

Pillaged Skulls and Looted Gear: The Racialization of the Japanese
and its effect on United States Trophy Hunting
during the Second World War

By

Lawrence R. Dahl

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Andrew Polk, Chair

Dr. Yuan-Ling Chao

Dr. Brenden Martin

Abstract

My research is on the racialization of the Japanese and how it affected looting during the Second World War. Though it focuses on the looting of Japanese teeth, ears, and skulls during the war, it begins with the years prior to the war where anti-Asian sentiment played a pivotal role in policies limiting the immigration of Asian peoples. By carefully analyzing propaganda posters utilized by the American government during the war, a conclusion can be made that there was a stark difference between the depictions of the Japanese and the Germans. This racialized propaganda led American soldiers serving in the Pacific to dehumanize their enemy to the extent of treating them like game animals. While often this topic is overlooked in historical writings, with many focusing on the brutality of the Japanese soldiers towards the Americans, I plan to utilize photographic evidence, first hand memoirs, and newspaper articles from the war that specifically showcase the barbaric mutilation of Japanese soldiers by Americans serving in the Pacific Theater. Life Magazine, as well as many newspapers, featured photographs and articles showcasing and describing the looting of Japanese skulls and body parts. In addition, many personal accounts, such as Eugene Sledge's *With the Old Breed*, describe the presence of post-mortem mutilation of Japanese soldiers. Much of the research of the Pacific Theater in WWII highlights Japanese brutality rather than American brutality, perhaps because many prefer to idolize rather than criticize American soldiers.

My research will fill a void in the discussion of the role of racism in the American treatment of Japanese enemy combatants by specifically showing the effect of that racism on the battlefield, compared to the relatively civilized treatment of European enemies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER ONE: ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARSHIP SURROUNDING THE JAPANESE AND TROPHY HUNTING DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.....	3
Scholarship on race and war.....	4
CHAPTER TWO: PROPAGANDA AND ITS RACIALIZED TENDENCIES.....	15
CHAPTER THREE: LOOTING ON THE BATTLEFIELDS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR.....	36
Looting in the Pacific Theater.....	36
Looting in the European Theater.....	52
Conclusion.....	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	63

CHAPTER I.
ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARSHIP SURROUNDING THE JAPANESE AND
TROPHY HUNTING DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Racialized propaganda during the Second World War played a critical role in influencing U.S servicemen's treatment of Japanese enemy combatants. While the U.S has a long history of racial biases towards minority groups, Anti-Japanese sentiment manifested itself through particularly barbaric methods. U.S soldiers viewed the Japanese as a subhuman race, similar to how Western settlers viewed the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. In these conflicts, the American people thought they were waging a war against those of a different and inferior race.¹ Due to this belief, the white population deemed it justifiable to take part in the barbaric mutilation of dead people.

Throughout warfare, there has been an effort by the combatants to seek out souvenirs from the battlefield as a way of remembering the time they served.

This deliberate seeking out of war prizes from defeated enemies is not a new concept for the United States, but during the Second World War, it would take on a more disturbing level of pillaging. During this war, it would grow to a level that would reach even the highest personnel in American Government. While many previous war histories focused on material goods as the trophies

¹ Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 158.

soldiers would take, such as in the Civil War where Confederate soldiers reported the “plundering of houses and taking of young ladies breast pins and finger rings,” WWII soldiers in the Pacific Theater went well beyond this common plundering and instead stooped to the barbaric collection of Japanese remains as trophies.² The fact that there is little to no evidence of human trophy taking occurring in the European Theater is significant and is tied directly to the differences in the way the American government portrayed Germans, Italians, and Japanese in their war propaganda. Simply put, the racialized characterizations of all Japanese as subhuman vermin in American propaganda had a direct effect on the way soldiers, sailors, and marines treated the Japanese in the Pacific Theater, especially in the barbaric act of human trophy collecting.

Scholarship of Race and War

Unlike in previous scholarship concerning trophy hunting and the Second World War, race has not been associated with the looting of enemy combatants; as a result, this leaves out an important narrative that adds more of a complete picture of the war and the United States’ role in it. While scholarship focuses on individual aspects of race during WWII such as anti-Asian sentiment, Japanese internment, and racialized propaganda, few areas of scholarship explore how these aspects culminated in the inhumane nature of the war in the Pacific. Much of the historical narrative of the Second World War focuses on the idea that

² Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, (New York: Penguin, 1988), 26.

America was fighting the “good war” and as such, were unable to commit such atrocities. Even with the controversial topic of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, historians often lean towards the idea that the ends justify the means. Even after such a catastrophic massacre of civilian life, Americans continue to see themselves as only the good guys. However, war is never black and white. In the words of philosopher James P. Carse, author of *Finite and Infinite Games*, “the contradiction inherent in all evil is that it originates in the desire to eliminate evil.”³ The reality of the matter is that both the Axis and Allied powers believed themselves to be the heroes in their story.

When discussing race, trophy hunting, and the Second World War, authors take many different stances ranging from wholesale exclusion of American atrocities, to those that discuss race, but fail to detail the extent to which race played in American treatment of the Japanese. Often when historians discuss anti-Asian sentiment, it is in reference to pre-war Anti-Asian exclusion, Japanese internment, or the Vietnam War. Historians often fail to link how racial ideology influenced the actions of American soldiers on the battlefield, and even when they do they don’t discuss the full extent of how those actions influenced trophy hunting. The purpose of this work is to fill this gap in the scholarship, offering a more complete history in the racialization of the Second World War.

³ James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2012), 33.

One book that fails to deal with American atrocities is Bernard Edwards' *Blood and Bushido: Japanese Atrocities at Sea 1941-1945*. In his book, Edwards acknowledges numerous instances of Japanese brutality towards Allied sailors, while at the same time neglecting to acknowledge the ways in which American sailors treated their Japanese counterparts.⁴ Similarly, Jerome T. Hagen's book *War in the Pacific: America at War*, is quick to point out the Japanese atrocities such as the Bataan Death March and the Rape of Nanking, but says little to nothing about the refusal of many American combatants to take prisoners in the Pacific Theater of the Second World War.⁵ When it comes to the topic of post-mortem mutilation, much of the scholarship focuses on Japanese mutilation of American soldiers. Such is the case in military historian James M. Scott's book *Rampage: MacArthur, Yamashita, and the Battle of Manila*. He describes two instances in vivid detail, one of these being on the island of Leyte where American forces found "mutilated dead American troops, and even sliced off souvenir body parts; several Caucasian fingers were found wrapped in a white cloth in the pack of a dead Japanese soldier."⁶ Later in the book, Scott describes

⁴ Bernard Edwards, *Blood and Bushido: Japanese Atrocities at Sea 1941-1945*, (New York, NY: Brick Tower Press, 1997).

⁵ Jerome T. Hagen, *War in the Pacific: America at War*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Malloy inc., 2006).

⁶ James M. Scott, *Rampage: MacArthur, Yamashita, and the Battle of Manila*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 134.

the report of the recovery of the captured body of cavalrymen Sgt. Henry Clark. Scott states, “his mutilated remains, found the next day, revealed that the enemy had sliced the first two fingers off of each hand. Coagulated blood around the wounds proved he was alive at the time. . . bayonet perforations of the chest and abdomen were present. Lack of blood around these areas is consistent with post-mortem mutilation.”⁷ The graphic nature of these depictions automatically provokes an emotional response in the reader, painting a picture of a heinous Japanese soldier committing barbaric acts on a helpless American.

John Costello, a scholar focusing on military history, falls in line with the long history of scholarship’s neglect of allied atrocities during the Second World War. Costello specifically points out instances in which Japanese soldiers maltreated American prisoners during the Bataan Death March, but fails to acknowledge American atrocities that also occurred during the War.⁸ Similarly, military historian and Professor of Military History John McManus discusses Japanese atrocities in his book, *Fire and Fortitude: The U.S. Army in the Pacific War, 1941-1943*. McManus mentions the Japanese practice of beheading their enemies, but fails to discuss how Americans beheaded the deceased Japanese.⁹

⁷ Scott, *Rampage*, 374.

⁸ John Costello, *The Pacific War: 1941-1945*, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2009), 228.

⁹ John C. McManus, *Fire and Fortitude: The U.S. Army in the Pacific War, 1941-1943*, (New York, NY: 2019).

By only mentioned one side's atrocities, these scholars neglect a large portion of the narrative that can ultimately change America's understanding of the War and their role in it. Victor Hanson's book, *The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won*, goes so far as to claim that the "Bataan Death March and other early Japanese atrocities shaped the American mindset in a way that logically led to the Napalming of Tokyo in March 1945."¹⁰ By making claims that Japanese atrocities were the cause of American policies in the Pacific Theater, Hanson neglects the role played by years of Anti-Asian sentiment in America. Essentially, Hanson lays the blame for American actions on the Japanese, and not on Americans themselves. While Japanese atrocities are undeniably horrific and inhumane, it would be biased to fail to acknowledge the acts American soldiers committed of the very same nature.

