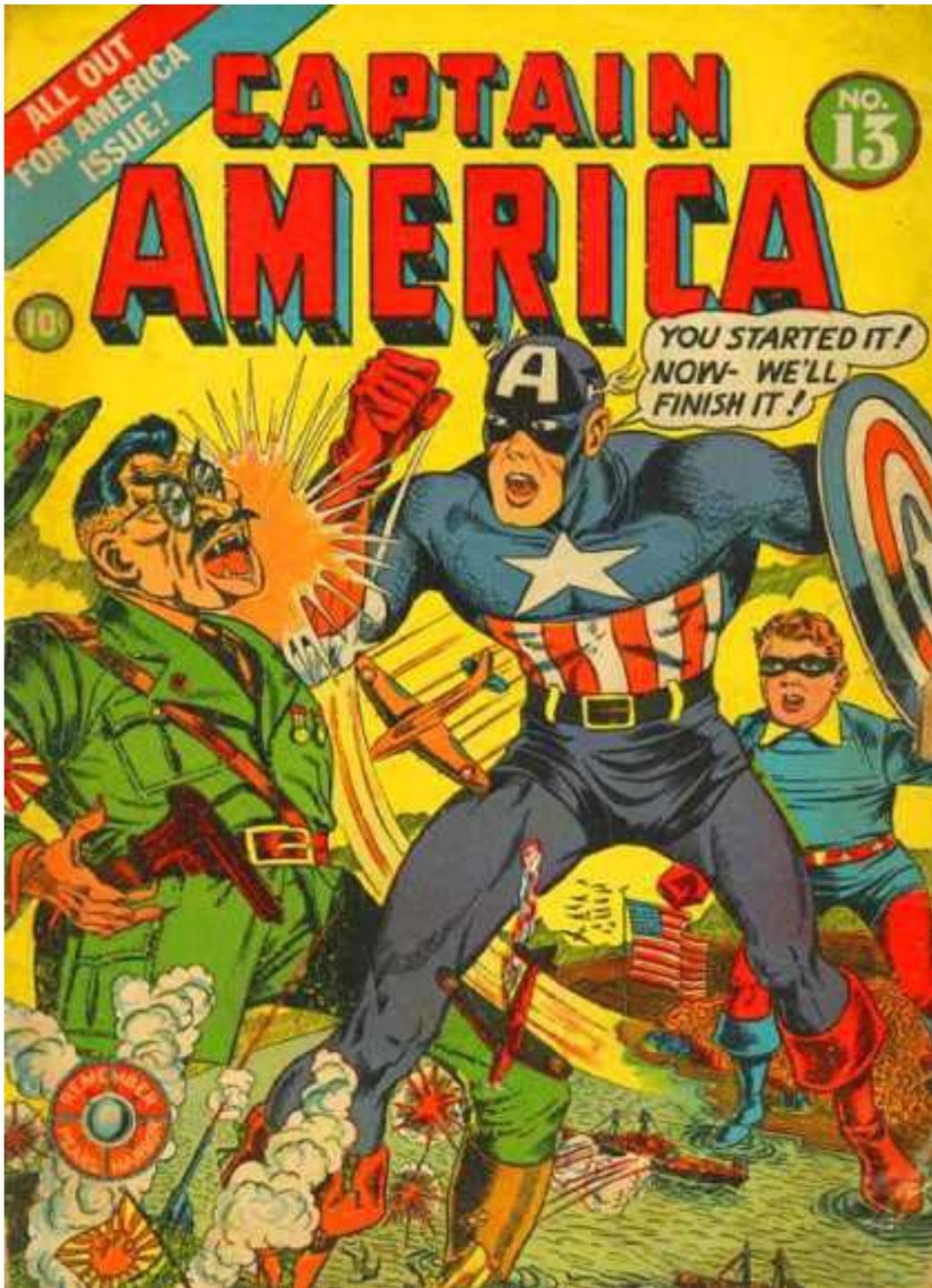
XIII



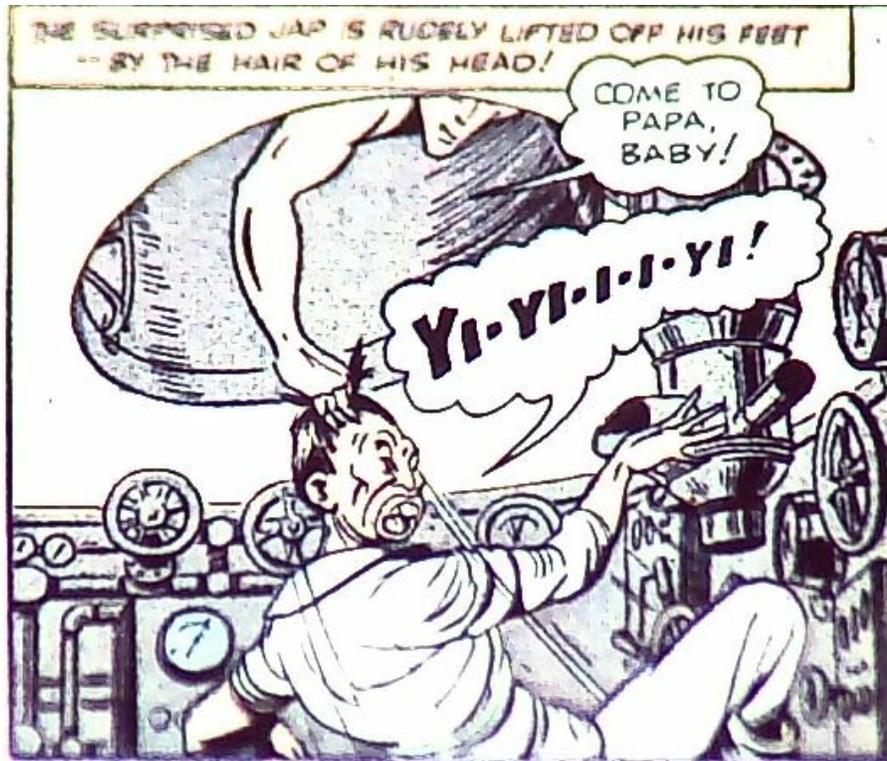


XV

“The Claw vs Daredevil,” by Jack Cole, reprinted in: Greg Sadowski, ed. *Supermen! The First Wave of Comic Book Heroes 1936-41*, (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2009), 147.



XVI

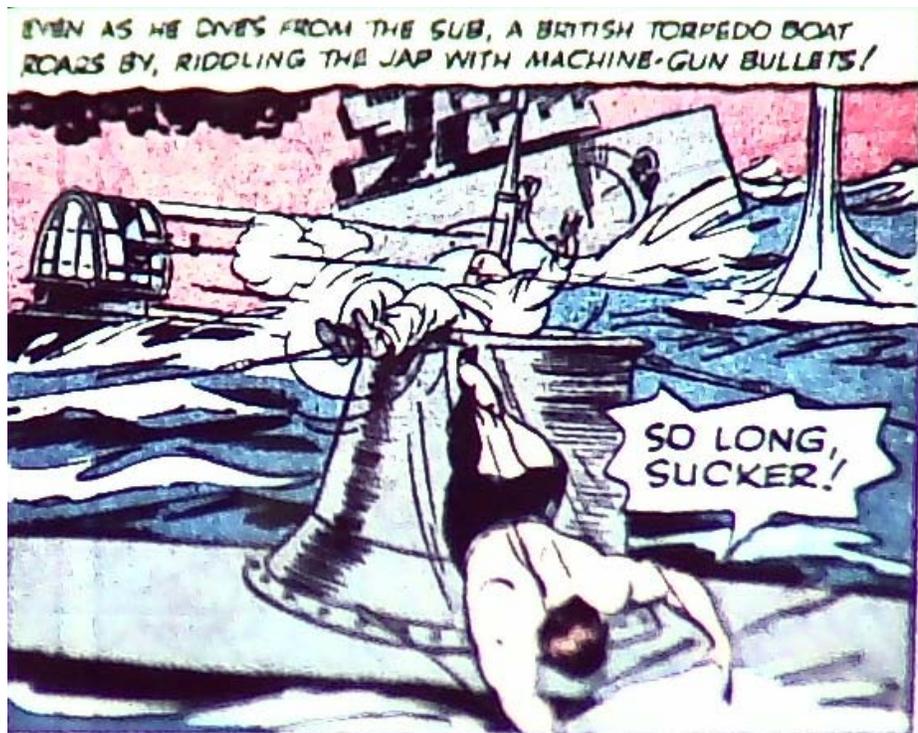


XVII

As can be seen from these panels, not only did Timely's characters, such as Namor The Sub-Mariner, get involved in the war effort more often than National Allied's Superman or Batman, but they also were more vicious in their dispatching of the enemy.



XVIII



XIX



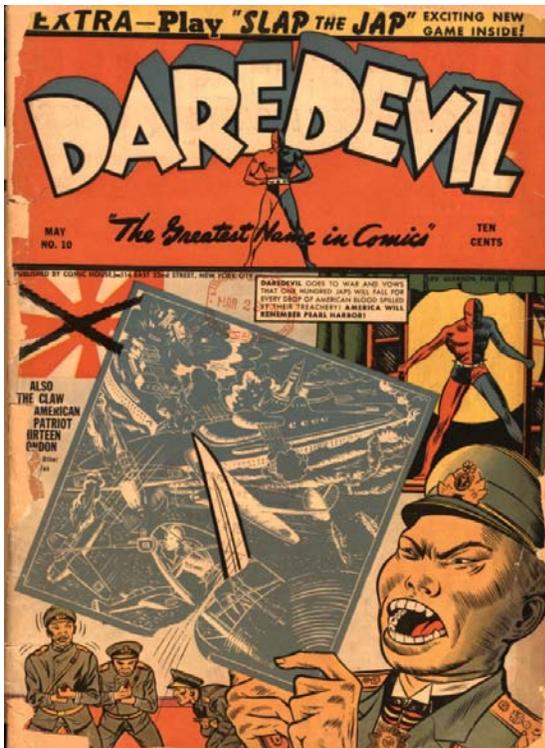
DAY AND NIGHT THE JAPANESE WAR LORDS PONDER ON HOW TO BRING AMERICA TO ITS KNEES! NO TRICK TOO DASTARDLY... NO WEAPON TOO FOUL FOR TOJO'S MURDEROUS CREW... WHO STOP AT NOTHING IN THEIR MAD DASH FOR WORLD CONQUEST! BUT ALWAYS THERE IS THE ONE AND ONLY **FIGHTING YANK** TO CHECKMATE ANY NIPPONESE PLOT AGAINST OUR COUNTRY...**THE FIGHTING YANK** WHO IS REALLY **BRUCE CARTER III**, ENDOWED WITH SUPER-HUMAN POWERS BY THE INVINCIBLE CLOAK OF HIS PATRIOT ANCESTOR!



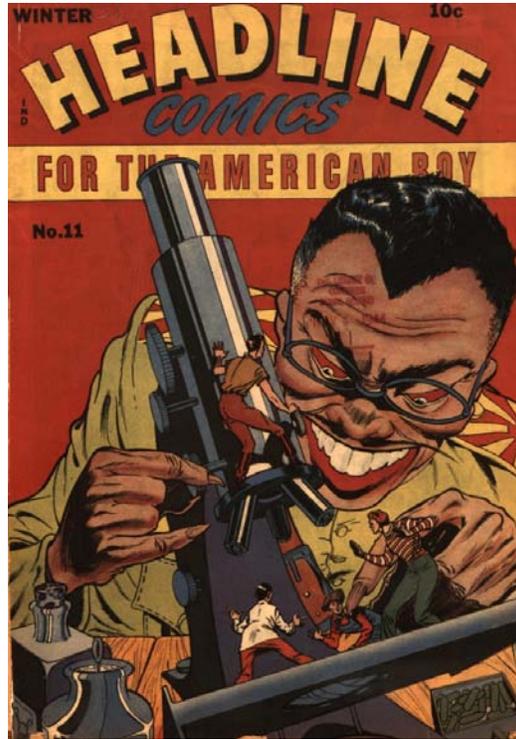
# The Fighting YANK



BE AN AMERICAN—BUY WAR STAMPS AND BONDS!



XXII



XXIII



XIV

# The Streamlined Dragon



Quivering, clutching her robe, Mi stood before the leering Japanese

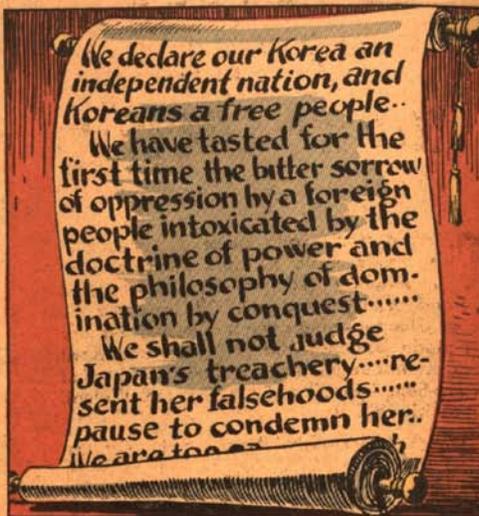
THE UNITED STATES MARINES



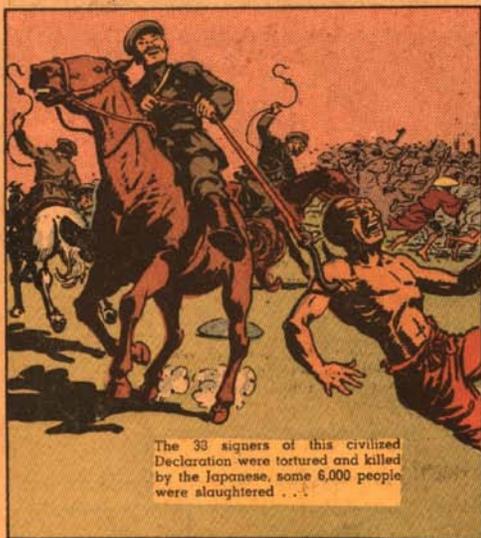
An independent nation for 42 centuries, Korea, annexed by Japan in 1910, refused to die. On March 1, 1919, 2,000,000 Koreans gathered in city and village squares to hear patriots read a Declaration of Independence!

MANSEI!

MANSEI!



