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JAPAN
IN
WAR
AND
PEACE
Selected Essays

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Race, Language, and War in Two Cultures

World War II transcends our imaginative capacities. It is simply impossible to grasp what it means to say that fifty-five million individuals, perhaps more, were killed in a prolonged frenzy of violence. It is even difficult for any single individual to imagine all the different wars subsumed by that oddly detached phrase, "World War II." Germany's early expansion in eastern Europe, Italy's in Ethiopia. The Berlin-Rome Axis versus the Anglo-Americans. The German invasion of the Soviet Union. The Nazi war against the Jews and other "Untermenschen." The antifascist partisan wars and resistance movements of the West. In Asia: the China War and Pacific War and what the Japanese called the "Greater East Asia War," embracing Southeast Asia. And also in Asia, the anticolonial war within the war. In both East and West, the war between the Axis and Allies enfolded a multilayered struggle between communists and anticommunists. For African Americans, World War II, under the rallying cry "Double Victory," was simultaneously the onset of an all-out domestic struggle for civil rights.

For most Americans, the war always has involved selective consciousness, and now even these memories are fading. The hypocrisy of fighting
with a segregated army and navy under the banner of Freedom, Democracy, and Justice was never frankly acknowledged and has been all but forgotten. In Asia, Japan was castigated for subjugating the native peoples of Dutch Indonesia, British Hong Kong and Malaya and Burma, America's Philippines, French Indochina—and neither then nor later did the anomaly of such condemnation sink in. Consciousness and memory have been deceptive in other ways as well. If one asks Americans today in what ways World War II was racist and atrocious, they will point overwhelmingly to the Nazi genocide of the Jews. When the war was being fought, however, the enemy perceived to be most atrocious by Americans was not the Germans but the Japanese, and the racial issues that provoked greatest emotion among Americans were associated with the war in Asia.

With few exceptions, Americans were obsessed with the uniquely evil nature of the Japanese. Allan Nevins, who twice won the Pulitzer Prize in the field of history, observed immediately after the war that "probably in all our history, no foe has been so detested as were the Japanese." Ernie Pyle, the most admired of American war correspondents, conveyed the same sentiment unapologetically. In February 1945, a few weeks after being posted to the Pacific after years of covering the war in Europe, Pyle told his millions of readers that "in Europe we felt that our enemies, horrible and deadly as they were, were still people. But out here I soon gathered that the Japanese were looked upon as something subhuman and repellent, the way some people feel about cockroaches or mice." Pyle went on to describe his response upon seeing Japanese prisoners for the first time. "They were wrestling and laughing and talking just like normal human beings," he wrote. "And yet it gave me the creeps, and I wanted a mental bath after looking at them." Sober magazines such as Science Digest ran articles entitled "Why Americans Hate Japs More than Nazis." By incarcerating Japanese Americans, but not German Americans or Italian Americans, the U.S. government—even with Supreme Court backing—gave official imprimatur to the designation of the Japanese as a racial enemy. They did so, of course, in the most formal and judicial language.

It is not really surprising that the Japanese rather than the Germans and their decimation of the Jews dominated American racial thinking. In the United States, as in Britain and most of Europe, anti-Semitism was strong and—as David Wyman among others has documented so well—the Holocaust was wittingly neglected, or a matter of indifference. Japan's aggression, on the other hand, stirred the deepest recesses of white supremacism and provoked a response bordering on the apocalyptic. As the Hearst papers took care to editorialize, the war in Europe, however terrible, was still a "family fight" which did not threaten the very essence of Occidental civilization. One Hearst paper bluntly identified the war in the Pacific as "the War of Oriental Races against Occidental Races for the Domination of the World."

There was almost visceral agreement on this. Thus Hollywood formulaically introduced good Germans as well as Nazis, but almost never a "good Japanese." In depicting the Axis triumvirate, political cartoonists routinely gave the German enemy Hitler's face, the Italian enemy Mussolini's, but rendered the Japanese as plain homogeneous "Japanese" caricatures: short, round-faced, jug-eared, buck-toothed, myopic behind horn-rimmed glasses. In a similar way, phrasemakers fell unreflectively into the idiom seen in the Science Digest headline: of Nazis and Japs. Indeed, while the German enemy was conflated to bad Germans (Nazis), the Japanese enemy was inflated to a supra-Japanese foe—not just the Japanese militarists, not just all the Japanese people, not just ethnic Japanese everywhere, but the Japanese as Orientals. Tin Pan Alley, as so often, immediately placed its finger on the American pulse. One of the many popular songs inspired by Pearl Harbor was entitled "There'll Be No Adolph Hitler Nor Yellow Japs to Fear." Pearl Harbor and the stunning Japanese victories over the colonial powers that followed so quickly in Southeast Asia—coupled with Japan's own rhetoric of Pan-Asianism—seemed to confirm the worst Yellow Peril nightmares.

World War II in Asia was, of course, not simply or even primarily a race war. Alliances cut across race on both the Allied and Axis sides, and fundamental issues of power and ideology were at stake. Where the Japanese and Anglo-American antagonists were concerned, however, an almost Manichaean racial cast overlay these other issues of contention. This was true on both sides. The Japanese were racist too—toward the white enemy, and in conspicuously different ways toward the other Asians who fell within their so-called Co-Prosperity Sphere. Thus, the war in Asia offers an unusually vivid case study through which to examine the tangled skein of race, language, and violence from a compa-
ative perspective—not only with the luxury of retrospect, moreover, but also at a time when U.S.-Japan relations are very different and yet still riven with racial tension.

The war exposed core patterns of racist perception in many forms: formulaic expressions, code words, everyday metaphors, visual stereotypes. Such ways of thinking, speaking, and seeing were often vulgar, but their crudeness was by no means peculiar to any social class, educational level, political ideology, or place or circumstance (such as the battlefield as opposed to the homefront as opposed to the corridors of power and policymaking). On the other hand, in many instances the racist patterns of perception and expression were just the opposite: indirect, nuanced, garbed in the language of empiricism and intellectualism. This too was typical. Ostensibly objective observations often are laced with prejudice.

That racist perceptions shape behavior may seem obvious, but the war experience calls attention to how subtly this occurs, and at how many different levels. Myth, in this case race myths, almost always overrides conclusions drawn from sober, rational, empirical observation—until cataclysmic events occur to dispel or discredit the myth. It required Pearl Harbor and Singapore to destroy the myth cherished by Caucasians that the Japanese were poor navigators and inept pilots and unimaginative strategists, for example, and it required a long, murderous struggle to rid the Japanese of their conceit that the Anglo-Americans were too degenerate and individualistic to gird for extended battle against a far-away foe. We have become so mesmerized by the contemporary cult of military intelligence-gathering—that we often fail to recognize how extensively unadulterated prejudice colors intelligence estimates, causing both overestimation and underestimation of the other side. Beyond this, in its most extreme form, racism sanctions extermination—the genocide of the Jews, of course, but also the plain but patterned rhetoric of exterminating beasts, vermin, or demons that unquestionably helped raise the tolerance of slaughter in Asia.