It is important to note that if these authors included information about American atrocities in the Pacific Theater, then there would be a more well-rounded history of the War. By providing evidence of American wrongdoings in the Pacific, these authors would be countering the long-held belief that the Second World War was the "good war" and was black and white, good versus evil. However, based on large amounts of evidence, one can see that the war was not black and white. These one-sided accounts that fail to acknowledge

¹⁰ Victor Davis Hanson, *The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2020), 511.

American atrocities not only skew the public opinion of America's role in the war, but also downplay the extent of anti-Asian sentiment in America.

Some authors discuss the anti-Asian sentiment in the United States, but fail to link that sentiment to the treatment Americans showed the Japanese during the Second World War. One such author is historian Erika Lee who, in her book *The Making of Asian America*, argues that there has been a long standing distaste for Asian people in the United States, and it played a major role in race relations throughout the history of the nation. While Lee includes numerous examples of the various struggles Asian people experienced in the United States, she fails to link her information to the Second World War.¹¹ As a result, there is a gap in the historiography of how Anti-Asian sentiment in the United States affected Americans when they engaged with their Asian counterparts on the battlefield. Similarly, Historian Beth Lew-Williams discusses anti-Asian sentiment in the United States. However, unlike Erika Lee, Lew-Williams describes numerous instances of extralegal violence committed against Asian people in the United States. Unfortunately, her descriptions of violent actions against Asians are limited to occurrences within the United States.¹² As a result, she fails to link

¹¹ Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

¹² Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018).

this American anti-Asian violence to the atrocities that occurred during the Second World War.

When authors do discuss anti-Asian sentiment, and more specifically, Anti-Japanese sentiment in relation to the Second World War, it is usually in reference to the Internment of the Japanese. One cannot open a large history book of the Second World War without encountering some discussion of the internment of the Japanese.¹³ More specifically though, there are books directed specifically at the Japanese internment. Books such as *Farewell to Manzanar*, *What did the Internment of the Japanese Americans mean?*, and *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II* all discuss the racial distastes for the Japanese and how it affected their treatment in the United States during the war.¹⁴ However, this is as far as most histories of the Japanese experience in the war go. Often, historians fail to recognize the treatment the Japanese received on the battlefield was far different than that of

¹³ Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001).; Scott, *Rampage*, 496.; Douglas Ford, *The Pacific War*, (New York, NY: Continuum International publishing Group, 2012).; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, (New York: NY: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston & James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of Japanese American experience during and after the World War II Internment*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973).; Alice Yang Murray, *What Did the Internment of the Japanese Americans Mean?*, (New York, NY: Haddon Craftsmen, 2000).; Richard Reeves, *Infamy: the Shocking Story of the Japanese Internment in World War II*, (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2015).

the Germans. In doing so, they downplay the role race played in the fighting in the Pacific Theater.

Ian W. Toll, a lauded American historian, wrote a three-part series on the War in the Pacific. The first part, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942*, Toll analyzes the first months of the Pacific War. Toll takes a tactical approach to his analysis of the War, and while he does discuss propaganda, he mainly focuses on Japanese propaganda and its influence on the Japanese people. There is little to no mention of trophy hunting by American soldiers, and fails to acknowledge the role race played in American actions during the Pacific War.¹⁵ The second part in his series, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*, does mention enemy mutilation, but downplays the practice in a manner that makes it seem much less common than it was.¹⁶ Toll emphasizes the fact that the practice was forbidden, and quickly moves on to discuss how the Japanese media capitalized on these seemingly sparse occurrences. This downplaying of American atrocities is common throughout scholarship of WWII. The third part in the series, *Twilight of the Gods: War in the Western Pacific, 1944-1945*, includes a discussion of American racism, but only racism directed towards African Americans. There was little to no mention of

¹⁵ Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012).

¹⁶ Ian W. Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015).

American trophy hunting, but Toll does reference one instance where Marines harvested gold from Japanese teeth.¹⁷ However, Toll is quick to point out that both sides committed dishonorable acts. Once again, the role of Anti-Asian sentiment and American atrocities is pushed to the background.

John Dower's *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* is perhaps the best example of scholarship that discusses the link between Anti-Asian sentiment and American actions during the Second World War. Dower focuses heavily on the dehumanization of the Japanese through propaganda and racist rhetoric, and even includes a few accounts of American trophy hunting of Japanese remains. However, Dower does not fully discuss the widespread nature of this trophy hunting, instead painting it as a rarer occurrence. By leaving this gap in the narrative, Dower is letting past scholarship that only discusses Japanese atrocities still control the narrative of the war. As a result, it is necessary to fill this gap and showcase the numerous instances of American atrocities so that people are not under the impression that the Americans did no wrong during the war.

While histories of the Second World War fail to acknowledge the widespread anti-Japanese sentiment that led to the mutilation of the Japanese soldiers, histories of the Vietnam war openly discuss American atrocities. This inclusion influences America's view of the Vietnam War, acknowledging the

¹⁷ Ian W. Toll, *Twilight of the Gods: War in the Western Pacific, 1944-1945*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021).

harsh realities of warfare and the ugly truths of racism. Consequently, the Vietnam War is not nearly as lauded in American public opinion as WWII. While Americans understand the reasons behind the Vietnam War, their knowledge of the atrocities committed lead them to see America in a different light. This war was not romanticized in the minds of the American people, allowing Americans to have a more truthful understanding of the Vietnam war.

Instances of ear and finger taking by U.S. service members and the My Lai Massacre are mentioned throughout historical narratives of the Vietnam war. One reason for this acknowledgement of American atrocities is due to the highly publicized nature of the war. Contrary to the newsreels of World War II which showcased the “enthusiastic, unquestioning, good guys fighting - and defeating - bad guys,” the Vietnam war showed the raw reality that was combat in Southeast Asia.¹⁸ The Vietnam War was the first televised, uncensored war, which meant that Americans had a front seat view to the harsh realities of war.¹⁹ Previously, many who never fought in battle could view war as some abstract concept in a far off place. After watching the uncensored content on television, however, Americans could no longer put the atrocities of war in the back of their minds. One such instance in which Americans became shocked by what they saw on

¹⁸ Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *The Vietnam War: and Intimate History*, (New York, NY: Vintage Book, 2017), 182.

¹⁹ Ward and Burns, *The Vietnam War*, 176.

their television screens occurred on August 5th, 1965 on CBS. The program showed a marine mission near Danang where the men were supposed to clear a hamlet of weaponry and enemy combatants. However, American television screens were filled with “images of weeping children and frightened old people and Marines flicking their cigarette lighters to set fire to the roofs of huts.”²⁰ With images like this, Americans could no longer view themselves as the good guys.

One of the most notable instances of American atrocities in the Vietnam War was the My Lai Massacre. In retaliation to repeated attacks from the village and American casualties resulting from these attacks, U.S. soldiers “rounded up and systematically murdered more than four hundred defenseless old men, women, children, and infants. Many of the women and girls were raped or sodomized before they were shot.”²¹ These were not the actions of a hero, and war was not a good enough excuse for American civilians to justify these atrocities. While not during the My Lai Massacre, there were numerous instances of American soldiers mutilating enemy dead and taking human remains as trophies in a similar fashion to the Second World War. Max Hastings discusses the topic of enemy mutilation in his book *Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy, 1945-1975*, stating that “the practice of mutilating the enemy dead was widespread. . . a CBS cameraman handed a soldier a knife with which to sever the ear of a dead

²⁰ Ward and Burns, *The Vietnam War*, 182.

²¹ Ward and Burns, *The Vietnam War*, 566.

communist for the benefit of TV viewers.”²² The media was often complacent in these atrocities and went so far as to exploit and encourage them for TV viewership. James R. Ebert also discusses the topic of enemy mutilation in *A life in a Year: The American Infantryman in Vietnam*, describing the commonality of ear removal from enemy corpses. Ebert writes, “Ears were collected as trophies, a means of ‘counting coup’- of keeping an individual record of kills.”²³ These instances of trophy taking of human remains were quite common during the Vietnam War, as Mitchell K. Hall mentions in *Vietnam War Era: People and Perspectives*. In his discussion of U.S veterans testifying to war crimes, Hall writes that “they told stories that at times they had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power.”²⁴ Hall also mentions that instances like these were not at all isolated, but crimes committed daily at the full awareness of officers of all levels. In histories of the Vietnam War, scholarship specifies that these atrocities were not isolated, further highlighting historians’ willingness to discuss these Vietnam War instances in full transparency. While practices such as enemy mutilation

²² Max Hasting, *Vietnam: an Epic Tragedy, 1945-1975*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018), 401.

²³ James R. Ebert, *A Life in a Year: the American Infantryman in Vietnam*, (New York, NY: Presidio Press, 1993), 359.

²⁴ Mitchell K. Hall, *The Vietnam War Era: People and Perspectives*, (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 215.

were common in both WWII and the Vietnam War, scholarship often neglects this topic and its commonality in WWII.