We declare our Korea an independent nation, and Koreans a free people.. We have tasted for the first time the bitter sorrow of oppression by a foreign people intoxicated by the doctrine of power and the philosophy of domination by conquest..... We shall not judge Japan's treachery.....re- sent her falsehoods.....re- pause to condemn her. We are too...



The 33 signers of this civilized Declaration were tortured and killed by the Japanese, some 6,000 people were slaughtered . . .

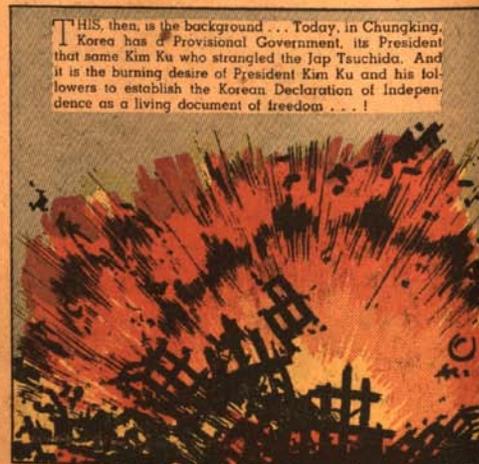


KOREAN BRATS!



LOOK! THEY CRUCIFY KOREAN CHRISTIANS!

IN SOME VILLAGES THEY ARE BURYING WOMEN ALIVE!



THIS, then, is the background . . . Today, in Chungking, Korea has a Provisional Government, its President that same Kim Ku who strangled the Jap Tsuchida. And it is the burning desire of President Kim Ku and his fol- lowers to establish the Korean Declaration of Independ- ence as a living document of freedom . . . !

# III

## Russian Communists, Red Chinese and Nuclear Annihilation:

The American Pulp and Comic Books of the  
Early Cold War

1946-1956

1946. During his speech at Missouri's Westminster College, former (and future) British Prime Minister Winston Churchill evoked an image that would come to define the following decades: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an 'iron curtain' has descended across the Continent. . ." <sup>173</sup> Churchill's description of the precarious situation between the West and the Soviet Union foreshadowed how American escapist literature would depict the emerging Cold War.

By its very nature, Communism has no indigenous ethnicity or cultural traits, and therefore a shift from the more nativist and racial imagery prevalent in the 1920s through the early 1940s would be expected. Unlike in the past, one could not point to a person, judge his appearance, and automatically know whether he was "one of them." The threat was hidden and elusive, adding an even more sinister nature to its character. Such an enemy, however, at this juncture of internationalism and nativism, is rather fitting for the times. With a rise in America's standing in the international community during, and following, the Second World War, the enemy invariably could no longer maintain the nativist and ethnocentric nature it had before. The Fu Manchu and Koshinga of the 1920s and 1930s pulps, devilish simply by their nature and "un-Americanness," had been supplanted by the wily minions of Hideaki Tojo and Hirohito in the pulps and comic books of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Once again, in the 1950s, a change in the nature of racial imagery appeared; the Cold War was a war of ideologies, and the confrontations found in popular literature mirrored such an alteration.

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<sup>173</sup> Richard A. Schwartz, *The 1950s – An Eyewitness History* (New York: Facts on File, 2003), 422.

Communism, while being a product of German intellectual thought, could comfortably be placed in the “East,” thanks to its success in Russia. With such a traditional backdrop seemingly ready-made, other traditional imagery was utilized. The Nazis of World War II were replaced, in their savagery and ruthless determination to extinguish democracy, by the Soviets. Similarly, the fanged, clawed, grotesqueness given to the Japanese soldier was, following the events of 1949 (the successful testing of a Soviet Atomic Bomb and the fall of China to Communism) and 1950 (the outbreak of the Korean War), transferred to the Chinese and North Korean soldier. Obviously, the continuation of such imagery underlies a parallel continuation of racially biased views on the part of many Americans of the time. On the other hand, it can also be understood as a changing aspect of what was considered “American,” and what was not. With America taking up arms, both ideologically and militarily, around the world to defend its values (and the values of nations it considered worth defending) an understanding of “he looks different” as the basis for identifying an enemy no longer seemed relevant.

Attitudes concerning race were changing in the late 1940s and 1950s; that much cannot be questioned. Jackie Robinson’s integration of Major League Baseball, the desegregation of the military, and the expanding opportunities of all minorities, in areas such as education and employment, is proof of that. The horror that many Americans felt at the “loss” of their Chinese “brothers” to Maoism, and the vehement anger it generated throughout the country and against President Harry Truman, is equally visible in the political rhetoric of the time.<sup>174</sup> What

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<sup>174</sup> To add an even deeper sense of loss to the takeover of China by Communist forces, historian Eric F. Goldman points out that for many in the United States it seemed to be America’s mission to Christianize the Chinese, as missionaries had been travelling there for centuries, and later in droves during the era of the Qing’s “Unequal Treaties” with the Western nations; the loss of China to the atheist Communists was seen as a failure on America’s part to bring Christianity to the Orient. – Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade – America, 1945-1955* (New York: Alfred a Knopf, 1956), 116.

the Red Spectre of Communism allowed popular fiction was an arena in which traditional imagery of the “other” could still be used, imagery that had been selling out on the newsstands for decades, yet would still fit with the internationalist times. As was the case during World War II, “good Asians” were not depicted as monsters, but rather as normal people and often in a heroic light. “Good Russians” were depicted equally humanly as well, often as rural peasants suffering under the yoke of Stalinism – if a Russian or an Asian appeared as a physical or mentally-depraved abomination, it was because he was a Communist. The 1950s also gave rise to a new manner of demonization that, while not necessarily racial, certainly invoked past imagery concerning the savagery and inhumanity of the “un-American;” that of a possible attack against America or worldwide nuclear holocaust. Such anti-communist and apocalyptic imagery, as well as “leftovers” from the “Yellow Peril” days of the medium’s heyday, can be found in the pulp magazines that continued publication after World War II.

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, the pulp magazines had begun to recede in popularity and in circulation. Several stalwarts such as *Argosy* and *Adventure* managed to endure, but in forms that were closer to the more popular “slicks” than to the purely-fictional periodicals they had been during their zenith. A number of magazines did survive, and new ones appeared, but primarily in smaller niche markets, the largest being the science-fiction genre. *Astounding Stories*, which began in 1930, survived as the re-titled *Astounding Science-Fiction* (later renamed *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*, as it is still known today) and new titles such as *Venture* and *Fantastic Adventures* debuted to cater to a smaller market, one made possible by both a robust economy and a growing “fandom” dedicated to science-fiction and fantasy.

The pulps, in attempting to keep with the times, did their part to warn of the Communist menace, such as *Adventure's* March 1952 "Gift of Mourning," by George C. Appell, detailing the bitter struggle between the Nationalist and Chinese Communist forces. The same magazine published, in April 1953, "I Survived the Korean Death March," chronicling one American's harrowing experiences in the hands of North Korean forces.<sup>175</sup> The July 1953 issue of *Astounding Science-Fiction* featured "Enough Rope" by Poul Anderson, and starred an intergalactic dictator with a Mongol-sounding name (Hurulta, Arkazhik of Unzuvan), as well as a rather "Asiatic" appearance, albeit with blue, and not yellow, skin. The October 1954 issue of the same title printed an editorial about the horrors of "Red-brainwashers." The Ziff-Davis science-fiction pulp *Fantastic Adventures* published an anti-Communist tract in the form of "He Fell Among Thieves," by Milton Lesser, in its March 1952 issue (*see Figure III*). In Lesser's tale, a visitor from another world falls prey to Communist brainwashing, and almost destroys America as result, due to his belief that the West is belligerent and harboring plans for world domination. The alien, upon meeting a captured American spy, learns that he has been deceived and journeys to the West:

But in the end the man from space would see the truth. With his cultural heritage telling him he must fight evil wherever he saw it, he would place undreamed of science at the disposal of the United Nations. Because the Commies had seen samples of that science for themselves, it would be a big stick they would be able to understand. It might – it just might- negate the necessity for war. but, if it didn't, no bookie in the world would place his money on the Commies. . . ."<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> This story was previously printed in the March 1951 issue of *Argosy*, which now featured the subtitle "The Complete Men's Magazine," emphasizing its departure from the realm of a purely general fiction, pulp magazine.

<sup>176</sup> Milton Lesser, "He Fell Among Thieves," *Fantastic Adventures*, March 1952, 55.

Much in the same way that comic book heroes had served as idealistic avenues of preventing war over a decade prior, so too does the creature of “He Fell Among Thieves.”

Despite attempts to keep pace with the times, the pulp magazines continued to promote racial stereotypes. The pulp’s reluctance to separate itself from its past can be seen in its continuing to print “Yellow Peril” type stories (“The Hands of Han” by George C Appell – *Adventure*, Nov. 1950), narratives that literally belonged to a different era. In July 1950, *Adventure* published “The Wrath of Genghis Khan – A Tale of the Mongol Horde,” by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, the founder of D.C. Comics who had seen his most prolific work appear during the inter-war years of the 1920s.

Comic books continued to be the popular form of printed escapism, albeit produced for an audience that included more adolescents within its ranks than did the pulps of the 20s and 30s. Following the end of the Second World War, an explosion of differing genres occurred within the comics industry, eclipsing, and eventually overtaking, the superhero books so popular during the war. Anthologies that had given rise to the superheroes shifted genres, leaving the heroes behind: *Marvel Mystery Comics* became the horror title, *Marvel Tales*, *All-American Comics* (birthplace of the Green Lantern and other heroes) eventually changed to *All-American Men of War*, and Wonder Woman’s debut title of *All-Star Comics* became *All-Star Western*. Crime, mystery, horror, romance, humor, sports, and war; numerous genres appeared, with titles well-known outside of comics fandom, such as E.C. Comics’ *Tales from the Crypt* and the *Vault of Horror* making their debut. The boom was cut short with the 1954 publication of Dr. Frederic Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent*, in which the psychologist and “juvenile delinquent expert” proclaimed that comic books, and the imagery and fantasy found

therein, were the cause of all of youths' troubles, from promiscuity to juvenile crime.<sup>177</sup>

*Seduction of the Innocent*, the Congressional hearings, and public comic book burnings that followed its publication, almost destroyed the industry. Within a decade however, the comic book had rebounded and reached new heights of popularity thanks to the revival of the superheroes initiated by Stan Lee and Marvel (Timely) Comics in the early 1960s; the type of superheroes that Wertham had sought to destroy in the first place. In the years before Wertham's attack, and even after it, the comic books were able to provide escapist literature for youths and adults alike. These comics succeeded in demonizing the Communist "other" better than any U.S. government propaganda film could have.

## European Communism – Before the Cold War

"New and strange conditions have arisen in the countries over there [Europe and Asia]; new and strange doctrines are being taught. The Governments of the Orient are being overturned and destroyed, and anarchy and bolshevism are threatening the very foundation of many of them. . ."

- Lucian Walton Parrish (1921, in Congress)

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<sup>177</sup> In many parts of the *Seduction of the Innocent*, the accusations of Wertham are either laughable, or horribly frightening, depending on the reader. While Wertham is correct that many comic books did feature scenes of violence that were too harsh for young children (and many are shocking even by today's standards), some of the author's contentions, however, seem somewhat questionable: from blowing up a single panel of a comic strip to show what Wertham believes to be the figure of a nude woman within an illustration of a man's shoulder "for children who know how to look," to a questionability as to how familiar he was with the subject matter – at one point, Wertham refers to a character named the Blue Beetle, who changes from man into beetle, and back again, and claims that it is "Kafka for the kiddies!" Such a character never existed; the Blue Beetle was a police officer who donned a blue costume to battle crime while not on the beat. Fredric Wertham, M.D., *Seduction of the Innocent* (New York: Main Road Books, 2004 [1954]), 185, 106.

Long before the Cold War, international Communism was understood by many in America as a threat to their ideals and way of life. The earliest imagery to be found in American popular periodicals depicted the Russian communist, in ways that did not differ from many other depictions of foreigners in general from the time. He was a subhuman, often bearded, menace, whose only goal was chaos and the overthrow of the American government. What was called “the Bolshevik experiment” equated in many Americans minds with pestilence, poverty, and constant warfare, the antithesis of what was considered human progress (*see Figure 1*). There were some Western voices that offered calm, such as the University of Edinburgh’s Charles Sarolea who suggested in *Impressions of Soviet Russia* (1924), that the West had nothing to fear, and that the Bolshevik regime was only a temporary phase on Russia’s path to joining the more democratic nations of Europe and America.<sup>178</sup> Such a reassuring voice seemed to fall only upon a minority of readers.

During the 1920s, the Communist was lumped together with the likes of socialists, anarchists, syndicalists, and radicals to create an amalgamation of various nationalities (usually German or Russian) into a foreign “other,” an appropriate action given the nativism of the time. The nativist aversion to Eastern European immigrants (immigrants who were among the primary targets of Quota Laws and “Americanization”) provided ample grounds for demonizing socialists, and vice-versa. Condemnation of foreigners as radicals appeared throughout the press, and in political rhetoric.

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<sup>178</sup> Sarolea, in his optimistic view concerning the outcome of the “Bolshevik experiment,” writes that “Even as in the material sense Russia will soon become once again the granary of the European continent, so in a political and moral sense Russia is likely to prove, in a not distant future, the mainstay of European law and order, and the most uncompromising enemy of all collectivist impostures.” – Charles Sarolea, *Impressions of Soviet Russia* (London: Eveleigh, Nash & Grayson, 1924), 276.