Given the virulence of the race hate that permeated the Pacific War, it seems at first glance almost astonishing that Americans and Japanese were able to move toward cordial relations so quickly after the war. At the state-to-state level, the Cold War abetted this, but postwar amity also rested on personal feelings of goodwill and mutual respect. This tells us something about the uniqueness and artificiality of hatred fueled by war and propaganda, perhaps, but it does not mean that racism simply disappeared. Rather, what we see here is the extraordinary nuance of racial stereotyping. Patterns of perception that abet killing can, with but a small twist, foster paternalism (or acquiescence to it) in more stable times. Damning stereotypes can be transferred, with minor adjustment, to new enemies.

This—after the patterns of racist perception, and the multiple links between perception and behavior—is the third broad area where the war in Asia offers insights into racial thinking in general. Put simply, racist stereotypes are as a rule malleable or flexible, capable of provoking contempt and violent oppression in one circumstance and paternalistic patronage in another. For the weaker side, this may translate into fear and defiance or, alternatively, acquiescence in an inherently unequal relationship. At the same time, beneath the surface specificity of preoccupation with “ethnic peculiarities,” the basic patterns and idioms of racial stereotyping often tend to be free-floating, easily transferred from one target of prejudice to another. The very notion of “white supremacy” implies this, of course, but it is still sobering and illuminating to confront in concrete cases the ease with which fundamentally identical stereotypes have been transferred from one nonwhite group to another. What Americans said about the “uniquely” reprehensible Japanese during World War II, for example, was in considerable part a formulaic reiteration of invectives employed against Amerindians in the genocidal Indian wars, against Negroes ever since the slave trade, against Chinese since the opening of regular contact in the mid-nineteenth century, against Filipinos in the American conquest of the Philippines at the turn of the century. Many of these same formulas, moreover, were subsequently applied to the Korean, Chinese, and Indochinese enemies in the wars of the post-1945 period.

Going a step further, the metaphors of racial difference are fundamentally even more free-floating. Ultimately they are codewords of power and domination, and overlap with the vocabularies associated with discrimination based on gender and class. For example, “childishness” is one of the most common terms used by whites to describe nonwhites. This can be buttressed with pseudo-scientific explanations (nonwhites being lower on the evolutionary scale, and thus biologically equivalent
to children or adolescents vis-à-vis the "mature" white races) or pseudo-
social-scientific equations (the "less developed" peoples of "less de-
veloped" nations, for example, or peoples alleged to be collectively blocked
at a primitive or immature state psychologically by indigenous cultural
practices or mores). The image of the child can convey contempt (as in
Newsweek's wartime reference to "the child mind of the Jap conscript")
but can also evoke a paternalistic sense of obligation (such as the depiction
of Japanese after the surrender as "MacArthur's children," or as the
beneficiaries of a student-teacher relationship with Americans). This
same metaphor of childishness is also integral to the rationale of male
domination and rule by elites. To describe women as childish or childlike
is one of the most familiar ways by which men traditionally have signified
both the inherent inferiority of women and their own obligation to
protect or at least humor them. Similarly, dominant social and political
classes commonly affirm their privileged status and inherent right to
rule by disparaging the masses as irrational, irresponsible, and immature.
In its softer guise, the elite sense of noblesse oblige masks class inequali-
ties with a paradigm of parent-to-child obligations.

Because the patterns of perception reflect not merely racial prejudice
but also equations of power, the issue of racism in U.S.-Japanese relations
becomes of even greater interest when the analysis is carried from the
war years to the present day. Why? Because Japan's emergence as an
economic superpower is inseparable from America's decline as the hege-
mon of the capitalist world. For the first time in modern history, a
nonwhite nation has challenged the West by the very standards of wealth
and power which for over four centuries have been associated with
Western—and white—supremacy. This unprecedented development
has been accompanied by rising tensions on both sides, and it is important
to recognize that these tensions are rooted in the transformation of power
relationships in the contemporary world. They are not irrational. They
do not derive from "cultural differences." They are not fundamentally
racist. Rather, the fear and tension we see today exist because the United
States and Japan are competitors in a high-stakes, high-tech global
economy that no one really understands or controls anymore. Still, race
matters. The structures of institutionalized inequality that took the form
of student-teacher, client-patron relations between Japan and the United
States after 1945 have crumbled; and in this uncertain milieu of destabi-
lized power, racial stereotyping and outright expressions of race hate
have reemerged on both sides of the Pacific.

In this, we see the full implications of the malleability of racial meta-
phors and of the free-floating nature of these ways of denigrating others.
The racist perceptions that were rendered soft can become harsh again.
The contempt and hatred that was floated to other enemies can come
back on the turn of the tide. Racism is not, in the end, an imaginative
mindset. The patterns of perception are subtle and flexible, but limited,
and in the current U.S.-Japanese conflict the racist words and images
are eerily familiar. They are the spawn of the war years, and of centuries
of racism thinking before then. How this is so is the subject of the pages
that follow.

Five categories subsume the racist perceptions of the Japanese which
-dominated Anglo-American thinking during World War II. The Japa-
nese were subhuman. They were little men, inferior to white Westerners
in every physical, moral, and intellectual way. They were, as a collectivity,
primitive, childish, and mad—overlapping concepts that could be
crudely expressed but also received "empirical" endorsement from social
scientists and old Japan hands. At the same time, the Japanese also were
portrayed as supermen. This was particularly true in the aftermath of
their stunning early victories, and it is characteristic of this thinking that
the despised enemy could be little men and supermen simultaneously.
Finally, the Japanese in World War II became the nightmare come true
of the Yellow Peril. This apocalyptic image embraced all others and
made unmistakably clear that racial hatreds, and not merely war hatreds
or responses to Japanese behavior alone, were at issue.