Ultimately, the combination of these texts provides a large history of Asian-Americans in the United States, and how they have been, or not been, discussed in reference to the Second World War. More specifically, by analyzing these sources, it can be said that there is a distinct lack in linking the racialized prejudices that were directed towards the Japanese to their treatment on the battlefield. As a result, it is important to include the many instances of American mutilation of Japanese on the battlefield, and how they were able to rationalize it because they had dehumanized the Japanese so far as to see them as animals and not human beings. If this story is told, more people will understand that the Second World War was not, and is not, black and white as many believe it to be. If we are blind to the injustices of the past, we will remain blind to the injustices of the present.

CHAPTER II. PROPAGANDA AND ITS RACIALIZED TENDENCIES

The implementation of propaganda campaigns to sway public opinion in favor of a cause has been an effective tool used by people of power for hundreds of years. This includes, but is not limited to, persuading people to support a political candidate, garnering support for an idea, or influencing public opinion in favor of a war. While propaganda is a successful tactic in raising awareness for a cause, it can cause long term harm when it displays derogatory terms or portrayals in an attempt to demean those being opposed. In some instances, propaganda allows for organizations to gain support for their cause by rallying the masses behind a slogan or idea. However, when propaganda incorporates negative stereotypes, derogatory language, or other characteristics that lead people to view others as lesser people, that is when the propaganda enters into dangerous territory. Once this propaganda is distributed, the consumers learn from it, and as a result, will incorporate its rhetoric into their everyday lives. During the Second World War, the propaganda that dominated the United States media exemplified the widely-held belief that their enemies, namely those of Asiatic descent, were subhuman. These racialized biases stemmed from years of white-supremacy that dominated American culture throughout its history. Beginning with the initial European settlers that arrived in the new world, there was a belief that those who were not of the same complexion were inferior.

This racial distaste that began with a negative view of the native peoples inhabiting North America soon applied to the enslaved Africans brought to the nation. The subjugation of the Native population and the African people created a blueprint for how other non-white people would be characterized in the future of the nation. This fact is highlighted by historian Beth Lew-Williams in her book *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America*. Lew-Williams states that “historians have often viewed anti-Chinese violence as a faint echo of the staggeringly lethal violence unleashed against Native Americans and African Americans.”¹ While Lew-Williams mentions how this racialized hatred and violence was transferred from the Native Americans and the African Americans to the Chinese, the same can be said for the Japanese once they arrived. When these Japanese immigrants started arriving in the United States in large numbers in the early 1900s, the white population saw them as a threat to their economic security. As a result, the white population quickly put efforts forth to disenfranchise the Japanese immigrants so they could keep them subordinate in society. Historian Erika Lee further supports this organized anti-Japanese sentiment in her book *The Making of Asian America*. Lee argues that “organized Japanese sentiment in the United States followed the successful campaign to restrict Chinese immigration. . . . both groups were inassimilable

¹ Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must go: Violence, Exclusion, and the making of the Alien in America* (Harvard University Press, 2018), 3.

cheap laborers who were threats to white workers and to existing race relations.”² Her observation furthers the belief that the racialized hatred of the Japanese was not a new concept, but rather an evolution of years of anti-non-white sentiment that permeated throughout American society.

The anti-Japanese sentiment prevalent throughout American society prior to the Second World War exemplified itself in numerous ways. One such way was the outright exclusion of those of Asian ancestry from the nation. While most of the early anti-immigration laws that affect those of Asian descent focused on the Chinese immigrant, the laws soon evolved to encompass the rising influx of Japanese people. The Reed-Johnson Immigration Act of 1924, as it was called, limited the number of immigrants allowed into the country based on quotas per nation.³ While this law came into effect in 1924, there had already been previous limitations on Japanese immigration that were agreed upon by the Japanese and the American government. Known as the Gentlemen's Agreement, in 1907, Japan limited the number of Japanese who could immigrate to the United

² Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster paperbacks, 2016), 124.

³ Congress, U.S. 1999. “Reed-Johnson Immigration Act of 1924.” *American Journey Online: The Immigrant Experience*. <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgsr&AN=edsgcl.2154000058&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

States.⁴ While President Theodore Roosevelt intended for this agreement to calm the tension between Japan and the United States, Japanese immigrants still faced widespread hostility from workers who felt threatened by the influx in cheaper laborers and the perceived cultural and economic threats that came with them. Some anti-Japanese laws denied people of Japanese descent their opportunity to become United States citizens. Other legislation like the Webb-Haney Alien Land Law of California of 1913 sought to deprive Japanese of the basic human right to private property.⁵ As more Japanese citizens emigrated to California, the state legislature passed this law to protect the state's Caucasian citizens from any perceived economic threats. Essentially, this law prohibited Japanese immigrants from purchasing land because they were not eligible for citizenship under U.S. law. These types of laws put into place by the American government were not some governmental manifestations of perceived negativity towards non-whites; rather, these laws came about from years of anti-Asian sentiment all over the country. For instance, in a 1924 debate, California's attorney general Ulysses S. Webb argued that the Japanese are "different in color; different in ideals; different in race; different in ambitions; different in their

⁴ "Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907." *Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907*, August 2017, 1.
<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=21212715&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁵ "Webb-Haney Alien Land Law, California 1913." *In Time and Place*. Accessed December 15, 2020.

theory of political economy and government. . . They have not in common with the Caucasioan in a single trait.”⁶ People tend to react to differences like these with disdain, as the unfamiliarity can make humans wildly uncomfortable. As a result, the overall “otherness” of the Japanese people made Americans uncomfortable, and many Americans quickly turned that discomfort into hatred. Furthermore, the Americans saw themselves atop a “hierarchy of races. On the lower rungs beneath the Caucasians, stood the allegedly uncivilized and semicivilized: Mongolian, Native Americans, and Africans.”⁷ This racial hierarchy played a key role in relationship building in the formative years of Japanese-American relations. The lower a race was on the rung, the more unhuman and more dangerous they were.

The preconceived racial bias that festered in the minds of so many Americans was exacerbated by the fact that the U.S. population of Asian-Americans and Asian immigrants was relatively small compared to the European-American population.⁸ This difference in population size ultimately facilitated the

⁶ Richard Reeves, *Infamy: The Shocking Story of the Japanese American Internment in World War II*, (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2015), 9.

⁷ Joseph M. Henning, *Outposts of Civilization: Race, Religion, and the Formative Years of American-Japanese Relations*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000), 1.

⁸ 1930 US Census, *General Report, Statistics by Subject*, census.gov, accessed December 17, 2020

increased resentment towards Asians because it is easy for the majority to discriminate against the minority. Essentially, the majority willingly participated in a collective ideology to blame their problems on a few parts of the population rather than the whole population or the system. While not the main reason for anti-Asian sentiment, the small Asian minority along with the majority's deep European roots influenced the perception that European-Americans were superior to Asian-Americans. This coupled with the previously mentioned hierarchy of races that Caucasians believed existed allowed for anti-Asian sentiment to be so easily accepted. However, though prejudice was easier to apply in areas where there was a sparse population of Japanese people, the inability to set aside racial differences infiltrated even the densest Japanese populated areas. For example, Hawaii's population of Japanese, which exceeded 130,000, were systematically profiled by the Anglo-American island population.⁹ Despite this being the largest concentration of Japanese people in America, they were still subject to significant racial profiling and degradation.

During interviews conducted after the Second World War, oral historian Studs Terkel highlighted the racial slurs and profiling the Japanese experienced in an interview with Peter Ota, a fifty-seven-year-old Nisei man, which is a person

⁹ Studs Terkel, *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War Two*, (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 21.

born in America whose parents immigrated from Japan.¹⁰ Ota was drafted during World War II and served as a vital part of the war effort. Despite his military service during the war, he still experienced racial profiling and disrespect. During this interview, he recalls his experience while traveling to his mother's funeral. Even though this man was seen as fit for the draft, the government continued to see him as untrustworthy and, thus, assigned an FBI agent to accompany him on the journey as a public safety precaution. As he recalled, "The people recognized me as being Oriental. They knew I was either an escaped prisoner or a spy. Oh, they called out names. I heard 'dirty Jap' very distinctly."¹¹ Americans held a variety of degrading ideas about the Japanese, some perpetuated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself. In his book, *Infamy*, Richard Reeves argues that "the president, in conversations with friends, speculated that the reason Japanese were 'devious and treacherous' was the shape of their skull."¹² Not only were the Japanese deemed treacherous, but also subhuman. John Dower touches on this idea of dehumanization in *War Without Mercy*, stating that "the western Allies. . . constantly emphasized the 'subhuman' nature of the Japanese, routinely turning to images of apes and vermin to convey this."¹³ By

¹⁰ "Nisei." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed 13 January 2021.

¹¹ Studs Terkel, *The Good War*, 31

¹² Reeves, *Infamy*, 34.