Throughout the Great Depression of the 1930s, Communism was again labeled an enemy of all things American, with the depictions of Communists shifting from that of subhuman, disorganized monsters on the prowl to systemized and organized vanguards of an underground army bent on both world domination and the destruction of all Christian nations. Labor unions, always the target of “red-baiters,” came under even harsher attacks in the 1930s, with popular pamphlets such as *Unmasking the C.I.O.* (1930) and *Communism’s Iron Grip on the CIO* (1937) delineating the labor union as a tool for Bolshevik subversion of America.<sup>179</sup> (see *Figure II*)

The years immediately preceding the Second World War saw something of a shift in American popular views of the Soviet Union. While many saw Stalin and Hitler as men of equally devilish ambition, and despite Stalin’s signing of a non-aggression pact with Hitler on the eve of the war, Soviet Russia was becoming, in many eyes, a possible ally against the fascist aggression of Nazi Germany. Former American ambassador to the Soviet Union Joseph E. Davies’ account of his time in Russia, published in 1941 as *Mission to Moscow*, paints a glowing picture of a friendly, fatherly Stalin. He depicts the Stalinist purges of the 1930s as nothing more than a “cleaning house” of poisonous German fifth columnists.<sup>180</sup> Books and pamphlets

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<sup>179</sup> *Unmasking the C.I.O.’s* definitions of “Nazi” and “Fascism” are rather interesting, as they equate the two terms to American anti-Communist sentiment: “NAZI – A powerful European enemy of Communism. There is no Nazi Party in America. The Communists use it interchangeably with ‘Fascist’ branding all opposing communism as either Nazi or Fascist – instead of using the correct word AMERICAN. They say you are a ‘Nazi’ if you do not support the Communist program.” “FASCISM – A powerful European enemy of Communism. There is no Fascist Party in America. The communists call every American movement that opposes Communism, ‘Fascism’ simply because they could not resist it with the support of the people if they called it by its correct name ‘Americanism.’” - Constitutional Educational League, *Communism’s Iron Grip on the CIO* (New Haven: Constitutional Education League, 1937), 16-17.

<sup>180</sup> Mr. Davies’ praise of Stalin would make even the best Soviet propagandist smile approvingly: “He greeted me cordially with a smile and with great simplicity, but also with a real dignity. He gives the impression of a strong mind which is composed and wise. His brown eye is exceedingly kindly and gentle. A child would like to sit in his lap and a dog would sidle up to him. . . He has a sly humor. He has a very great mentality. . . If you can picture

denouncing Communism did appear during the war. One example is *God and Liberty Against Satan and Slavery* (1943), which warned that “Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it in any undertaking whatsoever.” Nevertheless, there was a surfeit of popular media that praised the Soviets, much in the vein of Davies’ memoirs. American films such as *Miss V from Moscow* (1942), *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *The North Star* (1943), *The Boy From Stalingrad* (1943), and imported Soviet films, including *Our Russian Front* (1942) and *The City That Stopped Hitler – Heroic Stalingrad* (1943) fed the American Government’s need to lend moral support to its new ally. The government-sponsored *Why We Fight* series of films in its *The Battle for Russia* installments quoted Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson’s assertion that “History knows no greater display of courage than that shown by the people of Soviet Russia.” The film went as far as the thirteenth century to show that Russia had always been battling a belligerent “Hun.” As previously mentioned, comic books got in on the act. A member of *Air Ace Comics*’ heroic quartet, the Four Musketeers was Russian. Magazines, pulps as well as “slicks,” did their part; *Argosy* chronicled the struggle of Communist partisans in November, 1942’s “Guerilla Chief of the Balkans,” and the June 27, 1944, issue of the popular *Look* magazine featured a cover-story about Stalin that praised both his friendliness amongst children, as well as his fashion sense.<sup>181</sup>

Not long after Japan’s surrender, however, Stalin and Communism were once again understood to be enemies of America. The dawning of the atomic age only adumbrated the fears of the first Red Scare. There were some voices that spoke for tolerance and understanding

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a personality that is exactly opposite to what the most rabid anti-Stalinist anywhere could conceive, then you might picture this man.” - Joseph E. Davies, *Mission to Moscow* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1941), 356.

<sup>181</sup> Michael Barson and Steven Heller, *Red Scared! The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture* ( San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 45.

between the two ideologies, such as first chairman of the American Civil Liberties Union Harry F. Ward, in his pro-Stalinist pamphlet, *Soviet Democracy* (1947). The booklet showers praise on both Stalin and the Soviet system of governance. The Soviet bureaucratic machinery, wherein the populace (it is claimed) has the power to recall unproductive representatives, is lauded as closer to a true democratic structure than anything to be found in the United States.<sup>182</sup>

Such idealism was not reaching the majority of Americans. The era's new enemy was quickly emerging in the form of Communists, and the popular literature of the time would make use of such animosity. The imagery pertaining to Russian Communists, with a few exceptions, was not as "monstrous" as had been the case with the Germans and the Nazis previously. Rather, the grotesqueness was shown more so by their actions, by their disregard for human life and freedom. Communism was commonly tethered to Nazism in the comic books, one hatred being used to cement another. The demonization of the Russian Communist was found more so in the reviling of his ideology, as opposed to his physicality. Such a shift makes a good deal of sense, considering the paranoia concerning Communists at the time: they could be anyone, anywhere, anytime.

## The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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<sup>182</sup> "The picture of the Soviet Union as a new imperialism against which we must defend ourselves exists only in the heads of professional anti-Soviet propagandists. . . . On [realizing] that necessity the possibility of peace and the immediate future of democracy depend. That is the inexorable condition for realizing the possibility that Stalin has repeatedly affirmed of Soviet democracy living side by side with capitalist democracy, each developing into higher forms, and working together to achieve peace, security and social progress for all the people of the earth." - Harry F. Ward, *Soviet Democracy* (New York: Soviet Russia Today, 1947), 47.

“Captain America and Bucky - They fought and battled all through World War II, these valiant and courageous patriots! But, with the coming of peace, there was still no rest for them. Communism was spreading its ugly, grasping tentacles all over the world!”

- *Captain America No. 76 (May, 1954)*

With Russian Communists being the most frequent enemy in American comic books during the early years of the Cold War, the “Ruskies” inherited characteristics used to define the previous enemy of America, the Nazis. Such continuity, nonetheless, was not fluid. In the case of Communists, their ideology was to be demonized, not necessarily their ethnicity. Traditional forms of dehumanizing the enemy were still used from time to time, such as the Neanderthal-like Communist commander who uses killer whales to attack America’s shipping lanes in a Sub-Mariner tale from the early 1950s (“Killer Whales”, *Men’s Adventures* No. 28 – July, 1954). Likewise, the gluttonous and lecherous espionage master, Mr. Sarano, battled Treasury agent Pete Trask (*T-Man* No. 2 – Nov. 1952). The main avenue of characterization was in showing the Nazi-like depths of depravity the Communists were able to sink to. Some titles even sought to return the Nazi to the forefront of world terror, despite the fall of the Third Reich. Fawcett Comics released in 1947 *Comics Novel* No. 1, which featured “Anarcho, Dictator of Death,” an American-turned-Nazi who, after the war, had rounded up a group of similarly minded traitors to destroy the new sense of international camaraderie and create a fascist, one-world government.<sup>183</sup> Nonetheless, such enemies had become passé. Savagery, brutality,

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<sup>183</sup> In the first, and only, issue of Fawcett’s *Comics Novel*, Anarcho’s team of international fascists is opposed only by Rader, the International Policeman, and his team of international crime-fighters, based in Geneva.

sneakiness, and sabotage were all avenues of subversion that the Communists, like the Nazis beforehand, used frequently in the pages of America's comic books in the early years of the Cold War.

One of the most literal instances of the Nazi-turned-Commie menace is present in the popular *Captain America* series. In the December 1953 issue of *Young Men*, all three premier Golden Age heroes of Atlas Comics (known during the 1940s as Timely Comics) - Captain American, the Human Torch and The Sub-Mariner - were recalled into active service, each with his own explanation as to what had transpired during the inter-war years. In the case of Captain America, he and his sidekick Bucky had retired from "costumed" life, with the Captain becoming a history professor in his alter-ego of Steve Rogers, satisfied that America's need for Captain America had ended with Japan's surrender years earlier. "Gangsters tremble! Spies hide in fear!" Captain America's first 1950s story opens, "Out of a glorious past comes the greatest crime-fighter of them all! The enemy of crooks and dictators, foe of injustice and friend of the downtrodden! Is it only the Red Skull's awful nightmare or is Captain America really 'Back from the Dead!'"<sup>184</sup> The Skull is so sure that he will never have to deal with Captain America again that he feels free to form "an international syndicate of crime . . . bigger than Murder Inc., working with the Reds in murder. . . sabotage. . ."

Meanwhile, Professor Steve Rogers is retelling the origin of Captain America to his somewhat doubting classroom, prompting Bucky to ask his teacher, and former partner, if he thinks Captain America will ever be needed again. At just that moment, a radio bulletin

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While the enemy is still Nazism, more or less, the sense of internationalism that would permeate American comic books in the early 1950s can be seen as early as 1947. "Anarcho – Dictator of Death," *Comics Novel* 1 (Fawcett, 1947).

<sup>184</sup> "Back from the Dead!," *Young Men* 24 (Atlas, December 1953).

interrupts the duo's conversation: "Here's terrible news, folks! The worst criminal mind of all has come back to plague humanity! This time he's joined our Red enemies to fight against America! Yes. . . THE RED SKULL IS BACK!. . . He and his gang have crashed the United Nations building . . . and they're holding the delegates prisoners!" Upon hearing this news, Steve and Bucky decide their country is now threatened by a new enemy, just as dangerous as the Nazis (if not more so). They don their costumes and proceed to the United Nations building, freeing the hostages and receiving the praise and adulation of their countrymen, once again (*see Figure XII*).

The Red Skull, a Nazi who formerly took orders directly from Hitler, has discarded his swastika-emblazoned uniform, in favor of a jumpsuit sporting a bright, red cape. His propensity for violence and a will to undermine international cooperation is still prevalent in his latest scheme. The Red Skull's presence among both organized crime and Communists (a collusion that served to further demonize Communists), was also found in the same issue's first story, that of "The Return of the Human Torch." Opening with the Human Torch, Atlas' fiery hero that first appeared in 1939, making short work of a group of criminals, the story explains that what happened following the Second World War. The Torch, and his partner Toro, were attacked by a criminal syndicate, and doused with a chemical compound that extinguished their flames. The Torch was buried in the desert for years, and Toro was taken to an undisclosed location. After relating this back-story (which also informs the reader that it was, in fact, the Human Torch that killed Hitler, burning him alive in the depths of the *Führerbunker*), the Torch, now freed from his desert prison thanks to the testing of a nuclear device which reignited his flame, discovers that Toro had been given "to a country behind the Iron Curtain." Upon hearing reports of a "fireball"

threatening American troops in Korea, the Torch finds that Toro is indeed still alive, and has been brainwashed by the Communists to hinder American movements in the area. After the brainwashing process has been reversed, The Human Torch and Toro both vow to work together to fight tyranny and injustice in this new era.

Once again, the literal criminal nature of the Communist mindset is shown, with organized crime and Communism working in partnership to cripple America. Also, the abhorrent practice of brainwashing, the only way to turn a true, red-blooded American into a Communist, has been used on one of the nation's most beloved defenders. The Communists' dependence on brainwashing is seen in other stories from the era, such as "Captain America Turns Traitor!" (*Young Men* No. 26 - March 1954), in which a drug is secretly administered to the Captain in order to turn him against his country. This practice is also seen in "Come to the Commies!" (*Captain America* No. 76 - May 1954), which finds Captain America in Korea, attempting to understand why a group of captured American soldiers are broadcasting messages to their country, urging the nation to give up the fight against Communism.

The Communist's ability to subvert America from within using treachery, trickery and sabotage, much like their Teutonic forbearers during the war, was also a staple of many Cold War stories. In "The Hour of Doom" (*Captain America* No. 78 – September 1954), such sabotage takes the form of a popular media personality. An all-star athlete and intellectual whiz named Chuck Blayne has taken America by storm, with every boy in the country hanging on his every word. His popularity prompts a suspicious Captain America to remark that such a sway over public consciences reminds him of "someone." After a successful broadcast, the reader is shown Blayne's true colors. He is, in actuality, a servant of International Communists, who has

done his best to endear himself into the hearts and minds of loyal Americans, all for the purposes of “destroying the faith of the youth in world cooperation as exemplified in the United Nations!”<sup>185</sup> At a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, an enraged Blayne exclaims to the attending delegates, as well as the millions of viewers watching the assemblage via television:

Boys of America! Listen to me! You know I always speak the truth! Now I tell you that world cooperation is a falsehood! Friendship among nations is not possible! I have placed a bomb in this building! A bomb that will blow up the U.N. and part of New York! I want you to realize that the U.N. is powerless against a stronger power. . . World brotherhood is a farce! You boys must allow one stronger than you, to lead you!

Quickly arriving on the scene, Captain America and Bucky race into action, and defuse the bomb, only to find a second bomb, rigged to coincide with the second hand on the giant clock in the middle of the General Assembly chamber. Captain America leaps into the air, using his superhuman strength to hold the massive second-hand in place, providing Bucky with enough time to defuse the secondary incendiary. Upon Bucky’s inquiry as to who Blayne reminded him of, Cap replies “Hitler! Same words ‘Strong minds in strong bodies’ and ‘Play to win!’ Americans play not to win, necessarily, but for the sake of sportsmanship and fair play. . . which Nazis AND Reds know nothing about at all!”

Quality Comics’ Pete Trask also enjoyed popularity during the early 1950s, with every issue chronicling the wily Treasury Agent’s battle against Communist subversion, both in America and abroad. In “The Deserters to Red Doom” (*T-Man* No. 26 – June 1955), Trask is sent

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<sup>185</sup> “The Hour of Doom,” *Captain America* 78 (Atlas, September 1954).

abroad to answer the splash page's question: "Why should American G.I.'s suddenly desert and go over to the Reds? Why should decent American kids write letters to their grieving parents . . . Letters spouting Commie party-line lies? Why? This was the vital mission of ace T-Man Pete Trask."<sup>186</sup> Upon his arrival in Berlin, the "T-Man" attempts to save a young woman from mugging, only to find himself knocked unconscious in the melee, awakening later with strange burns etched into his skin. Later that evening, Trask is unable to control himself, and runs, like those before him, over to the Soviet-side of Berlin. He comes to his senses, but is thrown into a prison full of the previous "deserters." In speaking to the other captives, he ascertains that they are all part of a Communist brainwashing scheme, used by Soviet propagandists, both in America and abroad, to weaken American morale. Eventually escaping with the aid of the other soldiers, Trask returns to the free side of the divided city, to the soldiers' exclamations of "The Commies keep trying to hypnotize the free world with propaganda...but, we're wise to them, Trask...We're wise to them!"

While many depictions of Russian Communists contained characteristics of German imagery, a new type of characterization appeared that furthered the demonization of the Soviets along ideological lines: the threat of Communist hegemony over the Earth and of nuclear Armageddon. "Red Scare" media, such as the popular 1952 film *Invasion U.S.A.*, depicted a Communist takeover of America. Related comic book stories warned America against complacency and promoted vigilance against the threat of Communist infiltration. In such stories, the Communists' use of the Nazis' ruthlessness approached levels that the latter had not the means to achieve. Communism had enveloped almost all of Eastern Europe, and

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<sup>186</sup> "The Deserters to Red Doom," *T-Man Comics* 26 (Quality, June 1955).

was making inroads in Asia. These circumstances, combined with the successful tests of Soviet nuclear weapons in 1949, the possible domination of one government over the Earth, as well as the possible complete annihilation of the human race, seemed more likely than at any time in the past.