Dehumanization of the enemy is desirable among men in combat. It
eliminates scruple and doubt from killing, the reasoning goes, and this
contributes to self-preservation; the enemy, after all, is simultaneously
dehumanizing you and trying to kill you. Among Allied fighting men
in the Pacific, this attitude emerged naturally in the ubiquitous metaphor
of the hunt. Fighting Japanese in the jungle was like going after "small
game in the woods back home," or tracking down a predatory animal.
Killing them was compared to shooting down running quail, picking
off rabbits, bringing a desperate and rabid beast to bay and finishing it.
The perception of the Japanese as apes and monkeys similarly was not confined to any particular group or place. Even before Pearl Harbor, Sir Alexander Cadogan, the permanent undersecretary of the British Foreign Office, routinely referred to the Japanese as "beastly little monkeys" and the like in his diary. Following Japan's capitulation, U.S. General Robert Eichelberger, alluding to the Japanese mission en route to the Philippines to arrange the surrender procedures, wrote his wife that "first, monkeys will come to Manila." Among Western political cartoonists, the simian figure was surely the most popular caricature for the Japanese. David Low, the brilliant antifascist cartoonist working out of London, was fond of this. The New York Times routinely reproduced such graphics in its Sunday edition, while adding its own commentary at one point that it might be more accurate to identify the Japanese as the "Missing Link." On the eve of the British debacle at Singapore, the British humor magazine Punch depicted Japanese soldiers in full-page splendor as chimpanzees with helmets and guns swinging from trees to tree. Time used the same image on its cover for January 26, 1942. The New Yorker also found the monkey-men-in-trees conceit witty. The Washington Post compared Japanese atrocities in the Philippines and German atrocities in Czechoslovakia in a cartoon pairing a gorilla labeled "Japs" and a Hitler-figure labeled simply "Hitler."

This ubiquitous simian idiom of dehumanization came out of a rich tradition of bigoted Western iconography. Only a few decades before they put the Japanese in trees, Punch's artists had been depicting the Irish as apes. And generations of earlier white cartoonists had refined the simian caricature while working on Negroes and various Caribbean people. The popular illustrators, in turn, were merely replicating a basic tenet in the pseudo-science of white supremacy, namely, the argument that the Mongoloid and Negroid races (and for Englishmen, the Irish) represented a lower stage of evolution. Nineteenth-century Western scientists and social scientists had offered almost unanimous support to this thesis, and such ideas persisted into the mid twentieth century. President Roosevelt, for example, was informed by a physical anthropologist at the Smithsonian Institution that Japanese skulls were "some 2,000 years less developed than ours."

In the world outside the monkey house, the Japanese commonly were referred to as "the little men." Their relatively short stature contributed
to this, but again the designation was essentially metaphorical. The Japanese, it was argued, were small in accomplishments when compared to the West. No great "universal" achievements were to be found in their traditional civilization; they were latecomers to the modern challenges of science and technology; they were imitators rather than innovators, ritualists rather than rationalists. Again, the cartoonists provided a good gauge of this conceit. More often than not, in any ensemble of nationalities their Japanese figures were dwarfish.

Such contempt led, among other things, to a pervasive underestimation of Japanese intentions and capabilities by British and American observers at even the highest levels. Prior to Pearl Harbor, it was common wisdom among Westerners that the Japanese could not shoot, sail, or fly very well. Nor could they think imaginatively; as a British intelligence report carefully explained, this was because the enormous energy required to memorize the ideographic writing system dulled their brains and killed the spark of creativity. There can be few better examples of the power of myth and stereotype over the weight of objective analysis than the unpreparedness of the Westerners when Japan attacked. Almost everything was a shock: the audacity of the Pearl Harbor attack and ability of the Japanese to bring it off, the effectiveness of the Zero aircraft (which had been in operation in China for over a year), the superb skills of the Japanese pilots, the esprit and discipline of the Japanese ground forces, the lightning multipronged assault against the European and American colonial enclaves. Equally shocking, of course, was the Western side of the coin: the unpreparedness in Hawaii, the debacle at Singapore, the humiliation in the Philippines. In the long view, despite Japan's eventual defeat, the events of 1941-1942 exposed the dry rot of the old empires and shattered the mystique of white superiority.

These Japanese victories—coupled with the spectacle of Japanese brutality and atrocity—set whole new worlds of racial thinking in motion. The little men suddenly became supermen; and at the same time, more elaborate versions of the little-men thesis were developed. A remarkable intelligence report circulated by psychological warfare experts within General Douglas MacArthur's command in mid 1944, for example, masticated the old thesis with excruciating thoroughness:

And yet in every sense of the word the Japanese are little people. Some observers claim there would have been no Pearl Harbor had the Japanese been three inches taller. The archipelago itself is a land of diminutive distances. Japanese houses are artistic but flimsy and cramped. The people, tiny in stature, seem to play at living. To a Westerner they and their country possess the strange charm of toyland. Centuries of isolation have accentuated the restrictive characteristics of their outlook on life.

Being little people, the Japanese dreamed of power and glory, but lacked a realistic concept of the material requirements for a successful world war. Moreover, they were totally unable to envisage the massive scale of operations in which the United States is now able to indulge.²

At the same time, the little-people thesis also was elaborated upon in ways that shed harsh light on racist bias in the academic disciplines by revealing the extent to which Western social sciences could be used to support popular prejudices. The war years witnessed the emergence of anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists as the new mandarins of theories of "national character," and as a whole they performed a valuable service in repudiating the old theories of biological determinism. What the social scientists did not dispel, however, were the racial stereotypes that had been associated with biological determinism. On the contrary, they essentially reaffirmed these biases by offering new cultural or sociopsychological explanations for them.

This is most clearly seen in three of the most influential themes that the social scientists introduced to explain Japanese behavior. The Japanese, it was argued, were still essentially a primitive or tribal people, governed by ritualistic and particularistic values. The influence of the cultural anthropologists was particularly apparent here. Furthermore, it was argued, Japanese behavior could be analyzed effectively by applying Western theories of child or adolescent behavior. Here the Anglo-American intellectuals turned to Freudian-influenced theories concerning toilet-training and psychic blockage at various stages of immaturity (the British social anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer was extremely influential on this
theme), and also extolled the value of applying insights gained from American studies of individual adolescent psychology and of the behavior of adolescents in gangs in our society, as a systematic approach to better understanding of the Japanese" (the quotation is from the minutes of a large 1944 symposium involving, among others, Margaret Mead and Talcott Parsons). Finally, in the third great preoccupation of the new mandarins, it was argued that the Japanese as a collectivity were mentally and emotionally unstable—neurotic, schizophrenic, psychotic, or simply hysterical.

In the final analysis, the “national character” studies amounted to a new way of explaining what the presumably discredited biological determinists had concluded long ago: that the Japanese as a people displayed arrested development. While this was not inherent in their genes, it was the inevitable consequence of their peculiar history and culture. All of this was expressed with considerable erudition, and many of the insights of wartime social scientists concerning social pressures and situational ethics remain influential today. For the proverbial man from Mars, given access only to the wartime writings of these social scientists, however, it would be reasonable to conclude that imperialism, war, and atrocity had been invented in Asia in the twentieth century by developmentally retarded Japanese. They were unique, sui generis, and very peculiar indeed.