¹³ John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), page 9.

dehumanizing this group, Americans could justify drastic measures to be used against them. The comparison of the Japanese to rats and vermin perpetuated the idea that this group was something that needed to be exterminated. Unlike other racial groups that Caucasians viewed as lower than them such as African Americans, the Japanese were not paternalized like the Africans. While African Americans were viewed as animals, they were valuable because they were work animals in the eyes of their Caucasian masters. The Japanese, however, were seen as a pest that offered danger rather than value, and therefore needed to be exterminated. Consequently, the Pacific War became an effort of the Western Allies to eradicate what they saw as the “Yellow Peril.”¹⁴

In the case of the Second World War, race played a much more significant role in the Pacific Theater than the European Theater when it came to the treatment of the enemy.¹⁵ This racialized tendency to deem all Japanese people as evil allowed the soldiers fighting in the Pacific Theater to engage in barbaric acts of treatment towards the Japanese with little to no remorse. David M. Kennedy highlights this racialized opinion American soldiers held towards the Japanese in his book *Freedom from Fear: the American People in Depression*

¹⁴ Ford, Douglas Ford, *The Pacific War*, (London, England: Hambledon Continuum, 2011) 9.

¹⁵ Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

and War, 1929-1945, where he mentions one Marine's opinion of the Japanese on Guadalcanal. The Marine stated, "I wish we were fighting against Germans, they are like human beings, like us. . . but the Japanese are like animals."¹⁶

Views of Japanese people bearing an animalistic resemblance such as this one were not isolated incidents, but widely held beliefs among the larger population.¹⁷

These types of dehumanization tactics made it possible for those soldiers serving in the Pacific theater to see their adversaries not as humans, but rather animals who did not deserve humane treatment. This is further exemplified in the derogatory language Marines used in describing the Japanese. Comparisons to rats, lice, and monkeys were common amongst Marines who fought against the Japanese. Historian Gerald Linderman mentions how some Marines referred to the Japanese as "Japes, which is a combination of 'Jap' and 'ape.'"¹⁸

Prior to the Second World War, anti-Asian sentiment festered throughout America. With the influx of Asian immigrants, many believed that their presence would compete for American-deserved jobs, thereby "undercutting [the] tenets of economic citizenship." In addition, Americans believed the Asian immigrants to

¹⁶ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: the American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 561.

¹⁷ Gerald F. Linderman, *The World within War: Americas Combat Experience in World War II*, (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 168-73.

¹⁸ Linderman, *The World within War*, 169.

be inassimilable, and therefore a threat to the American way of life. With this inability to assimilate, many people along with the press deemed Asians barely human and spoke of them as if they were an infestation of vermin. Propaganda on the home front exacerbated these animalistic comparisons. The United States War Department promoted propaganda riddled with animalistic depictions of the Japanese. War posters, such as figure 1, depicting the Japanese as rats, were common throughout the United States during the war.

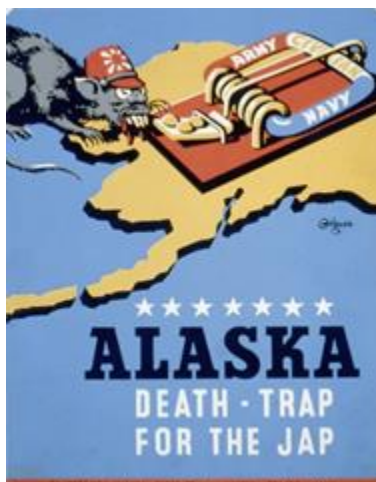


Figure 1. An example of dehumanization tactics used in propaganda when referencing Japanese. (“When Art Meets Army: The Dangerous Propaganda of World War II.” Ohio History Connection, June 8, 2017. <https://www.ohiohistory.org/learn/collections/history/history-blog/2017/august-2017/ralphwilliams>).

This specific poster alludes to the Japanese attempt to invade the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. Using a rat with large buck teeth to represent the Japanese, the propaganda shows the American military ready to exterminate the vermin.

Another example of a propaganda poster utilizing dehumanization tactics to depict the Japanese is figure 2.



Figure 2. An example of dehumanization tactics used in propaganda when referencing Japanese. (This is the Enemy. Maximum Advantage in Pictures: Propaganda as Art and History, March 2, 2010. <http://chumpfish3.blogspot.com/2010/03/this-is-enemy.html>. Accessed October 23, 2020).

In this poster, the Japanese are represented by a large ape with a knife and sharp claws. The ape is attacking an innocent woman, exacerbating the idea that the Japanese were murderous beasts putting American women and children in danger.

This type of racialized propaganda went beyond flashy posters. Items ranging from placemats (see figure 3) to matchbooks depicted the Japanese in a racially charged way. Such was the case at a joint council of teamsters meeting,

where the guests in attendance utilized paper placemats instead of the usual linen tablecloths. The idea behind this was that due to the war with the Axis powers, the resulting rationing in the U.S limited their ability to use tablecloths. Therefore, if it weren't for the Axis powers, Americans could be living their lives normally. While this is a brief look at how rationing was affecting the American people, the more important note regarding the placemats is how the enemy is depicted. The depictions of the Japanese on the placemat showcase the common racist characteristics that were often associated with the Japanese - buck teeth and poor eyesight. Also, it is important to note that the depiction does not target a specific leader of Japan, rather it attempts to showcase how Americans viewed all Japanese people as a whole.

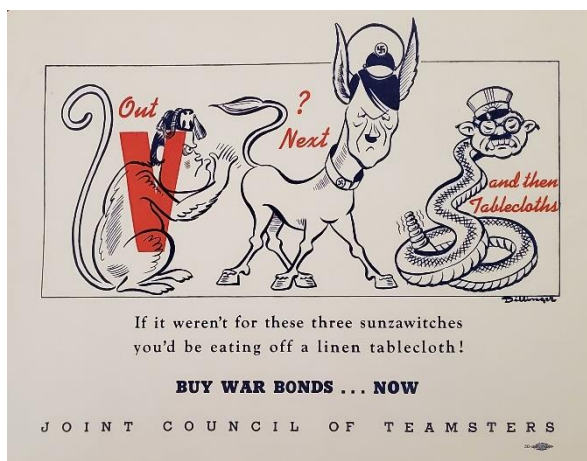


Figure 3. An example of a placemat depicting the enemies of the United States in WWII. (Lawrence Dahl, *Placemat*, (Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, n.d)).

Similar to the placemats, matchbooks were another everyday item transformed into a tool of propaganda (see figure 4). These matchbooks often depicted the enemy leaders, but in the case of the Japanese it more often than not showcased an ordinary Japanese person. In the illustration, the generic Japanese person depicted has large teeth, slanted eyes, and comically large glasses emphasizing the stereotype that Japanese people have poor eyesight.



Figure 4. An example of a matchbook with a racialized depiction of a Japanese person. (Lawrence Dahl, *Matchbook*, (Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, n.d)).

In addition to the propaganda posters and paper documents, popular music also played a role in dehumanizing the Japanese. For example, songs such as “Oh, You Little Son of an Oriental”, and “We’re Gonna Find a Fellow Who is Yellow and Beat Him Red, White, and Blue” were popular in the United

States, for they expressed the American people's resentment of the Japanese.¹⁹ The racism directed at the Japanese people was so normalized that it became a part of American mainstream media consumption. This normalcy went so far that racist propaganda could be depicted in children's cartoons with no one batting an eye. Often these cartoons were created in order to be distributed amongst the general public; most of the material was promoted as family-oriented and Americans were encouraged to view the cartoons with their families, thus, helping the government reach a more diverse segment of the population. Since the creators focused on reaching as many Americans as possible, the cartoons were often comical and easy to understand. One cartoon, a Looney Tunes episode titled "Tokio Jokio," effectively conveys the intended demeaning portrayal of the Japanese by focusing on negative characteristics of the Japanese people during the Second World War.²⁰ This cartoon was designed for the sole purpose of being distributed to the everyday American citizen and their families. In this cartoon, the Japanese people are depicted based on the racial stereotypes that developed in the United States prior to the onset of World War II; these stereotypes included portraying the Japanese as being round-faced with

¹⁹ Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch, *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II*, (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²⁰ Don Christensen, "Tokio Jokio" (animated cartoon), directed by Norman McCabe, release date May 15, 1943, accessed September 20, 2016, <https://ia800808.us.archive.org/16/items/ClassicRareAndCensoredCartoons/051543TokioJokioLt.mp4>.

large ears and teeth that protruded from their faces. In this cartoon, the director focuses on the large teeth stereotype through comical means; the director had the teeth fall off of a character's face because the character was unable to exit the frame before the exit screen closed around his head. Another method propagandist employed to portray Japanese people as inferior to Americans was over-accentuating the problems that Japanese people had when attempting to speak English. For example, directors created characters that were unable to pronounce the letters "R" and "L," thus highlighting an over-exaggerated accent that many Americans believed the Japanese acquired when learning to speak English.