The Soviet domination of the United States was the subject of the 1947 comic *Is This Tomorrow*, released by the Catechetical Guild, a Catholic organization. The Communist revolution in America takes place during an agricultural crisis, when the nation is considered most vulnerable. The comic, in its opening pages, presented its reasons for publication:

IS THIS TOMORROW is published for one purpose – TO MAKE YOU THINK! To make you more alert to the menace of Communism. Today, there are approximately 85,000 official members of the Communist Party in the United States. There are hundreds of additional members whose names are not carried on the Party rolls because acting as disciplined fifth columnists of the Kremlin, they have wormed their way into key positions in government offices, trade unions, and other positions of public trust. . . These people are working day and night – laying the groundwork to overthrow YOUR GOVERNMENT! The average American is prone to say, “It Can’t Happen Here.” Millions of people in other countries used to say the same thing. Today, they are dead – or living in Communist slavery. IT MUST NOT HAPPEN HERE!<sup>187</sup>

Given who published the book, as well as the overall belief that the battle against Communism was also one against Atheism, one of the most striking scenes involves a young boy who has turned over his parents to the new Communist authorities, after learning in school that listening to foreign broadcasts and harboring religious icons is outlawed. “Take my son with you,” the father tells the invading Red policemen, “You’ve got his soul – Now take his body,

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<sup>187</sup> “Is This Tomorrow,” *Is This Tomorrow* (Catechetical Guild, 1947).

too.”<sup>188</sup> The threat of nuclear exchanges between the two superpowers proved to be the most common depiction of the possible end-result of the new West-East antagonism.

In 1952, the four-issue series *Atomic War!* debuted, from Ace- Junior Books, Inc. At the top of each issue’s splash page, a reason for the title’s publication was offered to the reader:

This book is designed to shock America in vigilance – and to help keep the horrors of atomic war from our shores. IT CAN happen here, unless friend and foe alike can be made to realize the awful devastation that another war will bring to all. So as you read these pages, pray that what you see here will never happen. And it won’t – if we keep America strong!<sup>189</sup>

The series follows the hypothetical confrontations between the Western and Eastern hemispheres following the Soviet Union’s nuclear attack on the United States in the year 1960. It also documents the various battlefields, on the land, under the sea, and in the air that such wars, now in the Atomic Age, would occupy.

Another title that dealt with the possibility of a future war with Russia, combining fears of both Russian hegemony and nuclear annihilation was the aptly-named *World War III*, first published by Ace-Junior in March 1952. Like *Atomic War!*, it stated that its purpose was to wake America from its complacency and rally its citizens to preparedness in the face of possible Communist aggression (*see Figures IX and X*). It warned that nuclear war could erupt within the next decade.

This is the summer of 1960. We have for so long been saying “the Russians don’t dare attack” – we have come to believe it. On this hot summer afternoon Americans’ main concerns are The Giants’ pennant chances, vacation plans, Junior’s new tooth. All the small and pleasant bits of business that make everyday life as we know it in blessed

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> “Operation Vengeance,” *Atomic War!* 2 (Junior Books, December 1952).

peace time. But at this same fateful moment in the secret Kremlin headquarters of Russia's military rulers. . . <sup>190</sup>

Thus, around a table located in a secretive war-room, a Russian leader (who looks a great deal like Josef Stalin) directs his countrymen to launch a surprise attack against the United States. By the third page, atomic bombs have decimated numerous American cities, including Washington, D.C.

Scenes of horrendous destruction follow, with dozens of cities annihilated by Soviet atomic bombs, in the midst of Americans boasting as to the invincibility of their country moments before their deaths. In every American city, the threat of Soviet bombs is realized: "Radiant heat, deadly aftermath of an A-Bomb blast, is only one of the ghastly secondary results of atomic warfare. Frequently, all that is left of a victim is a shadow-etching burned into the wall of a bomb-wrecked building!"<sup>191</sup> By the end of the issue's first story, the President has gone on the airwaves to assure his fellow Americans that retaliation will be swift and soon. One member of the assembled audience exclaims "Well, one thing's for sure! The Russkys'll never get surrender out of that tough old guy! I wouldn't want to be in their shoes, now!" The remainder of the series' two-issue run depicts individual stories and battles within the larger narrative of this Third World War. Ground forces of NATO and Soviet Russia engage on the battlefields of a divided Germany, and American and Communist frogmen battle deep underwater off Allied coastlines.

The science-fiction and superhero genres of comic books also tackled the topic of a possible nuclear holocaust. *Batman* No. 68 (Dec. 1951-Jan. 1952) features a villain threatening

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<sup>190</sup> "World War III Unleashed," *World War III* 1 (Ace Magazines, March 1952).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

to steal America's national treasures, after they had been moved to a bomb-proof cave following threats of atomic bombings from abroad. Atlas Comics' mystery-horror series *Astonishing*, in its seventh issue (Dec. 1951) offered "Out of the Darkness!," which depicted the underground world man inhabited two-thousand years after the atomic wars ended in 1999.

As was the case with many films of the time, such as *The Thing From Another World* (1951), *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *Them!* (1954), and *The Invasion of the Body-Snatchers* (1956), popular youth literature of the early Cold War often used science-fiction, with aliens and other creatures as proxies for the Communist menace. For *Strange Adventures* No. 3 (Dec. 1950), Gardner Fox (who would later at D.C. Comics oversee the resurrection of the superhero genre) wrote "The Stranger from the Stars," about a shape-shifting alien who assumes the identities of several highly-placed American officials. The creature plants "Super-hydrogen bombs" throughout the major cities of the United States, waiting to set them off until the arrival of the rest of his invading compatriots. The story ends with an ominous threat that could have been attached to any number of Communist-themed plots:

When I receive word from them, the bombs go off! In the resultant confusion, it will be easy to conquer the entire planet!" That is why this appeal is being made to you! To every man, woman and child in this nation! Be on your guard! Warn the authorities if you see this Alien! Remember – he can change his body to make it look like anyone – even like – YOU!<sup>192</sup>

The story's concluding plea to its readers to remain vigilant and ever watchful for suspicious activities are found in a multitude of Cold War comics that deal with more terrestrial infiltrators. Atlas Comics' Marvel Boy, one of the few new superheroes to appear during these

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<sup>192</sup> "The Stranger from the Stars," *Strange Adventures* 3 (D.C. Comics, December 1950).

years, contended with alien weapons coming from the sky to wreak havoc on Washington, D.C., in the second issue of his own title (Jan. 1951). E.C. Comics' *Weird Fantasy* No. 14 (July 1950) featured the threat of "cosmic ray bombs" which produced what looked eerily like atomic bomb mushroom clouds covering the Earth.<sup>193</sup>

The comic book Communists did not have to depend on sabotage and nuclear weapons alone to bring ruin to American shores. The 1951 promotional comic book *How Stalin Hopes We Will Destroy America* explains how it has been the goal, since the earliest days of the Bolshevik government, to use inflation as a weapon against the United States. The narrator, a kindly, old grandfather explains to his family how "We're weakening our money – lowering its value. And that's just what the Communists want us to do!"<sup>194</sup> Explaining how "Nikolai" Lenin demanded the new Soviet state begin a program that would "force the United States to spend itself into destruction!," the grandfather extols to his family the devastation inflation can bring. Going as far back as the Roman Emperor Valentinian, the narrator elucidates how inflation can destroy a country. He explains why it exists in America today (increased spending in fear of a Communist attack), and what can be done to end it. He succeeds in finally convincing all the members of his

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<sup>193</sup> In Marvel Boy's origin story, an interesting reversal of Superman's origin and first appearing in *Marvel Boy* No. 1 (Dec. 1950), it is revealed that his father was a scientist in Europe who, fearing the encroaching Nazi onslaught and after the Nazis' murder of his wife, builds a rocket ship with the hope of taking him and his infant son far away from the Earth. Eventually, the pair are drawn by gravity to Uranus, where the inhabitants no longer indulge in war or strife, and young Bob Grayson learns many fantastic abilities that he will use later upon his return to Earth, under the guise of Marvel Boy. This origin story is interesting in that it shows yet another link to the Nazis found in Cold War era comic books – having fled the Earth due to Nazi belligerence, Marvel Boy must return, in the face of new "Nazis" (Commies) to prevent a reoccurrence of the type of horrors that led to his father's own self-imposed exile from Earth.

<sup>194</sup> "How Stalin Hopes We Will Destroy America," *How Stalin Hopes We Will Destroy America* (Pictorial Media, Inc., 1951).

family to write to their local representative, and demand that no “new money” be added to the country’s growing deficit.<sup>195</sup> (*see Figures VI – VIII*)

The Russian Communists, as the closest thing to Anglo-Saxon, white enemies that the Cold War provided, inherited the characteristics previously attributed to the Teutonic Nazis in popular, printed media. Brutality, depraved indifference to human life, and at times, monstrous physical characteristics, combined with the new Cold War-era threat of global domination and/or nuclear annihilation (made possible by complacency and a lack of vigilance on the part of Americans) combined to create the most common villain to appear in American comic books during the 1950s.

## The People’s Republic of China and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

So he’s talkin’ the truth, eh, Fritz? The Claw IS workin’ for the Commies! And when I hand over this briefcase, I’M workin’ for the Commies, too!

- *The Yellow Claw (Oct. 1956)*

On October 1, 1949, the People’s Republic of China was founded, with Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and other leaders of the Chinese Communist Party standing atop the rostrum erected at the Forbidden Palace in Tiananmen Square. The defeated Chinese Nationalists, led by Kuomintang Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, fled to the island of Formosa, and established a rival capital in Taipei. The defeat of the Nationalist Chinese came after decades of civil war and

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

of broken truces, with the Maoist forces gaining the support of the countryside in their efforts to fight off the invading Japanese during World War II, while the Kuomintang chose to fight their countrymen rather than the invaders. The “loss” of China to Communism was significant for the United States, which had been backing the Nationalist forces for years. Although support for Chiang had begun to dwindle in the late 1940s in the face of rampant corruption on the part of the Kuomintang, the U.S. had seemingly lost an important buffer to the further spread of Communism. The fact that the Soviet Union had also backed the Nationalists, and that the Communism of Mao differed strongly from that of Lenin did not seem to matter to America; Communism was spreading, and with it, a new enemy had emerged: Red China.<sup>196</sup> Two years prior, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, with Kim Il-sung as President was established in the north of the Korean Peninsula, after disagreements between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. had made any unification between north and south impossible. North Korea’s guiding ideology also was not an exact duplicate of what was to be found in Russia. As far as Americans were concerned, Red was Red. The outbreak of the Korean War in the summer of 1950 cemented Asian Communists as a staple of popular media villainy, alongside the Russian Bolsheviks.<sup>197</sup>

Whereas the characterization of European Communists relied more on the demonization of the actual Communist ideology, as opposed to the use of physical

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<sup>196</sup> For a more complete understanding of what separated the various strains of Communism present during the Cold War from one another, see: Gary K. Bertsch and Thomas W. Ganschow, *Comparative Communism – The Soviet, Chinese, and Yugoslav Models* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1976).

<sup>197</sup> In fact, the ideology based upon Kim Il-sung’s programs, known as *Juche*, now bears little resemblance to traditional Marxism, and the North Korean Constitution drafted in 1972 officially removed Marxism-Leninism as the guiding ideology of the nation, and replaced it with *Juche*, or “self-reliance,” the idea of “socialism in one country” taken to the extreme. For an excellent understanding of *Juche*, Kimilsungism, and of North Korea as a whole, see: Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader – North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004).

abnormalities or deformities, imagery depicting Communist Asians often, but not always, relied on physical characteristics. These were the same characteristics (albeit toned down, to a degree) that had been in use in the pulps of the 1920s and 1930s, and through the war-time comic books of the 1940s. Also, as was the case during World War II, there would be distinctions drawn between the “good” Asian, and the “bad” Asian. The “good” inherited traditional, American values and ideologies, and the “bad” was demonized using the depictions attributed to Asians in the past. The difference now being that such grotesqueness was not a result of their ethnicity, but rather that only subhuman monsters would accept and obey the doctrines and orders of the Comintern.

The majority of comic book-depictions of Asians during the early wars of the Cold War, it should be noted, were not as demonic as their counterparts from World War II. Certainly, the characters were depicted often as monstrous or sinister looking, but the overly-exaggerated features (such as claws and fangs) were not as prevalent after the Second World War. One of the casualties of the Second World War was the superhero that had proven so popular during the war years. Almost as soon as the war ended, superhero titles began to falter in sales, in favor of other genres, such as war, romance, horror, crime, and humor. This change is also seen in the few heroes that did survive, namely National Allied’s Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. All three of these characters stopped dealing with somewhat realistic issues, and instead became more “science-fiction” in their nature. Superman fought his evil twin Bizarro. Batman and Robin became intergalactic policemen or were sent back in time to the Stone Age. Wonder Woman contended with villains from another world. These heroes had seemingly left the more “grounded” basis they had enjoyed earlier, with very few issues

mentioning threats such as Communism or atomic bombs. In fact, the closest thing a reader may find to Superman or Batman tackling the issues of the day would be the public service announcements found in the pages of their titles, promoting diversity, understanding, and internationalism. These public services announcements are some of the few instances of the “Big Three” superheroes venturing into territory remotely related to the real world (*see Figures IV and V*)

One of the genres to replace superheroes as a top-seller was that of war. The number of war-related titles was staggering, and included, but were not limited to, such series as: *Navy Combat, Battlefield, Battle Cry, G.I. Joe, Combat Casey, Two-Fisted Tales, Man Comics, G.I. Combat, Joe Yank, Battle Front, Combat Kelly, Battle Action, Battle, All-American Men of War, War Combat, War Adventures, War Comics, War Heroes*, and even *Wartime Romances*. The sheer number of titles dedicated to war nearly rivaled the number of superhero books that flourished in the decade prior. Within the pages of the war comics, the hero was the American soldier. At times he fought in past wars, such as the Revolution and World War II, but typically he was involved in more contemporary battles, such as in Korea (*see Figure XI*). The enemy was regularly Asian, employing traditional “Asian” imagery that, once again, was attributed more to Communism than to ethnic origins. In many cases, the war comics featured their own recurring characters, such as Tripoli Shores, found in *Fightin’ Marines*, and the title characters in Atlas’ *Combat Kelly* and *Combat Casey*, Ziff Davis’ *G.I. Joe*, and Standard Comics’ *Joe Yank*. For the most part (with the exception of E.C. Comics, at times) the American soldier “character” was not a great deal more realistic than his costumed predecessors that had fought against the Nazis. In these stories, the American soldier is often wise-cracking, “laughing in the face of

danger,” as it were, and taking chances that it is doubtful any soldier in his right mind would take. Nonetheless, the American soldier in the 1950s war comics provided the type of characterization the comic readers wanted from their soldiers. Indeed, their longevity (usually appearing in World War II-era stories) in comics published decades later attests to that.