At the same time that Japan’s attack on the West was inspiring this new racial “empiricism” among the Anglo-Americans, it also revitalized an old fantasy world. It is characteristic of the paranoia of self-designated master groups that even while dismissing others as inferior, they attribute special powers to them. The lower classes may be contemptible to the elites, but they also are perceived to possess a fearsome potential for violence. Women may be irrational in male eyes, but they are also said to have special intuition, and the Jezebel potential of becoming castrators. Where Western perceptions of the Japanese and Asians in general are concerned, there is in fact an intriguing congruence between the female mystique and the Oriental mystique as expressed by white male elites. Thus, in the war years, as now, the “femininity” of Japanese culture was emphasized. Traits attributed to the Japanese often were almost identical to those assigned to women in general: childishness, irrationality, emotional instability, and “hysteria.” And also intuition, a sixth sense, even an exceptional capacity to endure suffering. Put negatively, these latter qualities could be equated with nonrationality and simply integrated into the argument of arrested development. Positively framed, they became suprarational powers—impossible to explain, and all the more alarming to contemplate.

Because nothing in the “rational” mindset of Western leaders prepared them for either the audacity and skill of Japan’s attack or the debacle of Euro-American capitulations to numerically inferior Japanese forces that followed, it was natural to look to nonrational explanations for these developments. Scapegoating helped to obfuscate the situation—the U.S. commanders at Pearl Harbor were cashiered, and the West-Coast Japanese Americans were locked up—but this was not enough. It also became useful to think of the Japanese as supermen. Graphic artists now drew the Japanese as giants on the horizon. Rhetorically, the new image usually emerged in a more serpentine or back-handed fashion. Thus, the U.S. print media from December 1941 to the end of the war featured a veritable “between-the-lines” subgenre debunking the new myth of the supermen. Battle A proved they could be beaten at sea, Battle B that they could be beaten in the jungle, Battle C that they were not unbeatable in night fighting, Battle D that the myth of the “invincibility of the Zero” was finally being destroyed. The New York Times Magazine took it upon itself to address the issue head-on with a feature article entitled “Japanese Superman: That Too Is a Fallacy.” Admiral William Halsey, the most blatant racist officer in the U.S. high command, later claimed that he deliberately belittled the Japanese as “monkeymen” and the like in order to discredit “the new myth of Japanese invincibility” and boost the morale of his men.

The myth of the superman was never completely dispelled. To the end of the war—even after most of the Japanese navy and merchant marine had been sunk; after Japanese soldiers in the field, cut off from support, had begun starving to death and being killed by the tens and hundreds of thousands; after the urban centers of the home islands had come under regular bombardment—Allied planners continued to overestimate the will and capacity of the Japanese to keep fighting. There are surely many explanations for this, but prominent among them is a plainly racial consideration: the superman image was especially compelling because it meshed with the greatest of all the racist bogeys of the
white men, the specter of the Yellow Peril. Hatred toward the Japanese derived not simply from the reports of Japanese atrocities, but also from the deeper well springs of anti-Orientalism. Time magazine's coverage of the American response to Pearl Harbor, for example, opened on this very note. What did Americans say when they heard of the attack, Time asked rhetorically; and the answer it quoted approvingly as representative was, "Why, the yellow bastards!" At one time or another, almost every mainstream newspaper and magazine fell into the color idiom. In poster art and every other form of anti-Japanese illustration, yellow was by far the dominant color. Among the music makers, we already have encountered Tin Pan Alley's revealing counterpoint of Hitler and the "Yellow Japs." Other song titles included "We're Gonna Find a Fellow Who Is Yellow and Beat Him Red, White, and Blue" and "Oh, You Little Son of an Oriental."

Spokesmen for Asian allies such as China were aghast at such insensitivity, and the war years as a whole became an agonizing revelation of the breadth and depth of anti-Asian prejudice in the United States. In the very midst of the war, these revelations actually prompted a year-long congressional hearing to consider revision of the notorious "Oriental Exclusion Laws," the capstone of formal discrimination against all peoples of Asian origin. What the Japanese attack brought to the surface, however, was something more illusive and interesting than the formal structures of discrimination, namely, the concrete fears that underlay the perception of a menacing Orient. Since the late nineteenth century, when the Yellow Peril idea was first expressed in the West, white people had been unnerved by a triple apprehension—recognition that the "hordes" of Asia outnumbered the population of the West, fear that these alien masses might gain possession of the science and technology that made Western domination possible, and the belief that Orientals possessed occult powers unfathomable to Western rationalists. By trumpeting the cause of Pan-Asianism and proclaiming the creation of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japan raised the prospect that the Asian hordes might at last become united. With their Zero planes and big battleships and carriers, the Japanese gave notice that the technological and scientific gap had narrowed dramatically. And with the aura of invincibility that blossomed in the heat of the early victories, the Japanese "supermen" evoked the old fantasies of occult Oriental powers. All this would be smashed in August 1945, when Japan capitulated. And all this would resurface three decades later, when Japan burst upon the scene as an economic superpower and other Asian countries began to emulate its so-called miracle.

Racism also shaped the Japanese perception of Self and Other—again in patterned ways, but patterns different from those of the West. History accounts for much of this difference. Over centuries, Japan had borrowed extensively from India, China, and more recently the West; and had been greatly enriched thereby; and acknowledged these debts. And over the course of the last century, the Japanese had felt the sting of Western condescension. Even when applauded by Europeans and Americans for their accomplishments in industrializing and "Westernizing," the Japanese were painfully aware that they still were regarded as immature and unimaginative and unstable—good in the small things, as the saying went among the old Japan hands, and small in the great things. Thus, Japanese racial thinking was riven by an ambivalence which had no clear counterpart in white-supremacist thinking. Like the white Westerners, they assumed a hierarchical world; but unlike the Westerners, they lacked the unambiguous power that would enable them to place themselves unequivocally at the top of the racial hierarchy. Toward Europeans and Americans, and the science and civilization these peoples exemplified, the national response was one of admiration as well as fear, mistrust, and hatred. Toward all others—that is, toward nonwhites including Asians other than themselves—their attitude was less complicated. By the twentieth century, Japan's success in resisting Western colonialism or neocolonialism and emerging as one of the so-called Great Powers had instilled among the Japanese an attitude toward weaker peoples and nations as arrogant and contemptuous as the racism of the Westerners. Koreans and Chinese began to learn this in the 1890s and early 1900s; the peoples of Southeast Asia learned it quickly after December 7, 1941.