Another cartoon that focuses on the Japanese was an episode in the television series *Private Snafu*. In contrast to the cartoon "Tokio Jokio," this episode in the *Private Snafu* shows the Japanese people as being anatomically correct, however, it continues to humiliate the Japanese people by focusing on their extremely short stature while also promoting the idea that they are stupid or clueless. In "Private Snafu," the Japanese are incapable of seeing through Private Snafu's poorly designed disguise, which allows him to gain the upper hand and succeed with his mission.²¹ Ultimately, the portrayal of the Japanese as

²¹ Theodore Geisel, P. D. Eastman, and Munro Leaf, "Private Snafu" (propaganda cartoons), directed by Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, Bob Clampett, Frank Tashlin, Osmond Evans, Zack Schwartz, Hugh Harman, posted 1943-1946, accessed September 30, 2016, <https://archive.org/search.php?query=private%20snafu%20AND%20mediatype%3Amovies>.

both clueless and short demonstrates the growing belief that the Japanese were an inferior race.

When it came to the portrayal of our enemies during the Second World War, the propaganda campaigns purposefully depicted an everyday German and Nazi differently, but the propaganda regarding Japan failed to make any distinction between a good Japanese person and a nefarious Japanese citizen.²² The majority of Americans were Anti-Hitler rather than Anti-German as demonstrated by a 1939 Fortune poll that asked “which of these statements comes closest to your own idea of Germany?” The options provided ranged from kind statements describing Germans as peaceful but unfortunately misled by ruthless leaders, to critical statements describing Germans as a menace to world peace; sixty-six percent of respondents believed that the German population had simply been led astray.²³ Most non-Asian Anglo-Americans had ties to Europe especially because many were first- or second-generation Americans from countries such as Germany, Italy, and England. These roots made turning against other Europeans or European-Americans difficult whereas the majority’s lack of ties to Asia facilitated the growth of opposition towards those of Asian

²² John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy*, Pg. 34.

²³ Fortune (December 1939), pp118-20, attached to Yorke to Early, November 21, 1939, OF 3618, FDLR.

descent. Once again, an interview conducted by Studs Terkel underscores the national struggle to humanize and relate to the Japanese during the war. In this interview following World War II, Paul Pisicano, a fifty-two-year-old full-blooded Sicilian, reflects on the atmosphere of the United States during the war and discusses his struggle to hate the Italians as much as he hated Hitler and the Japanese. Essentially, his decision to target his hatred at Hitler rather than the Germans, as well as his inability to reject his fellow Italian countrymen demonstrates the difficulty most Americans had with ignoring their familial roots. A further representation of this discrepancy in views of the Axis powers is Pisicano's decision to attribute his hatred towards the entire Japanese population rather than the leader of Japan.²⁴

On top of the American public's opinion about Hitler's manipulation of the German people, President Franklin D. Roosevelt further emphasized this belief during a private discussion in which he stated that it was imperative that the United States "make a distinction between the Nazi gang and the German people."²⁵ It is important to highlight Roosevelt's willingness to concede to the widely held belief that there was a definitive difference between the German government and its people as well as the notion that there was no such

²⁴ Studs Terkel, *The Good War*, pg. 139

²⁵ Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pg. 58-9.

distinction between the Japanese government and its citizens. Franklin D. Roosevelt's decision to fuel the public opinion further promoted the United States' war agenda by appeasing and appealing to the general public; essentially, it was easier to appeal to the public's convictions rather than change those convictions when seeking to further the wartime efforts. In order to garner support and maintain this support, the propaganda campaigns were developed to appeal to this widely accepted idea that Hitler and the Nazis manipulated the general German population.

This distinction presents itself clearly in wartime propaganda. Often, while propaganda made no distinction between Japanese citizens and Japanese leadership, it did so with propaganda concerning the Germans and Italians. Douglas Ford touches on this idea in *The Pacific War*, arguing that in political cartoons, "faces of national leaders such as Hitler or Mussolini appeared most frequently, thereby suggesting that the fight was against the dictatorships of enemy nations, rather than the people. However, posters depicting the Japanese invariably included caricatures of the masses, where they embodied a number of stereotyped features, including short stature, rimmed glasses, and facial expressions which suggested an ignorance of the outside world."²⁶ Arguments such as these are exemplified in numerous propaganda ads the War Department

²⁶ Ford, *The Pacific War*, 183.

distributed during the war. While the previous cartoons discussed focused on the Japanese while only hinting at the Germans, the cartoon titled “Der Fuehrer's Face” focuses more on the Germans during the Second World War. In this cartoon, which featured the famous Looney Tunes character Donald Duck, the German army is depicted as buffoon-like, forceful, and ruthless as they force the beloved character to work tirelessly on the German assembly line. Besides these main characters who personify the German high command, the other German characters are portrayed as being forced to work for the German leaders against their will. This furthers the belief that, in general, the German people were not nefarious but, rather, were manipulated and controlled by their leaders who made them commit atrocities in the name of the Fuhrer. Even in cartoons that focused on the German enemy, propagandists would include Japanese characters that almost always adhered to the racial stereotypes. In “Der Fuehrer's Face” the character that is meant to portray a Japanese person is unlike the other characters in that he is portrayed as a big-eared, buck-tooth yellow-green misfit.²⁷

This distinction between everyday Germans and their leaders can also be seen in propaganda presented in everyday objects. The “Step on it” (see figure

²⁷ Joe Grant and Dick Huemer, “Der Fuehrer's Face” (animated cartoon), directed by Jack Kinney, release date January 1, 1943, accessed September 27, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzH1iaKVsBM>

5) and “Speed Up” (see figure 6) matchbook propaganda depicts the Axis powers, clearly illustrating Hitler and Mussolini as the leaders. The Japanese person depicted alongside them, however, is not Emperor Hirohito. Rather, it is just some generic caricature, based upon racial stereotypes of a Japanese person. These types of depictions are common throughout propaganda from this time. The depictions of Hitler and Mussolini are found on many anti-Axis propaganda pieces, whereas when these propaganda pieces reference the Japanese, they rarely, if ever, depict the Emperor. Rather these pieces utilize the stereotypes of the day to depict a caricature of Japanese people as a whole.

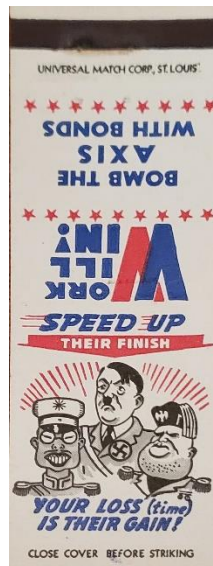


Figure 5 and 6. Examples of propaganda depicting German and Italian leaders, but not the Japanese leader. (Lawrence Dahl, *Speed up* and *Step on it Matchbooks*, (Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, n.d)).

Even though the United States depicted the leaders of Germany and Italy in negative ways, the United States' belief in freedom of religion served as a

partial reason for not attacking the Japanese Emperor because he was seen as a deity. Since those of Japanese descent saw the Emperor of Japan as a deity, the propaganda could not contradict the right to freedom of religion laid out in the Bill of Rights. Therefore, any propaganda that subjected Emperor Hirohito to abuse would be seen as blasphemous and contradictory to the democratic values that defined the United States.²⁸ This fact, coupled with the American tendency to generalize the Asian people, at least partially explains why there wasn't a separation between Japanese leaders and the Japanese people. Developers of the propaganda campaigns ultimately gave all Japanese people the same characteristics regardless of their views of the war or their participation in it. In propaganda pertaining to the Japanese, all Japanese people were depicted with yellow round faces, bucked teeth, large ears and even ape-like features; German-specific propaganda, on the other hand, consisted of characters with Hitler's likeness, as well as other top Nazi officials' likenesses. This distinction in propaganda, in regards to who was seen as the enemy, was further exacerbated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's refusal to "launch a hate campaign against the German nation. Instead, in the first six months of 1943, he continued to use the terms 'Nazi' and 'Hitler' to characterize" the European enemy.²⁹ The President's decision to refrain from initiating a hate-filled campaign against the

²⁸ Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy*, page 322.

²⁹ Casey, Steven, *Cautious Crusade*, pg. 146.

entire German population was a continuation of his earlier decision to uphold the publicly held distinction between the German people and the German government. Ultimately, the way in which the War Department depicted the Japanese people found its basis in the racial stereotypes of the time, whereas there were no such racialized depictions regarding the Germans. With the proliferation of these racist propaganda pieces, the American soldiers could easily justify the atrocities they committed because the Japanese were degraded to a subhuman status.

These offensive depictions fueled the racial disdain for the Japanese felt throughout the country. Due to such negative feelings towards the Japanese, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was easily able to pass Executive Order 9066, which allowed for the internment of Japanese people in the United States.³⁰ Mostly concentrated on the West Coast, thousands of Japanese were forced to relocate to internment camps, in response to the fear that they would commit terrorist acts. One first-hand account of the forced internment of the Japanese is Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's ground breaking book *Farewell to Manzanar*. In her book, she describes what it was like for her family inside the Manzanar Internment camp, and the events that led to their internment. Houston explains

³⁰ Executive Order 9066, February 19, 1942, General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11, National Archives. <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=74>

that “tolerance had turned to distrust and irrational fear. The hundred-year-old tradition of anti-Asian sentiment on the West Coast soon resurfaced, more vicious than ever.”³¹ This relocation was an order born out of racial disdain more than it was out of military need. Despite the fact that Germans and Italians were also enemies of the United States, there was no large-scale internment for those groups as there were for the Japanese.³² This further demonstrates the fact that Americans favored the Germans and Italians over the Japanese due to racial disdain, and that disdain presented itself through both American propaganda and law.