The first issue of *Battle Cry* (Nov. 1952) featured the story “Gunfire!” about an otherwise heroic American soldier on the Korean front whose only weakness was his fear of gunfire. The Koreans found therein are depicted as yellow, with sinister smiles, slanted eyes, and long, angular noses. The villain of “Plan of Attack!,” in *Battle Cry*’s fifth issue (Jan. 1953) appears in the form of a captured North Korean commander who is apparently modeled after Chairman Mao, and sports a “Fu-Manchu” mustache. Imagery related to the “Dragon Lady” motif of the 1930s and 1940s can be found in *Combat Casey* No. 18 (Oct. 1954), in which Casey battles “The Snake Lady of Sinyong.”

It is interesting to note that the more exaggerated Asiatic villains, for the most part, only appeared in the pages of superhero comics, those few that survived the late 1940s, or the Timely (then, Atlas) characters (Captain America, the Human Torch, and the Sub-Mariner), who enjoyed a brief revival between 1953 and 1955. While the resurrected Namor and Torch were battling both European and Asian Communists, as well as Fifth Columnists in America (in addition to the occasional monster or robot), it was Captain America who mostly battled the forces of Red Asia. This may be partly due to Private Steve Rogers (as was the situation in World War II) being posted near the frontlines (in this case, Korea). The nature of the character himself may have played a part in his constant antagonism with the Reds of Asia. Even in a time where internationalism was on the rise and nativism had declined to some degree, the

editors at Atlas may have figured that the living, breathing symbol of America should be fighting the most “alien” variant of the Communist threat. In “Kill Captain America!” (*Men’s Adventures* No. 28, July 1954), “Cap” and Bucky are captured by a contingent of Red Guerrillas after attempting to save the life of an American soldier who had been drugged into accepting Communist ideals. The soldier eventually regains his “Americanness” once the drugs wear off, and he aids the two heroes in killing all of the Commies and escaping. The two villains of the short story are Korean Communists who would have fit very well into any Captain America story from the early 1940s. Commissar Kee-Sai favors depictions years-past of Hideaki Tojo, complete with bespectacled, slanted eyes, crooked teeth, “Asian” mustache, and a sickly yellow shade of skin. His partner in crime, Kag the Guerilla, is a rotund Korean, with all of the same features (sans the glasses) as Kee-Sai. Other Asiatic villains that appear in the Captain America stories from the 1950s, such as “Come to the Commies!” (*Captain America* No. 76, May 1954) and “The Green Dragon” (*Captain America* No. 78, Sept. 1954) feature the same, exaggerated portrayals. In one of their own excursions to attack the “Redskis,” the Human Torch and Toro dispose of several battalions of yellow-skinned, slant-eyed Communists in “Playing with Fire!” (*Captain America* No 78). This story retains much of the mockery of Asian “Engrish” that had been used years earlier. “Now you never gonna get peekie at Pontu where we have many ‘Melican prisoners not reported to U.N. peoples!” yells one North Korean soldier to the Torch, after dousing his flame. Another Red boasts “And without flames you cannot melt bullets which honorable captain will now fill your bodies with!”<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> “Playing with Fire!,” *Captain America* 78 (Atlas, September 1954).

One of the few titles to retain the more monstrous imagery of Asians was Fawcett's *Captain Marvel Adventures*, which ran from 1941 to 1953. The stories found in the Captain Marvel series not only demonized Communists, but also invoked the old yellow peril fear of the Mongol, of the Asiatic hordes descending in waves of destruction upon civilized societies. Captain Marvel, first appearing in *Whiz Comics* No. 2 (Feb. 1940), was actually a young radio reporter named Billy Batson who, upon uttering the magic word "Shazam!", was instantly transformed into "The World's Mightiest Mortal," Captain Marvel. The character was immensely popular in the early 1940s, receiving his own film serial (still considered one of the best to come out of the era) and actually out-selling other characters such as Superman and Batman.<sup>199</sup> *Captain Marvel Adventures* No. 139 (Dec. 1952) featured the menace of the Red Crusher, "A monster feared and hated all along the allied front in Korea!" a hideous, giant yellow monster with slanted eyes and large teeth, clad in a Communist uniform and wielding a giant mace and chain (see *Figure XIII*). This "Mongolian Menace" would appear in other Captain Marvel stories before the series' cancellation.<sup>200</sup> Issue number 140 (Jan. 1953) of the same title featured a more monstrous depiction of Asians than that of the Red Crusher, in the story "Captain Marvel Fights the Mongol Blood-Drinkers." After delivering a supply of blood to a badly-depleted Army outpost on the Korean front, Captain Marvel learns why a blood shortage

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<sup>199</sup> Beginning in 1941, National Allied filed suit against Fawcett Comics over the Captain Marvel character, claiming it infringed on their copyright of Superman, although the fact that *Captain Marvel* titles were outselling those featuring *Superman* throughout the 1940s should be taken into consideration as a possible, if not probable, motive for litigation. The case went to trial in 1948, and finally ended in a settlement in 1953, at a time when superhero comics were no longer as profitable as they once were. Fawcett agreed to pay damages to National Allied, in addition to promising to never publish Captain Marvel stories again. After superheroes rebounded in popularity, D.C. Comics acquired the rights to all of Fawcett's characters, and began a new Captain Marvel series, entitled *Shazam!* in 1973. - Goulart ed., *The Encyclopedia of American Comics – From 1897 to the Present* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 70.

<sup>200</sup> "Captain Marvel Battles the Red Crusher," *Captain Marvel Adventures* 139 (Fawcett, December 1952).

has taken place. “A tribe of vampires has lived in Mongolia for centuries!,” a nurse explains, “The Communists made a deal with them – all the American blood they could drink if they’d join the red forces!”<sup>201</sup> Just as a thousand-strong force of vampires are about to descend on American troops, Captain Marvel races into outer space and returns with a “blob of blazing sun,” the sunlight from which weakens the vampires, rendering them defenseless against the giant wooden stakes he plunges into their hearts. The vampires themselves could have easily been pulled from the pages of a 1920s-era weird fiction pulp; bright yellow faces, with bushy eyebrows, elongated ears, flat pushed-up noses, slanted eyes, a Fu-Manchu-like mustache, and extremely-long canines, long even by *dhampir* standards (see *Figures XIV and XV*).

Another Captain Marvel title that Fawcett produced, beginning in 1945, was *The Marvel Family* (see *Figure XVI*). The series featured the adventures of Captain Marvel, his younger sister Mary Marvel, and their friend Captain Marvel, Jr. (the afore-mentioned arch-enemy of Captain Nazi), as well as other, secondary characters, such as Tall Marvel and Hillbilly Marvel. In the eighty-first issue of *The Marvel Family* (Mar. 1953), the Marvel trio contends with the villainy of “The Mightiest Mongol,” a yellow, slant-eyed, buck-toothed giant named “Mong the Giant,” who is capable of growing hundreds of feet tall, with battle ships and tanks being as toys before him.<sup>202</sup> Upon infiltrating the Commie base, the Marvels realize that Mong the Giant is actually a solider named “Red Runt” who, through the use of growing and shrinking pills, is able to reach any height he wishes. The trio eventually escapes imprisonment at the hands of the

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<sup>201</sup> “Captain Marvel Fights the Mongol Blood-Drinkers,” *Captain Marvel Adventures* 140 (Fawcett, January 1953).

<sup>202</sup> “The Marvel Family Fights the Mightiest Mongol,” *The Marvel Family* 81 (Fawcett, March 1953).

Reds, destroying all of the Giant's growing pills and even saving a decorated American soldier in the process.

While demonization of the "other" (in this instance, the Communist) still utilized many characterizations that can be traced back to the Yellow Peril of the early twentieth century, the move away from such imagery can be seen in both the "toned-down" nature of the majority of Chinese and Korean depictions, as well as in the continuation of an internationalist message in American comic books of the early 1950s.

## Towards Internationalism

"The hillside was alive with sudden death! And trapped atop the summit of Kushi Hill the Free Chinese forces stood shoulder to shoulder with American troops against a common foe!"

- *G.I. Combat No. 19 (Dec. 1954)*

While the exaggerated imagery of Asians from the 1930s and 1940s was not as rampant in the comic books of the 1950s, and depictions were more "tame" than in the past, the characterization of "good" and "bad" Asians, begun in the war years, did continue into the Cold War era. Such an understanding of race relations can be found in comics of the 1940. "They Got the Blame," printed in the December 1943 issue of *True Comics* explains the history of the scapegoat, documents what groups have suffered under such a designation in years past, and extolled the internationalism found in the form of the Allied Nations. A 1944 issue of the same

title contained the short piece “There Are No Master Races,” (later re-issued as its own promotional pamphlet) which argued against the Nazi ideology concerning the existence of such an Aryan race. The 1946 animated film *The Brotherhood of Man* explains that the international interconnectivity following World War II demands that people put aside racial beliefs and stereotypes and understand that all people, regardless of skin or cultural experiences, are fundamentally the same. The film even goes so far as to point out in one scene the many instances in the past, in which both the Asiatic races and those of the Middle-East surpassed Europe’s white culture in technology and other artistic achievements. The “good” Asians of the comics often lacked the more sinister features given to their Socialist brethren, and as was the case in World War II, are portrayed as either friends to any U.S. forces they came into contact with, or as heroes in their own right. In many stories, Koreans and Americans join forces to battle the Communist hordes, both sides contributing equally to the war effort.

The December 1952 issue of *Atlas’ Battlefield* (No. 6) featured “Massacre at Manghowon!,” in which the titular village is the scene of a battle between U.S. and North Korean forces, with “good” Koreans caught in the middle. The peaceful village of Manghowon is roused from its slumber by the advance of a column of Red troops, fleeing a U.S. assault. Once in control of the village, the Communists embark on a terror campaign, attacking men, women and children, with only a handful of villagers escaping the massacre. With the aid of American soldiers, and a clever trick using pumpkins floating downriver to mask the Allied advance, the villagers are able to retake their village, killing all of the Communist invaders. In this story, Americans are seen as both friends and benefactors of the “good” Koreans, who do not show the traditional, “Asiatic” characteristics, aside from a yellowish hue to their skin. An American

soldier had given them the pumpkin seeds that they later utilized in their liberation and, during the battle that led to the Communist invasion of the village, a farmer remarks “Let us hope it is the Americans who win the battle, Ku Li!”<sup>203</sup> The Japanese enemy of years past is invoked, in that “The Reds rushed out of the woods in a Banzai charge against the village” and a Communist soldier refers to his commander as “his Excellency,” a title regularly used in mocking the imperially-minded Japanese of World War II.

*Tell it to the Marines* No. 10 (November, 1954) provides scenes in which an American soldier is aided by a Korean civilian, not on the battlefield, but rather in overcoming his self-loathing. In “The Gunner and the Kid!,” Sgt. “Howitzer Howie” Burns is recovering in a Marine hospital from wounds inflicted during a recent skirmish. Despite his physician’s assurance that his leg is almost fully-healed and ambulation will soon be within his grasp once more, Burns is hopelessly depressed. He refuses to believe he will walk and exclaims over and over again “I’m no murderer!” His doctor can provide no explanation for the Sergeant’s behavior. On a whim, the doctor introduces Burns to Ram Wo, a young Korean boy also staying in the hospital. The two connect almost immediately. After a few hours of jovial conversation and card games, Burns inquires as to why Ran is in the hospital. Ran explains that his family was killed when the Communist forces made his village march across a bridge as human shields, a bridge that American forces were shelling. It is then revealed that this is the same battle during which Howie was injured. After hysterically pleading with Ran to forgive him for his part in the battle that killed his family, the child reveals that he feels no animosity towards the Marine. Ran says “What you did had to be done...My people knew that and they marched bravely, singing, to

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<sup>203</sup> “Massacre at Manghowon!,” *Battlefield 6* (Atlas, December 1952).

their deaths...because they knew it also brought death to our enemies! No, I do not hate you! Many of your Marine brothers died to save my country...You all good men...and you fine guy, Howie!”<sup>204</sup> Ran Wo, with skin that has not been rendered in any shade of sickly yellow, absolves Burns of any culpability in his family’s death, frees the young soldier from his guilt, and allows him to recover his ability to walk once again.

*Combat Kelly* No. 30 (April 1955) contained “Victory in the Village,” in which the series’ title character not only defends a Korean village from the Commies but also instills a sense of internationalism in the isolation-minded Korean elders. In Hatong, a Korean village under the iron rule of “General Chang,” a young boy named Kil Ki witnesses the arrival of Combat Kelly and his troop of “Doggies.” While Kil Ki is overjoyed that the U.N. forces liberated their village, his grandfather is suspicious. “Yes, Kil Ki, but they too are foreigners!” the old man explains, “And Korea has been robbed and enslaved by foreigners for centuries! They will be no different! . . . Now they come to deal with us! But we must be brave. . . As we were when the Communists took our village!”<sup>205</sup> When the American soldiers refuse any of the villagers’ property without sufficient payment, the elders are still suspicious. Their fears are somewhat allayed however when they observe American troops refusing to defile a Buddhist temple to set up their command post (unlike the Communists) and sacrificing their own comfort in order to clothe, feed, and provide medical care to the town’s children (*see Figure XX*). While on patrol, the Americans are warned of an ambush by Kil Ki, whom Kelly saves from death at the hands of an enemy soldier. After burying the child’s pet goose (who Kelly was not able to save from the

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<sup>204</sup> “The Gunner and the Kid!,” *Tell It To The Marines* 10 (Toby Press, November 1954).