For Japan, the crisis of identity came to a head in the 1930s and early 1940s, taking several dramatic forms. Behind the joy and fury of the initial attacks, and indeed behind many of the atrocities against white men and women in Asia, was an unmistakable sense of racial revenge.
At the same time, the Japanese began to emphasize their own destiny as a “leading race” (shidō minzoku). If one were to venture a single broad observation concerning the difference between the preoccupations of white supremacists and Japanese racism, it might be this: whereas white racism devoted inordinate energy to the denigration of the Other, Japanese racial thinking concentrated on elevating the Self. In Japanese war films produced between 1937 and 1945, for example, the enemy was rarely depicted. Frequenty it was not even made clear who the antagonist was. The films concentrated almost exclusively on the admirable “Japanese” qualities of the protagonists. The focus of wartime propaganda for domestic consumption was similar. In its language and imagery, Japanese prejudice thus appeared to be more benign than its white counterpart—by comparison, a “soft” racism—but this was misleading. The insularity of such introversion tended to depersonalize and, in its own peculiar way, dehumanize all non-Japanese “outsiders.” In practice, such intense fixation on the self contributed to a wartime record of extremely callous and brutal behavior toward non-Japanese.

The central concept in this racial thinking was that most tantalizing of cultural fixations: the notion of purity. In Japan, as elsewhere, this has a deep history not merely in religious ritual but also in social practice and the delineation of insider and outsider (pure and impure) groups. By turning purity into a racial ideology for modern times, the Japanese in effect were nationalizing a concept traditionally associated with differentiation within their society. Purity was Japaneseized and made the signifier of homogeneity, of “one hundred million hearts beating as one,” of a unique “Yamato soul” (Yamato damashii, from the ancient capital of the legendary first emperor). Non-Japanese became, by definition, impure. Whether powerful or relatively powerless, all were beyond the pale.

The ambiguity of the concept enhanced its effectiveness as a vehicle for promoting internal cohesion. At a superficial level, this fixation on the special purity or “sincerity” of the Japanese bears resemblance to the mystique of American “innocence.” Whereas the latter is a subtheme in the American myth, however, the former was cultivated as the very essence of a powerful racial ideology. Like esoteric mantras, a variety of evocative (and often archaic) words and phrases were introduced to convey the special racial and moral qualities of the Japanese; and like esoteric mandalas, certain visual images (sun, sword, cherry blossom, snow-capped Mt. Fuji, an abstract “brightness”) and auspicious colors (white and red) were elevated as particularistic symbols of the purity of the Japanese spirit.

Where Westerners had turned eventually to pseudo-science and dubious social science to bolster theories of the inherent inferiority of non-white and non-Western peoples, the Japanese turned to mythohistory, where they found the origins of their superiority in the divine descent of their sovereign and the racial and cultural homogeneity of the sovereign’s loyal subjects. Deity, monarch, and populace were made one, and no words captured this more effectively than the transcendent old phrase resurrected to superecede plain reference to “the Japanese”: Yamato minzoku, the “Yamato race,” “Yamato”—the name of the place where Jimmu, grandson of the grandson of the Sun Goddess, was alleged to have founded the imperial line in 660 B.C.—was redolent with the archaic mystique of celestial genetics that made Japan the divine land and the Japanese people the chosen people. In Yamato minzoku, the association became explicitly racial and exclusionary. The race had no identity apart from the throne and the mythic and religious (Shintō) traditions that had grown up around it, and no outsider could hope to penetrate this community. This was blood nationalism of an exceptionally potent sort.

Many of these themes were elaborated in the ideological writings of the 1930s and early 1940s, and the cause of blood nationalism was elevated by the fact that 1940 became the occasion for massive ceremony and festivity in celebration of the 2,600-year anniversary of the “national foundation day.” At the same time, the racial ideologues took care to emphasize that purity was not merely an original state, but also an ongoing process for each Japanese. Purity entailed virtues that needed to be cultivated, and preeminent among these were two moral ideals originally brought to Japan from China: loyalty and filial piety (chūkō). Why these became a higher expression of morality in Japan than elsewhere, higher even than in China, was explained by the fact that in Japan loyalty and filial piety had their ultimate focus in the divine sovereign. Purity lay in transcendence of ego and identification with a greater truth or cause; and in the crisis years of the 1930s and early 1940s, this greater truth was equated with the militarized imperial state. War itself, with all the sacrifice it demanded, became an act of
purification. And death in war, the ultimate expression of selflessness, became the supreme attainment of this innate Japanese purity. We know now that most Japanese fighting men who died slowly did not pass away with the name of the emperor on their lips. Most often, they called (as GIs did also) for their mothers. Still, they fought and died with fervor and bravery, enveloped in the propaganda of being the divine soldiers of the divine land, and this contributed to the aura of a people possessed of special powers.

Both the Western myth of the superman and the bogey of the Yellow Peril had their analogue in this emphasis the Japanese themselves placed on their unique suprarational spiritual qualities. In Western eyes, however, this same spectacle of fanatical mass behavior also reinforced the image of the little men, the Japanese as a homogeneous, undifferentiated mass. There is no small irony in this, for what we see here is the coalescence of Japanese indoctrination with the grossest anti-Japanese stereotypes of the Westerners. In the crudest of Anglo-American colloquialisms, it was argued that “a Jap is a Jap” (the famous quotation of General John De Witt, who directed the incarceration of the Japanese Americans). In the 1945 propaganda film Know Your Enemy—Japan, produced by Frank Capra for the U.S. Army, the Japanese were similarly described as “photographic prints off the same negative,” a line now frequently cited as the classic expression of American contempt for the Japanese. Yet in essence, this seen-one-seen-all attitude was not greatly different from the “one hundred million hearts beating as one” indoctrination that the Japanese leaders themselves promoted. Homogeneity and separateness were essential parts of what the Japanese said about themselves. In their idiom, this was integral to the superiority of the Yamato race. To non-Japanese, it was further cause for derision and contempt.

The rhetoric of the Pure Self also calls attention to the potency of implicit as opposed to explicit denigration. In proclaiming their own purity, the Japanese cast others as inferior because those others did not, and could not, share in the grace of the divine land. Non-Japanese were, by the very logic of the ideology, impure, foul, polluted. Such sentiments usually flowed like an underground stream beneath the ornate paean to the “pure and cloudless heart” of the Japanese, but occasionally they burst to the surface with extraordinary vehemence. Thus, in a book of war reportage entitled Bataan, Hino Ashihei, one of the best-known Japanese wartime writers, described American POWs as “people whose arrogant nation once tried to unlawfully treat our motherland with contempt.” “As I watch large numbers of the surrendered soldiers,” he continued, “I feel like I am watching filthy water running from the sewage of a nation which derives from impure origins and has lost its pride of race. Japanese soldiers look particularly beautiful, and I feel exceedingly proud of being Japanese.” These were the American prisoners, of course, whom the Japanese soldiers brutalized in the Bataan death march.