This racial disdain soon found its way onto the battlefield, in which U.S soldiers committed barbaric atrocities towards the Japanese in the form of trophy hunting, but not towards the Germans. Propaganda is a powerful tool, and the racialized nature influenced American servicemen into believing the Japanese were a subhuman race worthy of extermination. This exterminist ideology did not apply to the Germans or Italians, further exemplifying the role race played in the motives of American actions. Ultimately, the exacerbated racialization of the

³¹ Jeanne Wakasuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin 2002) 15.

³² Michael Bess, *Choices under Fire: Moral Dimensions of World War II*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf 2006) 36.

Japanese culminated in American servicemen mutilating and taking Japanese body parts as trophies of war.

CHAPTER III LOOTING ON THE BATTLEFIELDS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Looting in The Pacific Theater

The Second World War involved two distinct theaters of combat; the European theater, associated with the Germans and Italians, and the Pacific Theater, associated with the Japanese. These two theaters of combat experienced some of the most ferocious fighting. The Pacific Theater, however, experienced a level of brutality on another level compared to the American experience in the European Theater. Gerald Linderman depicts this brutality in his book *The World Within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II*, in which he makes a distinction between the two theaters by declaring that fighting the Germans was a "war of rules", whereas fighting the Japanese was "war unrestricted."¹

The unrestricted nature of the war in the Pacific is defined by the brutal acts which took place at the hands of the Japanese and the Americans. In the February 1946 edition of *the Atlantic Monthly*, Edgar L. Jones exemplified the American brutality towards the Japanese when he wrote, "We shot prisoners in cold blood, wiped out hospitals, strafed lifeboats, killed or mistreated enemy civilians, finished off the enemy wounded, tossed the dying into a hole with the

¹ Gerald F Linderman, *The World within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II*, (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

dead.”² The American media did not often report on these atrocities committed by Americans during the war. Such reports dispel the idea that the Americans were the good guys. However, the media always found a way to report on the atrocities carried out by the Japanese, and in doing so they fueled the idea that “the enemy committed all the visible atrocities.”³ The acts of barbarity the media often reported were almost always carried out by the Japanese forces in the Pacific. Samuel Grashio, an American airman, stated in his memoir that it was “commonplace to find the bodies of one’s comrades tightly bound, obviously tortured, disemboweled, with their severed genitals stuffed in their mouths.”⁴ With the reporting of these heinous acts partaken by the Japanese, the American public became even angrier, heightening their responsive brutality towards the Japanese.

This brutality was a direct result of the years of Anti-Asian sentiment that festered in America, further exacerbated by the heavily racialized propaganda that influenced American soldiers into dealing with the Japanese the way one would deal with an infestation. These racialized beliefs allowed Americans to rationalize their brutal tactics in dealing with the Japanese, even going so far as

² Edgar L. Jones, “One War Is Enough,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1946.

³ Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch, *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II*, (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 51.

⁴ Samuel C. Grashio, *Return to Freedom*, (MCN Press, 1982), 19.

to justify their taking of human remains as trophies. This act is not evident in the European Theater, which further highlights the racial motivation behind the desecration of Japanese dead. These offensive beliefs had been stoked by years of racialized anti-Japanese sentiment and propaganda spread by the United States government.

While the practice of human trophy taking was evident in the Pacific Theater, it was not the only type of looting that occurred. Throughout the war, soldiers fighting in the Pacific theater collected standard field gear much like the looting in the European theater. Eugene Sledge describes this looting of field gear as “methodical,” going on to say that “helmet headbands were checked for flags, packs and pockets were emptied. . . Sabers, pistols, and *hari-kari* knives were highly prized.”⁵ These items would either be sent back home to loved ones or sold to soldiers who were behind the lines and not able to acquire them by themselves. This not only influenced soldiers to acquire items for their own collections, but also to acquire them for a substantial amount of money, depending on how much they collect. As a result, soldiers were more willing to loot the deceased soldiers. Robert Leckie described another occasion of methodical looting in which he observed the looters “prowling among them, carefully ripping insignia off

⁵ Eugene Sledge, *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa*, (New York, NY: Presidio Press, 2007), 118.

tunics, slipping rings off fingers or pistols off belts.”⁶ He himself participated in the looting and later wrote about a Japanese chest that he acquired and brought home.⁷

Trophy hunting is one way in which the American soldier carried out retribution on the Japanese while also fulfilling their desire for souvenirs. Soldiers collected items that they could send home as mementos of their time serving in the war. In doing so, they often took items categorized as field gear, but in the Pacific Theater, soldiers took much more gruesome trophies. United States GIs were avid souvenir hunters during the Second World War; in the Pacific theater the GIs, in addition to field gear, collected “gold teeth, ears, bones, scalps, and skulls.”⁸ There are numerous accounts of soldiers either observing and/or taking part in this grisly trophy taking. In his memoir, *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa*, Eugene Sledge noted several instances of Marines extracting teeth from Japanese combatants. One extremely gruesome case described another Marine attempting to extract teeth from a living Japanese soldier. Sledge wrote that “the Japanese was kicking his feet and thrashing about, the knife point glanced off the tooth and sank deeply into the victim’s mouth. The Marine cursed him and with a slash cut his cheeks open to each ear.”⁹ Eventually another

⁶ Robert Leckie, *Helmet for My Pillow: From Parris Island to the Pacific*, (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2010), 232.

⁷ Leckie, *Helmet for My Pillow*, 247.

⁸ John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 64.

⁹ Sledge, *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa*, 120.

Marine shot the suffering Japanese soldier to end his misery. Not only did Eugene Sledge note how other marines extracted Japanese teeth, but he himself almost extracted gold teeth from a deceased Japanese soldier. However, unlike the previous Marine, a friend of Sledge's stopped him from carrying out this barbaric act, and instead he took a more common trophy: a piece of insignia from the soldier's uniform.¹⁰ Robert Leckie's memoir provides another example of this gruesome trophy, in which he described a fellow Marine, whom he nicknamed "souvenir," walking "methodically among the dead armed with a pair of pliers. . . he kept the gold teeth in an empty Bull Durham tobacco sack, which he wore around his neck in the manner of an amulet."¹¹ Marine Sterling Mace also recalled a soldier who kept gold caps from the Japanese teeth in a tobacco bag around his neck.¹² Cases such as these highlight the barbarity of the acts that American soldiers performed to acquire gold and other morbid trophies from deceased Japanese soldiers. While some soldiers sought the gold teeth for monetary gain, many simply sought them as keepsakes of their slain adversaries.

¹⁰ Sledge, *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa*, 123.

¹¹ Leckie, *Helmet for My Pillow*, 84-5.

¹² Adam Makos and Marcus Brotherton, *Voices of the Pacific: Untold Stories from the Marine Heroes of World War II*, (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2014), 181.

Unfortunately, teeth were not the worst item extracted from Japanese soldiers during the war. GI's in the Pacific Theater took items such as ears, bones, and heads from the Japanese. James Weingartner, a professor emeritus at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, wrote on how "U.S. Marines on their way to Guadalcanal relished the prospect of making necklaces of Japanese gold teeth and 'pickling' Japanese ears as keepsakes."¹³ John Dower also mentioned this in his book *War without Mercy*, wherein he mentions a *leatherneck* marine periodical article from 1943 that discussed a Marine who "emptied his pockets of 'souvenirs' -eleven ears from dead Japs."¹⁴ Numerous instances such as these support the idea that there was a fundamental willingness to accept the taking of ears as a frequent occurrence. John Dower further discusses these souvenirs in reference to America's likening of the Japanese to vermin, which resulted in the idea that the Japanese were something to be exterminated.¹⁵ These animalistic comparisons, fueled by a history of racism and racist propaganda, allowed Americans to justify their barbaric treatment of the Japanese. If the Japanese people were subhuman, they didn't require human rights. In fact, one marine on Guadalcanal expressed what many others believed about the subhuman status of the Japanese when he

¹³ James J. Weingartner, "Trophies of War: U.S. Troops and the Mutilation of Japanese War Dead, 1941-1945." *Pacific Historical Review* 61, (1992): 53-67, accessed November 18, 2019, doi:10.2307/3640788.

¹⁴ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 65.

¹⁵ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 53-54.

stated “I wish we were fighting against the Germans, they are human beings like us. . . but the Japanese are like animals.”¹⁶ This animalistic comparison was likely fueled by years of Anti-Asian sentiment and Anti-Japanese propaganda.