<sup>205</sup> “Victory in the Village,” *Combat Kelly* 30 (Atlas, April 1955) – This issue also features a full-length story detailing the exploits of the all-black 91<sup>st</sup> and 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Divisions of World War I.

devious Reds), Combat and Kil Ki witness an American medical supply helicopter shot down by Communist forces. In a show of gratitude, and as an apology for the initial suspicion they harbored against the Americans, all of the villagers line up gladly to donate blood to the soldiers, and to replace the plasma lost in the attack. As the tale ends, Kil Ki and Combat are seen saluting American and Republic of Korea flags, as symbols “of a friendship bound by blood!”

In *Fightin’ Marines* No. 5 (April 1952), American soldier-extraordinaire Tripoli Shores belongs to a group of “Fugitives from the Firing Squad,” and only escapes due to the aid of a captured South Korean translator. Captain America witnesses a supernatural creature bringing doom to “the true enemies of China” and liberating the nation’s oppressed peasants in *Captain America* No. 78 (September 1954). Joe Yank, in the ninth issue of his self-titled series (Dec. 1952), is enticed into saving the life of a beautiful Korean villager named Su San, who has been sentenced to a most terrible fate. She tells him “I hate the Communists and all they stand for! My father has promised me to Colonel Blood...But I’d rather die than marry that loathsome beast!”<sup>206</sup> Su San aids in the escape of Joe Yank and his pals after they had been captured. The bestial Colonel Blood is murdered at the hands of Yank after he shoots Su San, “the bravest girl” Yank had ever known. It is later revealed that Su San was only grazed, and gratefully returns with the Americans to their camp.

The December 1954 issue of National Allied’s *G.I. Combat* (No. 19) features two stories that present an internationalist message to its readers. In “Red Invasion,” American troops fight alongside the forces of Nationalist China when a contingent of Red Chinese soldiers attempt to

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<sup>206</sup> “The Hermit Girl,” *Joe Yank* 9 (Standard, December 1952).

take advantage of a mock naval battle, and they seize the island of Formosa. Chiang Kai-shek's forces are never stereotyped, in neither appearance nor language, and, upon the story's end, are praised by the Americans as valiant allies who, eventually, will retake the mainland "from those stinkin' Reds!"<sup>207</sup> "No Escape," found in the same issue of *G.I. Combat*, relates the experiences of Johnny Yang and Frank Hoi, two Korean-American soldiers on the front, who volunteer to go undercover behind enemy lines in a spy operation. After their ruse is discovered, the pair embarks on a death-defying journey to return to the American side of the battleground. The duo, who refer to themselves as Korean-American, fill their escape with witty banter and jokes, no different than any of the countless Caucasian soldiers fighting the Korean War in the comics. Upon returning successfully to their base, they have only one thing on their minds, the one thing any red-blooded American would: which team is currently ahead in the World Series.

The most interesting example of the Asian heroic character to appear in 1950s comic books is that of Chinese-American F.B.I. agent Jimmy Woo. Jimmy Woo first appeared in the inaugural issue of *The Yellow Claw*, one of the rare titles named after a villain; a villain who, in this case, is a direct literary descendent of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu. Perhaps an attempt to appeal to more conservative elements after the attacks of Wertham labeled all comics unbridled sources of liberal extremism and "un-Americanness," *The Yellow Claw* premiered in October of 1956, from Atlas Comics (see *Figure XVII*). Once again, the traditional Oriental villain is recast in a new light, in that the Yellow Claw is a worldwide criminal mastermind, as well as a Communist agent. The narrator warns: "In an ancient Manchu palace hidden in a mist-filled

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<sup>207</sup> "Red Invasion," *G.I. Combat* 19 (D.C. Comics, December 1954).

valley deep among the foothills of the Tibetan Alps, America's greatest menace waited...A legendary Oriental mystic whose very name alarmed those who were familiar with his strange and terrible powers! Read now of...The Coming of THE YELLOW CLAW."<sup>208</sup> While battling a villain clearly in the yellow peril vein, Jimmy Woo's position as a main, heroic character did a great deal to dismantle that stereotype, as if the battles between the Claw and Woo were reflections of the real world battle to destroy such "Fu Manchu" imagery.

The first issue's story begins in Yuunan province, China (the base of Mao Zedong's power during the Chinese Civil War) wherein leaders of the "Chinese Communist High Command" are planning "the next phase of our campaign of world domination...the invasion of Formosa." Fear of America's Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Straits has made the planned invasion almost an impossible, until the gathered leaders, under the guidance of "General Mao Sung," decide to enlist the aid of an "ancient mystic" known only as The Yellow Claw. Terrified villagers run in fear of the Claw's name wherever Sung attempts to find him, until a beautiful young woman named Suwan, claiming to be the Claw's grandniece, offers to guide them to their desired destination. Upon arrival at the Claw's palace, complete with statues of Buddha and ornate Manchu decorations, the Communist soldiers are assured, by the Claw himself, of his dedication to their cause, his willingness to travel to America to destroy it from within, and of his mystic powers, far beyond those of human understanding. Gazing into his crystal ball at the end of the introductory story, the Yellow Claw sees his greatest enemy, F.B.I. operative Jimmy Woo.

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<sup>208</sup> "The Yellow Claw," *Yellow Claw* 1 (Atlas, October 1956).

Based in a curio shop in Chinatown, and enlisting the aid of a former commandant of Auschwitz, The Yellow Claw begins his plans of sabotage and fifth columnist activities. In “The Yellow Claw Strikes!” the Claw frees a convicted felon whose services he requires in attaining sensitive government documents; however, once informed by Jimmy Woo that the Claw is serving the Communist cause, the criminal’s patriotism emerges and he sacrifices himself to thwart the Claw’s plans. The third story of the issue reveals both Suwan’s role in The Yellow Claw’s plan, that of unwilling accomplice, made to serve her mad uncle through hypnotism. Suwan is also shown to be a potential love interest for the protagonist. When Jimmy is captured by The Yellow Claw, it is Suwan who engineers his escape, allowing him to report back to the F.B.I. that they have an ally inside the madman’s criminal empire. In subsequent stories, the Yellow Claw utilizes both magic and modern science, such as his allying with an alien, and his use of a “shrinking ray” to better infiltrate the offices of highly-placed government officials (“U.F.O. – The Lightning Man!” and “The Microscopic Army” – *The Yellow Claw* No. 3, Feb. 1957)

The character of the Yellow Claw is a near identical twin of Fu Manchu. Indeed, Atlas editor Stan Lee, who created the character, stated in an interview “We fashioned him after Fu Manchu.”<sup>209</sup> The Yellow Claw has a sickly, yellow visage with sharp pointed ears, deceitfully slanted eyes, and his name-sake’s mustache. His form is clothed in a long Chinese robe with high collar, topped off with a Mandarin cap, and his hands end in long, clawed fingers. Jimmy Woo’s relationship with Suwan, and her reluctance to aid in her uncle’s diabolical schemes, mirrors that of Kâramanèh, a servant of Fu Manchu’s who falls in love with, and eventually marries, Manchu’s nemesis, Dr. Petrie. Suwan also bears a literary resemblance to Fu Manchu’s

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<sup>209</sup> Les Daniels, *Marvel – Five Fabulous Decades of the World’s Greatest Comics* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1993), 80.

daughter, Fah lo Suee, who rebels against her maniacal father. Suwan would appear to be an amalgamation of the two (*see Figure XVIII*). The Yellow Claw, like Fu Manchu, takes advantage of both ancient sorcery and modern, Western science in order to achieve his ends. On the other hand, Jimmy Woo is as far from Fu Manchu's Anglo-Saxon, and Anglo-minded, enemy Sir Denis Nayland Smith, as possible. Jimmy Woo is Chinese, like The Yellow Claw, yet no attention is drawn to that fact over the course of the comic, with the exception of it being noted that Woo has many contacts in Chinatown. White officers take orders from him, and he is the one that leads the charge into The Yellow Claw's headquarters (*see Figure XIX*). While Nayland Smith was working to save white civilization, Jimmy Woo is working to protect his country and everyone inhabiting it, regardless of their ethnicity.

*The Yellow Claw* lasted only four issues (the villain appearing sporadically in later decades, and Jimmy Woo finding new life in the Marvel Comics of the twenty-first century); a short life-span that could be attributed to the comic reading public's inability to digest an Asian superhero (the first popular minority superhero, Marvel's The Black Panther, was still over a decade away). It could also be surmised, on the other hand, that the problem rests not with Woo, but with The Yellow Claw, himself. As was the case with other "Yellow Peril" characters, it is entirely possible that a Fu Manchu like character had simply lost his appeal among comic readers. The belief on publisher Martin Goodman's and editor Stan Lee's parts that a Chinese-American hero could lead to a viable franchise should indicate that, in their eyes, the reading public had changed to a degree that such an undertaking was at least possible, as well as possibly profitable.

The depictions of Asians that were prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s pulps existed through World War II, augmented to fit the enemy of the time, the Japanese; after the war, this imagery continued, in the form of America's newest menace, international Communism, and, specifically, Asian Communists. America's newfound internationalist stature promoted the notion that not all Asians were evil, hungry, Fu-Manchu-like monsters out for blood. Rather, many of them were not as different from Americans as once supposed, and they too valued traditional American values such as freedom and individualism. Furthermore, even the most vile depictions of the time to be found in American comic books were not as grotesque as those in the comics of the 1940s. Even in depicting the enemy, American comic books had toned down the nativist and racially-charged aspects of the imagery.

## Conclusion

With the end of the Second World War, a period of relative peace was thought to be at hand, after years of war, and, before that, economic stagnation. As Eric F. Goldman chronicled in *The Crucial Decade*, there was a general optimism that swept the country after Japan's surrender, "a zest in today, wondrous hopes for tomorrow."<sup>210</sup> This optimism would eventually be brought back around to reality however, with the emerging animosity developing between the United States and the Soviet Union. The ideological, and at times spiritual, battlefield on which the Cold War was fought took form in dozens of ways, one of the most illustrative being that of the popular literature of the time and in comic books particularly. Comic books supplanted one hated enemy with another, tying Communism to the defeated Nazism, and

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<sup>210</sup> Goldman, 14.

carrying much of its imagery over to the “Red Hordes.” With the “loss” of mainland China to Communists, comic books again reinvented older stereotypes. The “Yellow Peril,” a casualty of America’s newfound internationalism, found new life in the form of the Red Chinese and Communist Koreans.

The spirit of internationalism, however, also fostered the understanding that not all Asians were emissaries of the “yellow peril,” and that not all Chinese were tong-men and servants of Fu-Manchu. As the American mindset was increasingly molding itself into a revision of the “us” versus “them” mentality, the need for abandoning the nativist, Anglo-Saxon-centric imagery of years past was both a necessity, as well as a hallmark of the tolerance that the Soviets so often accused the West of not embracing. Racism and nativism still existed in America during the Cold War and has existed long since. Arguably-racist imagery still appeared in comic books for years to come. Nonetheless, the change in tone, tolerance, and acceptance in popular escapist literature, from the 1920s to the 1950s cannot be overlooked, in both the magnitude of change that occurred within that frame of time, as well as its progression in comic books in the years that followed.

# Appendix IV

## Illustrations

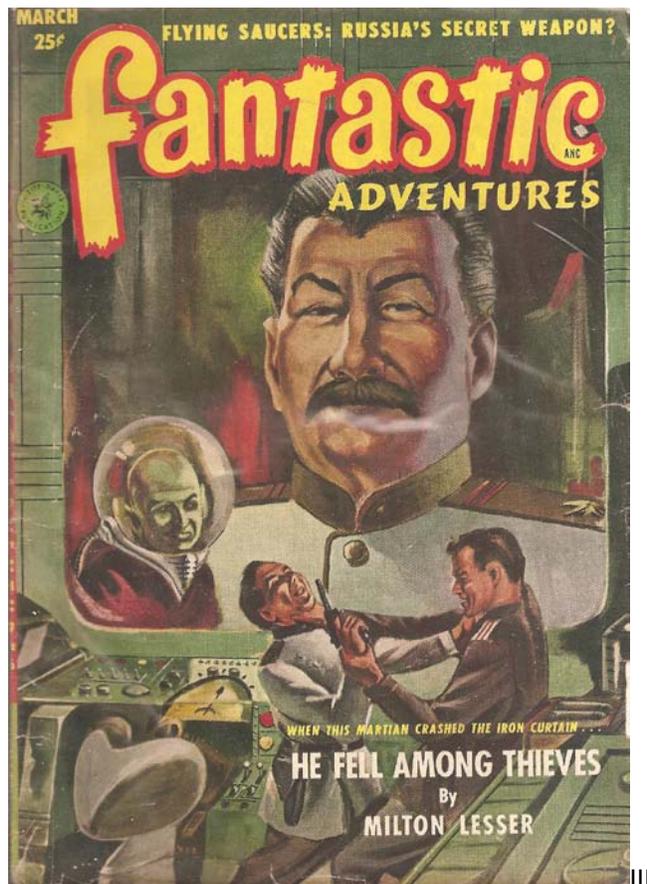
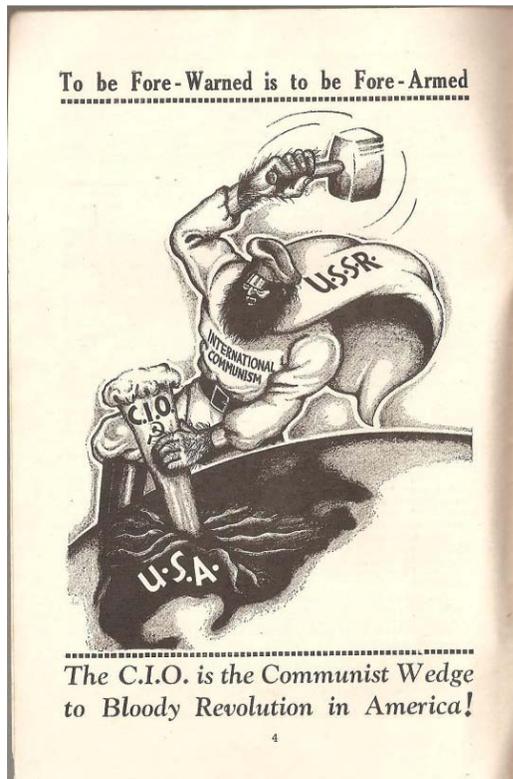
- Fig. I – “Pulling Back the Curtains” of Soviet Russia – *The Independent*, 1921 (LVA)
- Fig. II – Last page of *Communism’s Iron Grip on the CIO* – 1937 (NVM)
- Fig. III – Cover of *Fantastic Adventures* – March, 1952 (NVM)
- Fig. IV – Last page of *Batman* No. 57 – February-March, 1950
- Fig. V – Inside front-cover of *Action Comics* No. 162 – November, 1951 (LOC)
- Fig. VI – Cover of *How Stalin Hopes We Will Destroy America* – 1951 (NVM)
- Figs. VII- VIII – Panels from *How Stalin Hopes We Will Destroy America* – 1951 (NVM)
- Figs. IX- X – Panels from *World War III* No. 1 – March 1952 (LOC)
- Fig. XI – Cover of *Battlefield* No. 6 – December, 1952 (NVM)
- Fig. XII – Cover of *Captain America Comics* No. 77 – July, 1954 (CB)
- Fig. XIII – Cover of *Captain Marvel Adventures* No. 139 – December, 1952 (LOC)
- Fig. XIV – Cover of *Captain Marvel Adventures* No. 140 – January, 1953 (LOC)
- Fig. XV – Panel from “The Mongol Blood-Drinkers” – *Captain Marvel Adventures* No. 140 – Jan, 1953 (LOC)
- Fig. XVI – Cover of *The Marvel Family* No. 77 – November, 1952 (LOC)
- Fig. XVII – Cover of *Yellow Claw* No. 1 – October, 1956 (LOC)
- Figs. XVIII-XIX – Panels from *Yellow Claw* No. 1 – October, 1956 (LOC)
- Fig. XX – Panel from “Victory in the Village” – *Combat Kelly* No. 30 – April, 1955 (NVM)



Brown in Chicago Daily News

Pulling back the curtains

Originally printed in: *The Independent*, August 20, 1921, p. 75



**BATMAN AND ROBIN** *stand up for SPORTSMANSHIP!*

EVER ON THE ALERT FOR SIGNS OF CRIME, BATMAN AND ROBIN, FAMED FIGHTERS FOR JUSTICE, SPOT A NEW AND DANGEROUS MENACE!