As a rule, however, the Japanese turned to one particular negative image when referring directly to the Anglo-American enemy: the demon or devil. “Devilish Anglo-Americans” (kichi Ei-Bei) was the most familiar epithet for the white foe. In the graphic arts the most common depiction of Americans or British was a horned Roosevelt or Churchill, drawn exactly like the demons (oni, akuma) found in Japanese folklore and folk religion. As a metaphor of dehumanization, the demonic white man was the counterpart of the Japanese monkeyman in Western thinking, but the parallel was by no means exact. The demon was a more impressive and ambiguous figure than the ape, and certainly of a different category entirely than the vermin. In Japanese folk renderings, the demon was immensely powerful; it was often intelligent, or at least exceedingly crafty; and it possessed talents and powers beyond those of ordinary Japanese. Not all demons had to be killed; indeed, some could be won over and turned from menaces into guardians. Here again was an intriguingly malleable stereotype, one that would be turned about dramatically after the war when the Americans became the military “protectors” of Japan.

During the war years, however, this more benign potential of the demonic Other was buried. For the Japanese at war, the demon worked as a metaphor for the enemy in ways that plain subhuman or bestial images could not. It conveyed a sense of great power and special abilities on the part of the adversary, and in this respect captured some of the ambivalence that always had marked Japan’s modern relationship with the West. At the same time, the demonic Other played to deep feelings of insecurity by evoking the image of an ever-present outside threat. Unlike apes or vermin, the demon did not signify a random presence.
In Japanese folklore, these figures always inhabited the mountains outside the village, on islands and they exemplified not a racial fear, but a far more basic fear in general.

Contrary to the myth of being a homogeneous people, Japanese society was honeycombed with groups suspicious of one another, and the blue-eyed barbarians from across the seas were absorbed into patterns of thinking that had emerged centuries earlier as a response to these tense and threatening insider-outsider relationships. The Westerners who suddenly appeared on Japan’s horizon in the mid-nineteenth century were the most formidable of all outsiders, and the response to them mobilized nationalistic and racist sentiments in unprecedented ways. Symbolically, however, the demonic Other already was present to be racialized. There was, moreover, a further dimension to this complicated play of symbolic representation, for it was but a short step from the perception of an ever-present “demonic” threat to the consciousness of being an eternal victim. This too is a sentiment that recurs frequently in the indigenous Japanese tradition, and in the modern world this “victim consciousness” (higaisha ishiki) became inextricably entangled with the perception of foreign threats. From this perspective, modern Japanese racism as exemplified in the demonic Other reflected an abiding sense of being always the threatened, the victim, the aggrieved—and never the threat, the victimizer, the giver of grief.

Where images and actions came together most decisively, however, demon, ape, and vermin functioned similarly. All facilitated killing by dehumanizing the enemy. The rhetoric of “kill the American demons” and “kill the British demons” became commonplace not only in combat but also on the homefront. A popular magazine published in late 1944 conveyed the fury of this rhetoric. Under the title “Devilish Americans and English,” the magazine ran a two-page drawing of Roosevelt and Churchill as debauched ogres carousing with fellow demons in sight of Mt. Fuji, and urged all Japanese to “Beat and kill these animals that have lost their human nature! That is the great mission that Heaven has given to the Yamato race, for the eternal peace of the world!” Another magazine, reporting on the decisive battle in the Philippines, declared American beasts and demons “that are sent to hell, will be.” Iwo Jima was described in official newspaper, “a suitable place to slaughter the American devils.”

Demobilization was by no means an essential precondition for killing, however. The most numerous victims of Japanese aggression and atrocity were other Asians, who were rarely depicted in this way. Toward them, the Japanese attitude was a mixture of “Pan-Asian” propaganda for public consumption, elaborate theories of racial hierarchy and Japanese hegemony at official and academic levels, and condescension and contempt in practice. Apart from a small number of idealistic military officers and civilian officials, few Japanese appear to have taken seriously the egalitarian rhetoric of Pan-Asian solidarity and genuine liberation of colonized Asian peoples. Never for a moment did the Japanese consider liberating their own Korean and Formosan colonies, and policy toward Southeast Asia—even where “independence” was granted—always was framed in terms that made Japan’s preeminence as the “leading race” absolutely clear. The purity so integral to Japanese thinking was peculiar to the Japanese as a race and culture—not to “Oriental” peoples in general—and consequently there was no “Asian supremacism” counterpart to white supremacism in Japanese thinking.

Prior to the 1930s, the Japanese did not have a clearly articulated position vis-à-vis other Asians. The rush of events thereafter, including the invasion of China and decision to push south into Southeast Asia, forced military planners and their academic supporters to codify and clarify existing opinions on these matters. The result was a small outpouring of studies, reports, and pronouncements—many of a confidential nature—which explicitly addressed the characteristics of the various peoples of Asia and the appropriate policy to adopt toward them. That these were not casual undertakings was made amply clear in 1981, when a hitherto-unknown secret study dating from 1943 was discovered in Tokyo. Prepared by a team of some forty researchers associated with the Population and Race Section of the Research Bureau of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, this devoted over three thousand pages to analysis of race theory in general and the different races of Asia in particular. The title of the report provides an inkling of its contents: An Investigation of Global Policy with the Yamato Race as Nucleus.
The *Investigation* was a serious intelligence report, and its style was academic. In its way, it was a counterpart to the "national character" writings of the Anglo-American social scientists who mobilized in support of the Allied war effort (and found the Japanese "national character" best explained by theories concerning adolescent behavior and juvenile delinquency among Westerners). The Japanese researchers called attention to Western theories of race and, while attentive to Nazi ideas, surveyed the gamut of racial thinking beginning with Plato and Aristotle. In the modern world, they noted, racism, nationalism, and capitalist imperialism had become inseparably intertwined. And while modern scholarship had repudiated the notion of biologically pure races, blood still mattered greatly in contributing to psychological unity. In this regard, as Karl Haushofer had observed, Japan was fortunate in having become a uniform racial state. (Haushofer, the geopolitician whose writings influenced the Nazis, had done his doctoral work on Japan.) At the same time, overseas expansion should be seen as essential, not merely for the attainment of military and strategic security but also for preserving and revitalizing racial consciousness and vigor; on this point, the Japanese again quoted Western experts, including not merely the Germans but also the British. Looking ahead, it was predictable that the second and third generations of overseas Japanese might face problems of identity, and thus it was imperative to develop settlement policies that would thwart their assimilation and ensure that they "remain aware of the superiority of the Japanese people and proud of being a member of the leading race."