Though often not discussed, it is in fact well documented that Americans both collected and gifted Japanese remains as souvenirs. In 1944, President Roosevelt received a letter opener carved from the bone of a Japanese soldier from someone who deemed it a perfect gift. Despite Roosevelt’s previously stated anti-Japanese beliefs and policies, the President refused the item and requested it be given a proper burial.¹⁷ Weingartner discussed this presentation further by stating that the Japanese propaganda department received word of this grisly trophy and as a result, denounced the Americans as uncivilized and racist.¹⁸ Though the Japanese were not wrong in their accusation of American racism towards people of Asiatic descent, many American soldiers continued carrying out their barbaric mutilation of deceased Japanese soldiers. Eugene Sledge described of one of his buddies carrying around a hand of a Japanese soldier because he thought “a dried Japanese hand would be a more interesting souvenir than gold teeth.”¹⁹ Like previously discussed, marines often took gold

¹⁶ John Hersey, *Into the Valley: A Skirmish of the Marines*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 34.

¹⁷ “FDR Refuses Knife Made of Jap's Bone,” *The Daily Sentinel*, August 11, 1944.

¹⁸ Weingartner, “Trophies of War”

¹⁹ Sledge, *With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa*, 152.

teeth as souvenirs, but as it was a common item, this marine chose to take something more unique. The drive to acquire interesting and unique souvenirs would ultimately encourage soldiers fighting in the Pacific Theater to seek out Japanese skulls to keep as prized possessions.

There is extensive evidence that, throughout the course of the Second World War, United States soldiers not only decapitated Japanese dead, but also either boiled or left the head sitting out for ants to clean in order to keep the skull as a trophy.²⁰ Multiple photographs and reports document soldiers sending the skulls home to their loved ones as gifts. Though officials often suppressed these photos, some did manage to slip past censorship and into the American civilians' eyes.²¹ One of the most famous instances of this was in the *Life Magazine* picture of the week from May 22nd 1944 (see Figure 7). In this photograph, a woman is writing a thank you card to her boyfriend who sent her a Japanese skull as a gift.

²⁰ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 65-6.

²¹ Erenberg and Hirsch. *The War in American Culture*, 51.



Figure 7. Photograph of a woman thanking her boyfriend for sending a Japanese skull to her. (Life. Picture of the Week. May 22, 1944).

One would believe that a picture of a human skull would be deemed too graphic for an American audience, but as the Japanese were thought to be no better than animals, the practice wasn't much different than a hunter displaying the head of his game.

Photographs such as this exemplify the acceptance a portion of the United States population felt towards the taking of Japanese skulls. Though this photograph was one of the few to reach the broad population, there were countless others that did not. One such photograph that was not published in the United States showed the process needed to obtain the clean skull from the decapitated head (see figure 8). This process more often than not required the boiling of the skull so that the skin would fall off, thus revealing the clean skull.



Figure 8. Photograph of Soldiers boiling a Japanese Skull to remove the skin. (*Skull Stewing*, 1944. Photograph, *Wikipedia*, Archive, Accessed October 24, 2019. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pacific_war.jpg).

Upon completion of the deskinning process, the soldiers used the skulls as forms of grisly humor throughout the Pacific.

Americans serving in the Pacific sometimes used the skulls of Japanese soldiers as props. This grotesque humor is exemplified on the island of Tarawa, in which a posted sign reading “Tarawa Recruitin Office” featured a Japanese skull attached (see figure 9).



Figure 9. An example of grisly humor that utilized a Japanese skull. (Charles Kerlee, *Grim Humor on Tarawa*, Photograph, College Park, National Archives, Accessed October 30, 2019).

Another instance was the presence of Japanese skulls on a sign that reminded soldiers to take Atabrine, which was used to treat malaria (see figure 10).



Figure 10. An example of grisly humor that utilized two Japanese skulls. (“Malaria Prevention Sign”, Photograph, Flickr, Silver Spring: National Museum of Health and Medicine, November 21, 2006, Otis Historical Archives. Accessed October 26, 2019. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/medicalmuseum/302821131/in/photostream>).

In some instances, like on Peleliu, these signs reminded soldiers of the dangers of the battlefield (see figure 11).



Figure 11. An example of grisly humor that utilized a Japanese skull. (“Front Line Warning Sign Using a Japanese Soldier's Skull on Peleliu October 1944,” August 24, 2006. Photograph. *Wikipedia*).

In all of these cases, a Japanese skull is present as a way to convey information, and sometimes in a comical way.

In addition to these more public grisly humor displays, there is evidence of soldiers engaging in a one-on-one basis with the skulls. This is evident in the case of E. V. McPherson of Columbus, Ohio, who made it look like a Japanese skull was smoking a cigarette aboard his motor torpedo boat (see figure 12).

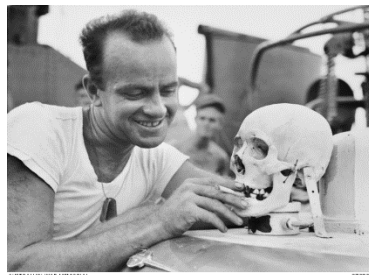


Figure 12. E. V. McPherson posing with a Japanese skull that served as his boat's mascot. ("*Smoking Japanese Skull*," Photograph, *Australian War Memorial*, Campbell, Australia, Australian War Memorial, Accessed October 30, 2019. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C64330>).

The Japanese skull itself served as a mascot aboard the vessel. Another instance in which soldiers found it humorous to make a Japanese skull smoke was when Richard Roy posed with Company G while holding a Smoking Japanese skull (see figure 13).



Figure 13. an example of men posing with Japanese skulls as if it were a normal thing to do. (Edward Gekosky, "*Men of Company G Hold a Skull, Smoking a Cigarette*," Photograph, *182nd Infantry*, Accessed October 30, 2019).

These photos highlight just a few cases in which soldiers in the Pacific found ways to utilize their Japanese trophy skulls in humorous ways. With such casual and comical interactions with the real human remains of the Japanese, the barbaric trophy taking practice became so normalized that it was almost a game. However, in fully understanding the scale on which this trophy hunting took place, it is important to note that the high command in the Pacific took note of the trophy taking. In doing so, they attempted to halt the efforts of the soldiers by implementing strict punishment for those caught engaging in such barbaric acts. Specifically, the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet ordered that “no part of the enemy’s body may be used as a souvenir. Unit Commanders will take stern disciplinary Actions.”²² Even with this restriction, the taking of skulls continued throughout the course of World War II. This is made evident by the sheer abundance of skulls taken during the war. In one instance alone, three soldiers posed with nine skulls (see figure 14).



Figure 14. An example of the pervasiveness of Japanese skulls being taken. (“9 Skulls,” Photograph, *World War 2 Gravestone*, Accessed October 30, 2019 <https://ww2gravestone.com/american-soldiers-gone-bad-ww2/>).

²² Samuel Cosman Papers, U.S. Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

Another instance is the appearance of two skulls on a jeep as hood ornaments (see figure 15).



Figure 15. An example of the pervasiveness of Japanese skulls being taken. (“2 Skulls on Jeep,” Photograph, *World War 2 Gravestone*, Accessed October 30, 2019. <https://ww2gravestone.com/american-soldiers-gone-bad-ww2/>).

Japanese skulls were so numerous in the Pacific that even pilots, who weren't known for being on the frontline in combat, possessed skulls (see figure 16).



Figure 16. An example of the pervasiveness of Japanese skulls being taken. (“American Pilots Resting with a Japanese Skull,” Photograph, *Rare Historical Photos*, <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/american-pilots-japanese-skull-1944/>).

The fact that these skulls were in the hands of people not even on the front lines demonstrates the pervasiveness of the skulls in the Pacific Theater.

When the skulls were photographed, they were not always stripped of their skin. One such instance was in the February 1st, 1943, edition of *Life Magazine* where a photograph of a decapitated burned Japanese head was placed on a tank (see figure 17).



Figure 17. An example of the brutality and the willingness to showcase Japanese decapitated heads to the public. Ralph Morse, ("Guadalcanal: Grassy Knoll Battle." *Life Magazine*, February 1, 1943).

The brutality that defined the Pacific Theater of the Second World War allowed for this depraved scene to not only happen, but to be photographed and printed in a national magazine. In normal situations, a decapitated head would be quite a taboo thing to display on a national magazine. If a German or Italian head was displayed similarly, there likely would have been more backlash. Americans saw the European Theater as enemies, but not animals. Since Americans did view the Japanese as animals, a picture of a Japanese head wasn't much more shocking than a picture of the head of a deer.

While the media published this photograph, there were numerous others that were kept in private collections. This is the case with a photograph that belonged to Earnie Potts that is now in my personal collection. The photograph depicts Sir Jacob

Vouza holding the decapitated head of a Japanese soldier. There are several versions of this photograph, all from various angles and croppings (see figures 18, 19, 20).



Figure 18, 19, 20. Examples of various versions of a photograph depicting Sir Jacob Vouza with the Severed head of a Japanese soldier. (“Sir Jacob Vouza With Severed Head,” Photograph, Mt. Juliet, n.d. Personal Collection.; Hubert William Rader, “Photo Jacob Vouza Holding the Severed Head of a Japanese Soldier,” Date Unknown, WW2DB, December 7, 2006.

https://ww2db.com/image.php?image_id=1050.; “The War Through the Eyes of My Neighbor,” War Relics Forum, June 3, 2012, <http://www.warrelics.eu/forum/docs-paper-items-photos-propaganda/war-through-eyes-my-neighbor-153299-2/>).