LOOK, ROBIN, SOME REAL TROUBLE ON THAT FOOTBALL FIELD--AND IT NEEDS OUR ATTENTION!

CHECK, BATMAN!

GOSH, IT'S BATMAN AND ROBIN!

A LOT OF US DON'T AGREE WITH YOU! HANK'S A GOOD PLAYER--AND HE BELONGS ON THE TEAM SAME AS ANYBODY ELSE!

RIGHT! IT'S THE ONE WHO THINKS OTHERWISE WHO'S NOT THE REAL AMERICAN! HE'S HARMING HIS COUNTRY WHEN HE SPEAKS AND ACTS THAT WAY!

HOLD ON, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

AW, WE DON'T WANT THIS GUY AROUND HERE. HE DON'T BELONG! HE AIN'T A REAL AMERICAN!

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, DAN!

DON'T BELIEVE THOSE CRACKPOT LIES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO WORSHIP DIFFERENTLY, OR WHOSE SKIN IS OF A DIFFERENT COLOR, OR WHOSE PARENTS COME FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY. REMEMBER OUR AMERICAN HERITAGE OF FREEDOM AND EQUALITY!

DON'T WEAKEN OUR COUNTRY! A NATION DIVIDED BY PREJUDICE IS LIKE A FOOTBALL TEAM WITHOUT TEAMWORK! SO GET TOGETHER... WORK AND PLAY IN HARMONY--AND YOU'LL HAVE A SUCCESSFUL TEAM.

THANKS, BATMAN, WE WILL!

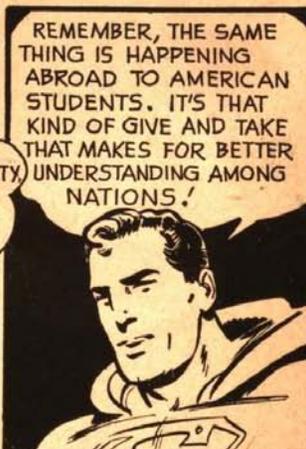
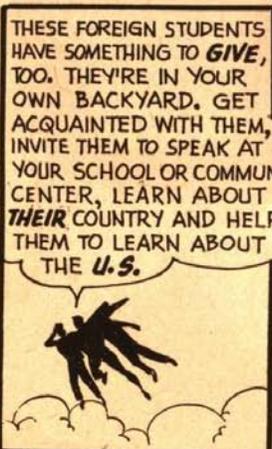
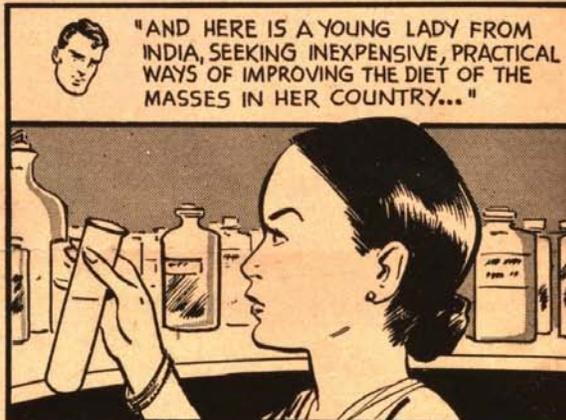
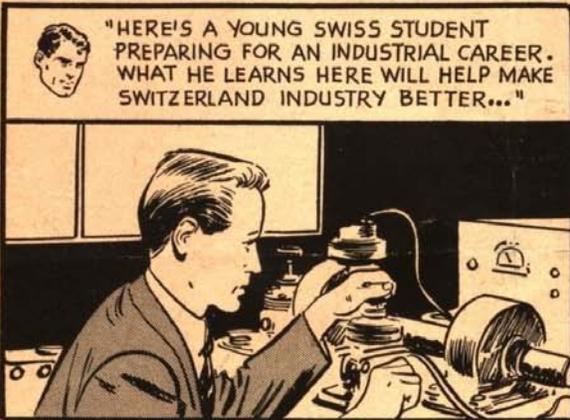
**DC** NATIONAL COMICS

PUBLISHED AS A PUBLIC SERVICE IN COOPERATION WITH THE ADVERTISING COUNCIL AND LEADING NATIONAL SOCIAL WELFARE AND YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS, THIS PAGE APPEARS IN MORE THAN 10,000,000 MAGAZINES OF THE NATIONAL COMICS GROUP (SUPERMAN-DC PUBLICATIONS).

IV

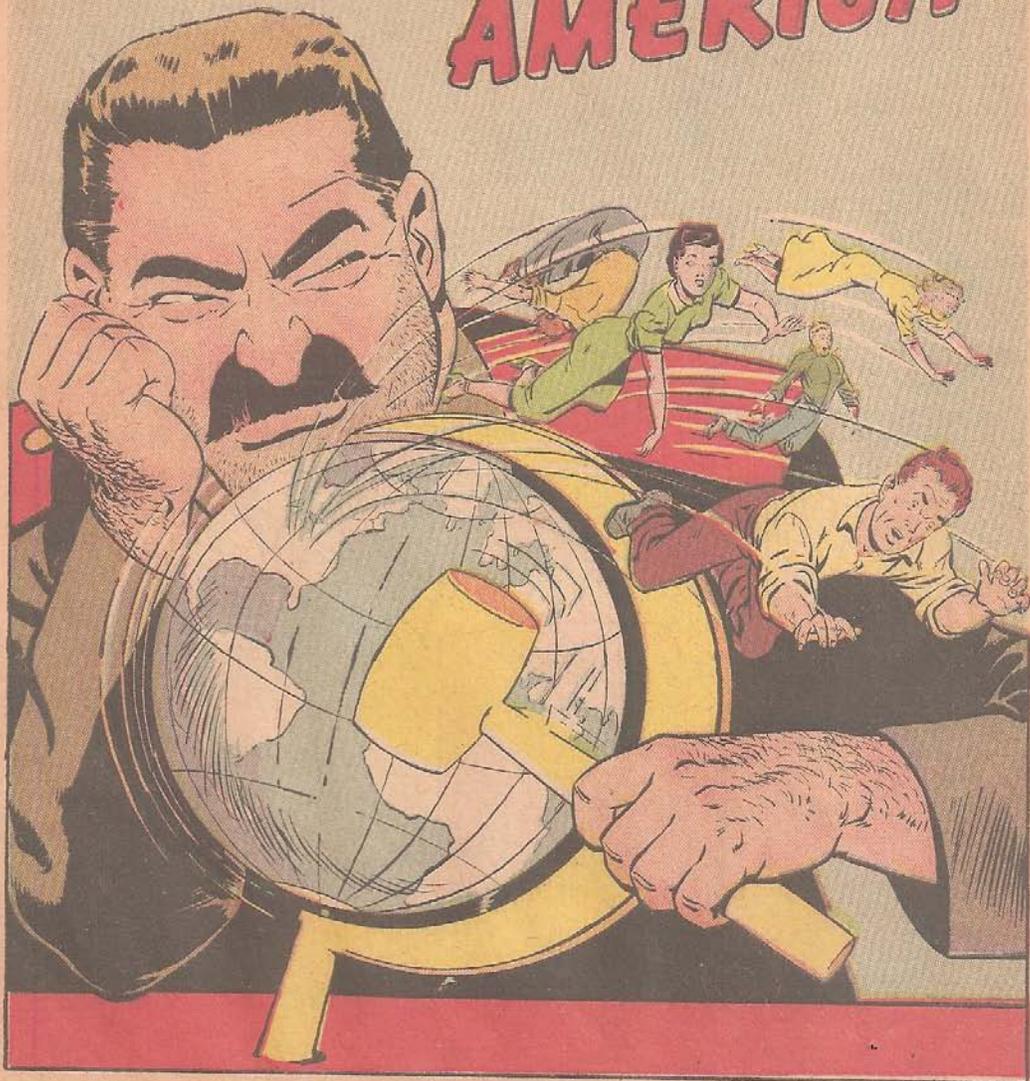
A Batman public service announcement – Both Superman and Batman warned against “unAmericanism” and intolerance, instead of fighting the Communists, at least to the same degree as did their Atlas counterparts. Reprinted in: Mark Cotta Vaz, *Tales of the Dark Knight – Batman’s First Fifty Years: 1939-1989*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 50.

# SUPERMAN "The WORLD is our SCHOOLROOM!"



THIS PAGE IS PUBLISHED AS A PUBLIC SERVICE IN COOPERATION WITH LEADING NATIONAL SOCIAL WELFARE AND YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS.

HOW **STALIN** HOPES  
WE WILL **DESTROY**  
**AMERICA**





VII



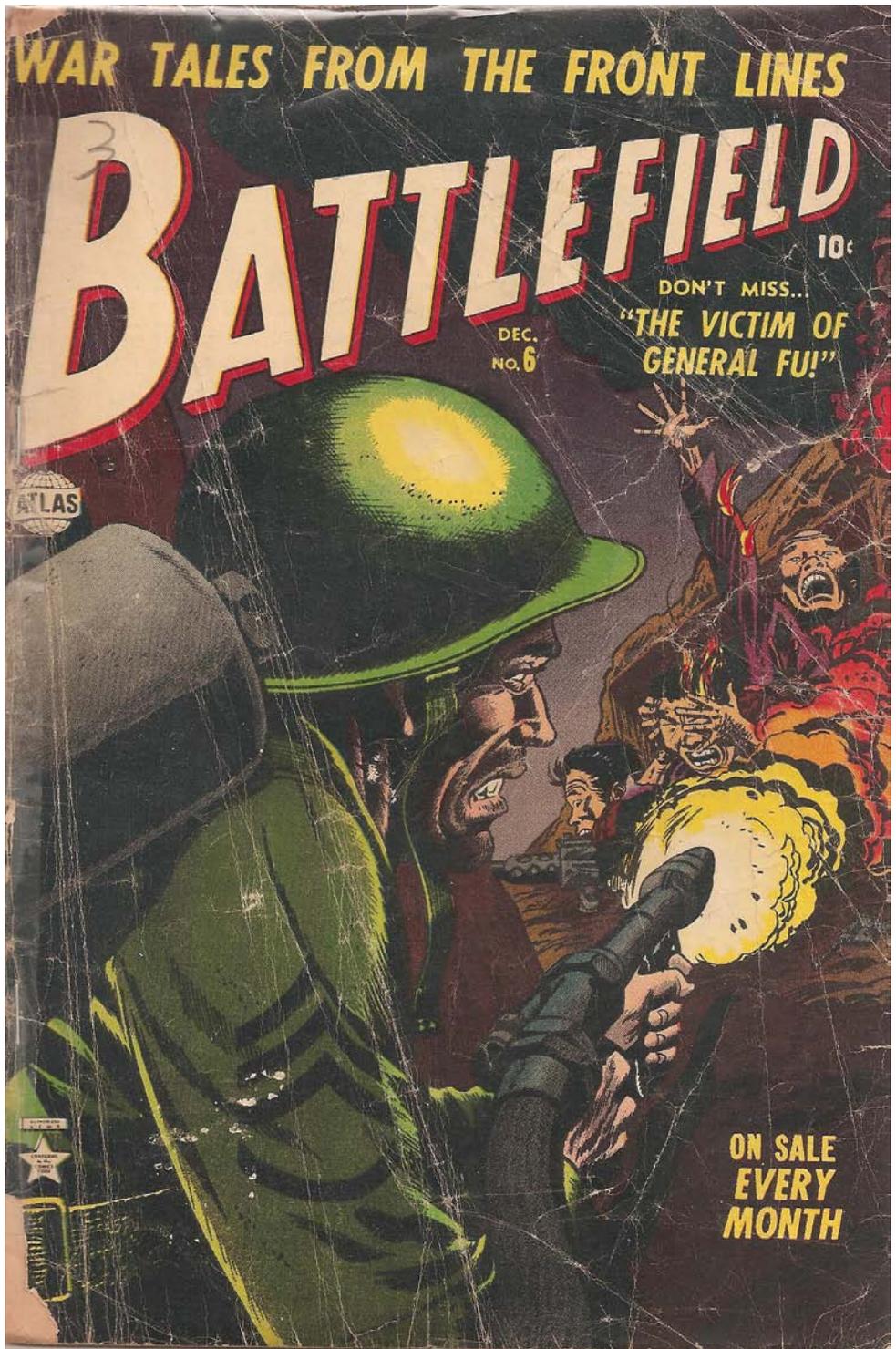
VIII



IX



X



XI



XII



XIII



XIV



XV

THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST MORTALS

# The Marvel Family

OCT - 1 1952

NO. 77

10¢  
NOV.