The focus of this massive report was on Asian rather than Western peoples, and its dry language provides insight into how racial inequality in Asia was rationalized. The central metaphor was the family. The critical phrase was "proper place"—a term that had roots in Confucian prescription for domestic relationships but was carefully extended to cover international relations beginning in the late 1930s. The family idiom is another example of the malleable social construct, for it suggests harmony and reciprocity on the one hand, but clear-cut hierarchy and division of authority and responsibility on the other; and it was the latter that really mattered to the Japanese. The authors of the *Investigation* were emphatic in condemning false consciousness concerning equality. "To view those who are in essence unequal as if they were equal is in itself inequitable," they observed. And it followed from this that "to treat those who are unequal unequally is to realize equality." The family exemplified such equitable inequality, and the Japanese writers made clear that Japan was not merely the head of the family in Asia now but was destined to maintain this position "eternally." Whether the Yamato race also was destined to become the head of the global family of races and nations was left unanswered, although passing comments suggested that this was the ultimate goal. The opening pages of the study flatly declared that the war would continue "until Anglo-American imperialistic democracy has been completely vanquished and a new world order erected in its place." And as the *Investigation* made amply clear, the Japanese-led imperium in Asia would assume a leading role in this new order.

Despite their Confucian overtones, the family metaphor and proper-place philosophy bore close resemblance to Western thinking on issues of race and power. The Japanese took as much pleasure as any white Westerner in categorizing the weaker peoples of Asia as "children." In their private reports and directives, they made clear that "proper place" meant a division of labor in Asia in which the Yamato race would control the economic, financial, and strategic sinews of power within an autarchic bloc, and thereby "hold the key to the very existence of all the races of East Asia." A secret policy guideline issued in Singapore at the outset of the war was equally frank: "Japanese subjects shall be afforded opportunities for development everywhere," it stated, "and after establishing firm footholds they shall exalt their temperament as the leading race with the basic doctrine of planning the long-term expansion of the Yamato race." Despite their detailed country-by-country, race-by-race summaries, the Japanese were interested in other Asians only as subordinate members of the family who could be manipulated to play roles assigned by Japan. For other Asians, the real meaning of Japan's racial rhetoric was obvious. "Leading race" meant master race, "proper place" meant inferior place, "family" meant patriarchal oppression.

There are two interesting questions to ask concerning racism in the postwar U.S.-Japan relationship. How did the racial hatreds dissipate so quickly after Japan's capitulation? And in what forms has racism
reemerged in recent years, as economic frictions have mounted between the two countries.

The answer to the first question is a story in itself, and begins with the commonsense observation that intimate face-to-face contact for purposes other than mutual slaughter enabled each side to rehumanize the other. Although the American-dominated Occupation of Japan, which lasted from 1945 to 1952, was ethnocentric and overbearing in many respects, it also was infused with goodwill and—in its early stages—a commitment to “demilitarization and democratization” that struck a responsive chord. Contrary to the wartime stereotypes of propagandists in both the Allied and Japanese camps, the majority of Japanese were sick of regimentation, indoctrination, and militarism. At the same time, the Cold War facilitated a quick diversion of enmity, and anticomunism became a new mission unifying the two former antagonists at the state level. Enemies changed, enmity did not.

On both sides, this abrupt metamorphosis was cushioned psychologically by the ability to use old patterns of perception in new ways. For the Americans, the vermin disappeared but the monsternmen remained for a while as charming pets. The September 1945 cover of Leatherneck, for example—the first issue of the Marine monthly to appear after Japan’s capitulation—featured a cheery cartoon of a Marine holding a vexed but thoroughly domesticated monkey wearing the cap, shirt, and leggins of the Imperial Army. Newsweek, in its feature article on what sort of people the Americans might expect to find in Japan when the Occupation commenced, ran “Curious Simians” as one subtitle. Other racist stereotypes traveled from war to peace in comparable ways. While defeat temporarily extinguished the superman mystique, it reinforced the perception of the Japanese as little or lesser people. Stated conversely, victory over Japan reinforced the concept of inherent white and Western superiority. The more precise associations of Japan’s “lesser” stature, however—the primitive nature of social relations and attitudes; the childishness of the populace both psychologically and politically; the collective neurosis—all this now provoked a paternalistic response. The American overseers of Occupied Japan thought in terms of a civilizing mission that would eliminate what was primitive, tribal, and ritualistic—an old but ideallistic colonial attitude indeed. They would guide an

immature people with backward institutions toward maturity. The Japanese “children” now became pupils in General MacArthur’s school of democracy, learners and borrowers of advanced U.S. technology, followers of U.S. Cold War policies. Where the Japanese psyche was tortured, the Americans would be healers.

These were not frivolous attitudes, nor more than paternalism itself is necessarily frivolous. At the individual level, moreover, countless Japanese and Americans collaborated equitably in pursuit of common goals. Neither democracy nor demilitarization nor—later—economic reconstruction and remilitarization were ethnocentric U.S. goals forced upon an unwilling, defeated people; on all of these policies, there was a gurnet of opinion among the Japanese themselves. The overall relationship, however, was inherently unequal and patronizing on the part of the Americans, and it is here that racist attitudes survived. U.S. policymakers at the highest level also were not above cynically manipulating Japanese racism to serve U.S. purposes. In 1951, when Japan’s allegiance in the Cold War was still not entirely certain, for example, John Foster Dulles recommended that the Americans and British take advantage of Japanese feelings of “superiority as against the Asiatic mainland masses” and play up the “social prestige” of being associated with the Western alliance. (In a fine example of a truly free-floating stereotype, Dulles, tapping a deep-rooted Euro-American tradition emphasizing the fundamentally Slavic or “Oriental” nature of the Russian people and culture, also liked to emphasize that the Soviet menace could be better understood if one remembered that the Russians were an Asiatic people.)

On the Japanese side, defeat was bitter but peace was sweet, and certain attitudes associated with wartime racial thinking also proved adaptable to the post surrender milieu. Proper-place thinking facilitated acceptance of a subordinate status vis-à-vis the victorious Allies, at least for the time being. In this regard, it is helpful to recall that the “leading race” rhetoric of the war years was a relatively new ideology in Japan, whereas for most of their modern history the Japanese had played a subordinate role in the world order. The militarism of the 1930s and early 1940s arose out of a desire to alter that insecure status, and ended in disaster. To seek a new place in more modest new ways after 1945 was in fact the continuation of a familiar quest.
In fascinating ways, the wartime fixation on purity and purification proved adaptable to this commitment to a new path of development. Individuals who had been exhorted to purge self and society of decadent Western influences before the surrender now found themselves exhorted to purge the society of militarism and feudalistic legacies. This sense of “cleansing” Japan of foul and reactionary influences was truly phenomenal in the early postwar years, and while this tapped popular aspirations for liberation, it also politicized the militarists’ ideology of the Pure Self in undreamed-of ways. Universal “democratic” values now became the touchstone of purity. And the guardians at the gates, to cap these astounding transmogrifications, were the erstwhile American demons. The U.S. assumption of a military role as protector of postwar Japan was a hard-nosed rational policy, but from the Japanese perspective it had a subtle, almost subconscious logic. The fearsome demons of Japanese folklore, after all, frequently were won over and put to use by the ostensibly weaker folk.

These transitional adaptations of proper place, purity, and the demon more or less deracialized the wartime fixations. They did not, however, eliminate the racial tensions latent in the structure of institutionalized inequality that has characterized postwar U.S.-Japan relations until recently. So long as Japan remained conspicuously inferior to the United States in power and influence, the structure and psychology of what is known in Japan as “subordinate independence” could be maintained. When relations of power and influence changed dramatically, however, neither side could be expected to rethink these fundamental relationships without trauma. The great change came in the 1970s, when it became apparent—abruptly and shockingly for almost everyone concerned—that Japan had become an economic superpower while America faced formidable problems. In this situation, war talk has become fashionable again: talk of trade wars; ruminations on who really won the Pacific War; doomsday warnings of a new “yen bloc,” a seriously rearmed Japan, a “financial Pearl Harbor.” Much of this is political grandstanding and yellow journalism, but the fears are real. The United States and Japan are mistrustful allies and serious competitors now, and they are capable of destabilizing the global political economy if unable to redefine their relationship. It is in this context of enormous stakes and high tension that the old vocabularies of racial pride and racial hatred have reemerged ominously on both sides.

The idioms of race are like hands: we can make a fist and strike others with it, or show the back of the hand in contempt, or offer the palm in friendship. That both Americans and Japanese have begun to withdraw the preferred hand in recent years is obvious. Thus, on the American side, Japan’s success has rekindled the idioms of dehumanization with scorn for the “economic animal” and “robotlike” salaryman. The image of the little people has persisted even as the country’s economic power becomes enormous. Henry Kissinger reportedly referred privately to the Japanese as “little Sony salesmen” and “small and petty bookkeepers.” Lee Iacocca, one of the harshest critics of Japanese economic practices, falls back on an archetypal racist metaphor in offering advice on how to deal with Japan in his memoirs: “It’s time for our government to call the kid in after class and ask him to explain his behavior.” In journalistic circles, the single most popular adjective for contemporary Japan is probably “tribal,” a notion straight out of the national-character studies of the war years, and hardly adequate for analyzing the second largest capitalist economy in history. The madman image has resurfaced in countless forms, from commentaries on compulsive work habits to fears that Japanese financiers may throw the global economy into chaos on a whim to visions of a suicidal nuclear-armed Japan. The superman has been resurrected as the superpower, and again it is suggested that occult powers lie behind this accomplishment—miracle men, secrets of success, an inscrutable Zen of management, an indomitable and inimitable Japanese spirit. And overriding this, for Americans and most of the Western world, is the reincarnation of the Yellow Peril in the form not merely of Japan alone, but also the “four dragons” or “four tigers” that are coming on fast in Japan’s wake: South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. What the optimists refer to as the “Pacific Century” is, in the pessimists’ phrase, the impending “Asian Century.”

To most Japanese, the attacks on their success ring of sour grapes, and more. They confirm the old fears of an ever-present threat from outside, and rekindle the sense of being an eternal victim. The prac-
titioners of Japan bashing are the new demonic menace, they are again mostly Americans and Europeans, and their numbers seem legion. They refuse to acknowledge the decline of the West, as it were, and Japan's new place in the world order.

What that place is, of course, is the nub of the problem. The rhetoric of “Japan as Number One” was first popularized in 1970 by an American scholar, Ezra Vogel, and has provoked pride among Japanese and fear and uncertainty everywhere, including in Japan itself. For it captures a central fact of our times—not that Japan is in fact “number one,” but rather that the structure of global power and influence is in the midst of a historic transformation, and no one can foresee what the outcome will be. “Proper place” means different place now, a restructuring of established hierarchies, in some instances almost a complete inversion of the former teacher-student and leader-follower relationships.

For many Japanese, especially those who lived through the war and endured the long decades of humiliation built into the postwar structure of subordinate independence, there is an understandable and only thinly disguised sense of racial revenge in these developments. There is also a frightening tendency on the part of the more fervent new nationalists to attribute Japan’s success to peculiarly Japanese qualities that are essentially the same as those emphasized in the blood nationalism and leading-race rhetoric of the war years. In explaining why the Japanese are winning the trade war, for example, the head of Nippon Telephone and Telegraph Corporation explained several years back that the superior quality of Japanese manufactures reflected the fact that the Japanese were racially pure and not “mongrelized” as were Americans. The prime minister of Japan spoke similarly in 1986, and provoked a violent outburst of anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States in return. Such remarks do more than reveal the persistence of the mystique of Japanese homogeneity and purity, and the special contempt that many Japanese still hold toward “nonwhites” (the targets in this case were primarily Afro-Americans and Hispanics). They also reveal an insular hostility toward pluralism which is incompatible with the global responsibilities their new power has thrust upon the Japanese.

The roads being traveled in global relationships today are unfamiliar paths to unknown destinations, but the racial language that has emerged as the United States and Japan jockey for position on these paths is familiar. No comfort can be taken in that.

NOTES

1 This essay summarizes some of the themes developed at length in my War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War (New York: Pantheon, 1986), where full annotations can be found. Here I have sharpened the focus on racial language in comparative perspective.

2 “Answer to Japan,” p. 20 (italics in original). This report appears in several archival collections at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. See “Bonner Frank Fellers Collection,” Boxes 1 and 15; also “U.S. Army Forces in the Pacific, Psychological Warfare Branch,” Box 1.

3 From Hino’s 1942 book Ban Hantō Kōjiki, as quoted in Haruko Taya Cook, “Voices from the Front: Japanese War Literature, 1937–1945,” unpublished M.A. thesis in Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1984, pp. 59–60. In numerous ways, Hino can be seen as a Japanese counterpart to Ernie Pyle, quoted at the beginning of this essay. Both men were immensely influential in interpreting the war for their countrymen; and both obviously responded with similar visceral racial repulsion to first encounters with the enemy.

4 These quotations, and the brief observations in these concluding remarks in general, are annotated in the fuller treatment of contemporary racial idioms which appears in the essay which follows on “Fear and Prejudice in U.S.-Japan Relations.”