A Fawcett Publication

THE LIBRARY OF  
CONGRESS  
SERIAL RECORD

OCT 29 1952



**BEWARE!**  
**KING KULL**

**IS ON THE LOOSE!**

XVI



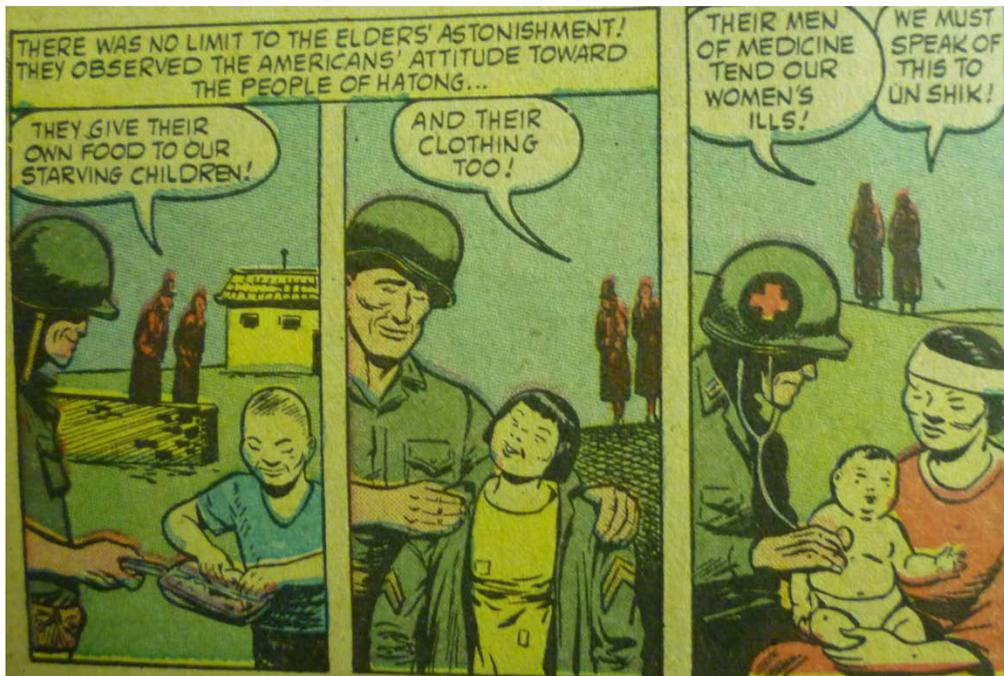
XVII



XVIII



XIX



XX

# IV

## Conclusion

An obsession to define what was “American” permeated the nation’s popular culture following the end of the First World War. Fears that America would be contaminated by European ideologies, such as socialism and communism, and of impending onslaughts from the East, worked their way into the literature, politics and social discourse of the era. The pulp magazines of the 1920s continued this discourse in a fictional setting. This fiction provides invaluable information as to what was considered wholesome and “American” and what was not. Physical differences, religious and cultural backgrounds, an inability to speak “American” English; these attributes, and many more defined the caricature of the “other” in the nativist pulps of the 1920s, and would appear throughout succeeding decades. Racist in nature, the imagery applied to “undesirable” Europeans and “untrustworthy” Orientals. This attitude was the product of rapid changes within and outside the country that led Americans to mourn the loss of what was considered traditionally “American.” Whether a monstrous fiend determined to destroy the white race, such as Fu Manchu, or the stereotypical, unemotional gumshoe of Charlie Chan and his imitators, the message was the same. They are, at the very least, unable to be assimilated into the American culture, and, at the worst, threaten the very survival of the country, and even of Western Civilization itself. There were, however, kernels of tolerance and even acceptance within these texts, which would grow more apparent in the events and warfare that defined the later years of the 1930s and the early 1940s. Was racism a contributing factor? Absolutely, it would be foolish to assume otherwise. But, just as assuredly, there is another factor at work; the death of one America, and the beginning of another. With the growing urbanization of America and increased globalization, traditional America seemed under assault.

The literature of the pulps, focusing on race as the essential divisor between intelligent or mentally deficient, progressive or socially backwards, good or evil continued through the isolationism of the post- World War I era and into the Second World War. It emerged, however, fundamentally altered and not nearly as simplistic as it had once been. These were events that that no American, no matter how nativist, could avoid. Over the course of the Second World War, nativism receded from the cheap escapism of the day. As time went on, the pulps and comic books reserved the most virulent depictions of racial differences for the enemy. Groups that would have formally been designated atheistic Slavs or Yellow Emperors transformed into allies, many of whom stood alongside their more Anglo-American counterparts. Such a retreat from nativism appeared in the comic books of the late 40s and early Cold War years, as the demonization formally reserved for the “Japs” and the Nazis was recycled to be used on Red Chinese and European Communists, respectively. Ideology replaced race as the deciding aspect as to who was “the other.”

Nativist imagery in the comic books continued to recede. The period that is usually referred to as the “Silver Age of Comics” coincided with a period of continued change in America’s approach to race relation and nativism. The resurrection of the superhero genre was initiated by National Allied’s *Showcase* No. 4 (October 1956), and followed by *Showcase* No. 22 (October, 1959), which premiered updated version of the 1940s heroes, The Flash and Green Lantern, respectively. These characters began a revitalization of the superhero genre that has not abated since. By the time of the first appearances of the Fantastic Four and Spider-man (*Fantastic Four* No. 1 – November, 1961; *Amazing Fantasy* No. 15 – August, 1962), comic books were seeing sales and popularity that rivaled those of the 1940s. The newer characters had

deeper personalities and “foibles” than the rather stiff personality exhibited by heroes of the Second World War. These characters approached societal issues, such as race, in ways that had never been attempted in years past.

The fanbase that sprang up around comic books in the 1960s and 70s was of a different mold from the medium’s target audience in the past. They were children of post-World War II prosperity, the first generation born after the Second World War. Many were highly-educated, and comic book publishers were finding their audience growing, not among children, but among college students and young adults, who demanded more from the comics. Characters were not as rigid and two-dimensional as had been the case in years past. A teenage Spider-Man wrestled with his conscience daily, considering using his gifts for crime in order to resolve his elderly aunt’s financial woes. Captain America, returned from the battlefields of World War II (his 1950s adventures attributed to an imposter) and formally the ideal American, he now wrestled with guilt over the death of his former partner and sought psychoanalytical help when faced with hallucinations. He also struggled to find his place in a world where he seemed as nothing more than a relic. National Allied’s (by the 1960s officially becoming DC Comics) Batman, despite being the star of his eponymous camp-television show, was removed from the science-fiction storylines he had inhabited since the end of the 1940s, and was restored to his original role as a mysterious and brooding vigilante. Superman, long-time champion of truth, justice and the American way, found himself starring in more stories that spoke to the loneliness and isolation he felt in relation to his powers in addition to his status as an alien on Earth. Writers such as Stan Lee, Doug Moench, Roy Thomas, Denny O’Neil, and Marv Wolfman used literary devices and approaches to narration never seen in comic books before. Artist such

as Bill Steranko, Neal Adams, Barry Windsor-Smith, and Frank Miller pushed the envelope of comic creativity. These creators, and a multitude more, either participated in, or were influenced by, the changes occurring in the comics in the 1960s and 1970s.

The comic industry also began to reexamine its history of the archetypal white hero. As was the case with other real-world issues, the comic books tackled the issue of racism and nativism. In *Green Lantern* No. 76 (April, 1970) writer Denny O'Neil and artist Neal Adams recreated the character as a symbol of law and order and of the establishment. The Green Lantern teamed with the Green Arrow, who had recently been remade into a voice for the liberal, anti-establishment left, and who was sick of superheroes doing nothing to aid the average person. In the first issue of their team-up title, Green Lantern is approached by an elderly black man, who asks him a simple question:

I been readin' about you...How you work for the blue skins...and how on a planet someplace you helped out the orange skins...and you done considerable for the purple skins! Only there's skins you never bothered with! The Black skins! I want to know... How come?! Answer me that, Mr. Green Lantern!"

In response, the Emerald Crusader, after a brief pause, can only look down, and reply "I ...can't..."<sup>211</sup> This story was the start of a brilliant run by the O'Neil/Adams team, which took the duo across the country in an old pickup truck, combating the ills of society, such as racism and religious fanaticism and fighting for the average American.

Characters of ethnically-diverse backgrounds, who were the feature of anthology titles, or the stars of their own titles, appeared in the comics as early as the 1960s. Marvel's *The Black*

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<sup>211</sup> "No Evil Shall Escape My Sight," *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* 76 (DC Comics, April 1970).

Panther appeared in 1966 (*Fantastic Four* No. 52, July 1966), receiving his own ongoing title in 1973. Another African-American hero, Luke Cage appeared in 1972 (*Luke Cage – Hero for Hire* No. 1 June, 1972). In December of 1971, D.C. introduced John Stewart (*Green Lantern*, Vol. 2 No. 87), an African-American Green Lantern who has maintained tremendous popularity into the twenty-first century. In 1983, Marvel's Tony Stark, the secret identity of the armored hero Iron Man, took time off to recover from alcoholism and was replaced by African-American Jim Rhodes, a lifelong friend of Stark. Following the return of the original Iron Man, Rhodes was given his own suit of armor, known as War Machine, and has remained a mainstay of the franchise, portrayed by Academy Award-winning actor Don Cheadle in 2010's *Iron Man 2*.

A particularly interesting advent of the 1970s in relation to the end of the nativist strain of comic books appeared in the middle of the decade, with a character who was both a reminder, and a counter, to the Yellow Peril of the pulps and early comic books. One of Marvel's most popular new characters was Shang-Chi, The Master of Kung-Fu, whose first series lasted well into the 1980s. Appearing in the first issue of *Master of Kung-Fu* (April, 1974) Shang-Chi was not only Chinese, exhibiting none of the racial or supposedly-humorous stereotypes of Asian characters past, but he also fought a battle against the evil machinations of his father, none other than Fu Manchu himself.

Now, in the twenty-first century, any sort of racist or nativist imagery in comic books is seen as intolerable as it is in any other medium. A plethora of minority characters abound in comic books; not as generic stereotypes, but rather heroes in their own rights. Jimmy Woo, Marvel's hero of the 1950s, is now among the most popular of Marvel's characters, having been revived in 2006 to lead a team of other 1950s Atlas characters. In the 2005-2006 mini-series

*Infinite Crisis*, the newest incarnation of D.C.'s character, The Blue Beetle, appeared in the form of Jaime Reyes, a Hispanic teenager. Recently Aquaman has been joined by Jackson Hyde, an African-American who has taken the mantle of Aqualad (*Brightest Day*, No. 10 – June, 2010). These few characters are only the smallest sampling of those that challenge the traditional Anglo-American hero of years past. The change in the definition of the archetypical American hero they represent is mirrored by a similar change that has occurred in the American populace as a whole. Since its inception, beginning with the dime magazines, through the pulps, and into the comic books of today, American popular literature has acted as a kind of cultural *pomerium*, designating what the majority of the population respects and considers part of "Americanness." Unfortunately, in the past, that included imagery that would be deemed racist today. That, however, is an over-simplification of the past that does not take into account the myriad of changes that were sweeping the nation through the entirety of the twentieth century.

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*Astounding Science Fiction*  
*Blue Book Magazine*  
*Complete Detective Novel Magazine*  
*Danger Trail, The*  
*Dare-Devil Aces*  
*Detective Story Magazine*  
*Doc Savage Magazine*  
*Fantastic Adventures*  
*Flying Aces*  
*G-8 And His Battle Aces*  
*Lone Eagle, The*  
*Oriental Stories*  
*Phantom Detective*  
*Shadow, The*  
*Spider, The*  
*Spy Novels Magazine*  
*Strange Detective Mysteries*  
*Thrill Book, The*  
*Thrilling Detective*  
*Thrilling Mystery*  
*Top Notch*  
*True Strange Stories*  
*Weird Tales*  
*Wu Fang*

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*Astonishing*  
*Atomic War!*  
*Batman*  
*Battle Cry*  
*Black Terror Comics*  
*Battle Attack*  
*Battlefield*  
*Captain America Comics*  
*Captain Battle Comics*  
*Captain Marvel Adventures*  
*Charlie Chan*  
*Combat Casey*  
*Combat Kelly*  
*Comic Novel*  
*Daredevil Comics*

*Detective Comics*  
*Exciting Comics*  
*Fight Comics*  
*Fightin' Marines*  
*Fighting Yank*  
*Frontline Combat*  
*G.I. Combat*  
*G.I. Joe*  
*Headline Comics*  
*How Stalin Hopes We Will Destroy America*  
*Human Torch*  
*Is This Tomorrow*  
*Joe Yank*  
*Kid Komics*  
*Marvel Boy*  
*Marvel Family*  
*Marvel Mystery Comics*  
*Master Comics*  
*Military Comics*  
*Mystic Comics*  
*National Comics*  
*Pep Comics*  
*Popular Comics*  
*Secret Voice, The*  
*Strange Adventures*  
*Sub-Mariner Comics*  
*T-Man*  
*Tell It to the Marines*  
*Terry and the Pirates*  
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## Vita

Nathan Vernon Madison was born on the ninth of July, 1983, in the county of Henrico, in the Commonwealth of Virginia. He attended Blessed Sacrament-Huguenot Catholic School, in his hometown of Powhatan, before receiving an Associates of Arts and Sciences degree at John Tyler Community College in Midlothian, followed by a Bachelor of Arts in History and American Studies at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg. While completing the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in History at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Madison finished work on his Master's Thesis, (*Isolationism, Internationalism and the "Other:" The Yellow Peril, Mad Brute and Red Menace in Early to Mid Twentieth Century Pulp Magazines and Comic Books*). He also wrote an entry in the Library of Virginia's fourth published volume of the *Dictionary of Virginia Biographies*, crafting the first biography written of Richmond-born Reform party member and Knight of Labor, Joseph P. Devine. In the Spring of 2010, Madison interned at the Virginia War Memorial, and aided in the creation of its Paul and Phyllis Galanti Education Center, museum and U.S.S. Birmingham Memorial Research Library.