The pervasiveness of this photograph highlights the interest and the acceptance Americans showed towards the mutilation of dead Japanese soldiers. This photograph may not have been originally taken by Earnie Potts, but he did acquire it at some point during the war. This photograph may have been a way to keep a trophy skull without actually possessing the skull. Similar to a mounted head of a deer on a wall, the picture taken with this fully intact head draws parallels to a hunter posing with his kill.

During the war, the local news would report about soldiers sending skulls back to his family. Often, these would not say negative things about the skulls, but rather say that the family was thankful for their son’s gifts. In the case of Air Cadet D. L. Packer,

the *Nevada State Journal* wrote that he “received a peculiar memento from his brother-in-law . . . the memento is a skull of a Japanese soldier.”²³ The fact that the newspaper referred to the skull as simply peculiar rather than gruesome demonstrates American’s general lack of disapproval towards the skulls. Another example depicting a skull proudly displayed was in the case of Police Captain Frank J. Reynolds. Reynolds suggested to his friend, before he deployed to the South Pacific, that he sends the head of the first Japanese he killed. His friend happily sent him back a skull, which Reynolds displayed with pride.²⁴ In addition to a relative acceptance of skulls as souvenirs, there is evidence that Americans held ear trophies in this same regard. Simon Harrison describes two examples of people either requesting their relatives to send them ears, or people being bribed with the promise of ears.²⁵ The idea that the ears of Japanese soldiers were so prized that people actually requested them exemplifies not only the approval of the practice of mutilation, but also that people cherished the items if and when they were sent back home. Countless newspapers reported on soldiers sending home skulls and other Japanese body parts to their friends and family.²⁶

²³ “Skull Souvenir.” *Nevada State Journal*. May 4, 1943.

²⁴ “Beached Jap Skull Mailed as Souvenir.” *The Franklin Evening Star*, February 8, 1944.

²⁵ Harrison, “Skull Trophies of the Pacific War,” 824.

²⁶ “Former Prairie Sailor Sends Jap Souvenirs to Parents From Pacific,” *The La Crosse Tribune*, April 16, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; “Around the Town,” *The Anniston Star*, June 21, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; “Souvenir,” *The Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed March 5, 2020).; Gene Wirth, “Jackson Marine Sergeant Returns From Guadalcanal with

The savagery that often described the Pacific Theater of conflict is perfectly exemplified through the various ways in which the United States soldiers methodically mutilated the Japanese dead as a means of acquiring war trophies. These barbaric acts of mutilation for the purpose of trophy taking were not evident in the European theater,

String of Jap Teeth," *Clarion-Ledger*, August 25, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed March 4, 2020).; "In the Service Cloverdale," *Cloverdale Reveille*, August 10, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; Louis Sobol, "New York Cavalcade," *The Evening News*, October 1, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; "Tampa Vet of 27 Months' Naval Action Home on Visit," *The Tampa Times*, February 10, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; "Jap Battle Souvenirs Are on Display Here," *Sioux City Journal*, March 23, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; "Trimmed Christmas Tree with Jap Skull," *Greenville Daily Advocate*, January 4, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; "Boro GI Makes Good on Souvenir Promise- Sends Dad Jap Skull," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 22, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 22, 1944).; "Sailor and Jap," *Daily News*, June 9, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; "Riddle Solves Riddle of Jap Machinegun," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 31, 1945, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; Marion McEniry, "Reminder of a War Hard Won--- Gear of Lost Men is Sent to Families," *The San Francisco Examiner*, August 16, 1945, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).; "Skull of Jap Sent by Seabee to Pal," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 17, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed June 22, 2020).; "Floyd Williamson Describes Sea Battle in the Pacific," *Nashville Journal*, July 22, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed June 22, 2020).; "Marine Swaps Jap Skull for Auto," *The Leaf-Chronicle*, September 25, 1945, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed June 22, 2020).; "Jap Skull on Display," *The Bennington Evening Banner*, January 29, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed March 5, 2020).; "Necklace of Matched Jap Teeth Sent Home by Marine," *The Austin Statesman*, August 19, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed March 5, 2020).; "Navy Baker on Guadalcanal Visiting Parents at Lennox," *Argus-Leader*, September 20, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed March 5, 2020).; "Bracelet of Jap Teeth," *The Star Press*, September 10, 1944, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed March 5, 2020).; "Ross Hits U.S. Sporting Cane Adorned with Jap Teeth," *Rutland Daily Herald*, February 26, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed March 5, 2020).

but the soldiers fighting there did take part in the looting of enemy field equipment. Based on substantial evidence, the act of trophy hunting is far more prevalent than scholars have previously discussed. Furthermore, racial motivation plays a significant role in the types of trophy hunting American soldiers took part in.

Looting in The European Theater

Though there is little to no evidence of the taking of skulls in the European Theater, the United States soldiers fighting there did take part in wide scale looting of the enemy's belongings. These belongings, however, were all material items such as pieces of uniforms, helmets, and medals. This is a stark difference from the human remains American took from the Japanese in the Pacific Theater. Propaganda directed towards the European Theater did not depict the Germans and Italians as animals; rather, it usually depicted caricatures of their leaders, exemplifying how Americans saw the common German and Italian person as a victim lead astray. Consequently, Americans treated German and Italian soldiers in a much more civil fashion, and chose to loot equipment rather than human remains. This is exemplified by famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle, who stated in the *Wisconsin State Journal* that "German's fight for glory, their cities and their homes, and the Americans fight for souvenirs."²⁷ The souvenir hunting that the American forces took part in did have risks if they were captured,

²⁷ Ernie Pyle, "Germans Fight for Glory; Americans Fight for Souvenirs." *Wisconsin State Journal*. December 24, 1943, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed March 5, 2020).

such as being executed by their captors.²⁸ Nevertheless, as the war was coming to an end, this bothered soldiers little and they looted their way through Axis territory.

The American soldiers didn't just fight their way through Europe, but they also looted their way through it and the upper command permitted it. Some units, such as the 28th infantry division, took looting further than others. As one of the first units to return to the U.S after the war, the 28th infantry brought with them roughly 20,000 weapons for just their 5,000 men.²⁹ With this being only one of the many divisions stationed in Europe, it can be said that there was a large number of items looted from the European Theater. A vast number of soldiers brought back trophies of war and would later tell of their items in memoirs of their experiences. One such case was David Webster, a paratrooper during the Second World War. Webster wrote that he looted "a Luger, two P-38s (similar to Lugers), a Schmeisser machine pistol, two jump smocks, one camouflaged winter jacket, several flags about three feet by two, and a watch."³⁰ With one soldier taking such a large sum of loot, it can be deduced that looting was partaken on a grand scale in Europe. Also, his wide range of items exemplifies

²⁸ Linderman, *The World within War*, 109.

²⁹ Earl F. Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany, 1944-1946*. Washington D.C.: Office of Military History, 1975, 329.

³⁰ David Kenyon Webster, *Parachute Infantry: An American Paratrooper's Memoir of D-Day and the Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2008), 436-437.

the various types of field gear soldiers attempted to acquire throughout the war. One of the more easily accessible items that soldiers could take home as a memento of their time fighting in Europe were Nazi flags. This is illustrated in the numerous photos and articles mentioning or depicting GIs with the captured flags (see figures 21, 22, 23).³¹



Figure 21, 22, 23. Examples of soldiers with captured Nazi flags. (Joseph O'Brien, "How Prevalent Was Looting by US Troops During WWII?" WAR HISTORY ONLINE, January 7, 2019. <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/instant-articles/who-looting-and-us-troops.html>.; "Nazi Flag GI." Gettysburg Museum of History, July 10, 2018. <https://www.gettysburgmuseumofhistory.com/nazi-flag-gi-3/>.; "World War II Soldiers with Captured Nazi Flag." Harry S. Truman Library. Accessed November 13, 2019. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/photograph-records/72-3951>).

The looting that occurred in Europe was not restricted to enlisted men; in fact, high-ranking officers often led by example. The officers were able to do this because they often held the nicest homes when they occupied cities, and

³¹ "Soldier Sons Send Mother Nazi Flags Captured When 36th Battled at Salerno." *Corsicana Semi-Weekly Light*, January 14, 1944, newspapers.com, accessed September 20, 2019.

therefore had access to better items worth looting.³² Historian Seth Givens claimed that due to the officers ability to send home uncensored mail, they were able to send home the items without them being confiscated.³³ With this example set by the officers in regards to looting high end items and not solely field gear, the average GI was better able to justify their additional looting of non-field gear items.

Unlike the soldiers in the Pacific theater, the enlisted men fighting in Europe did not take human trophies. Instead, they looted the civilian population. Items such as cameras were in high demand due to their value on the resale market.³⁴ However, a more direct route for the GIs serving in Europe to gain wealth was through robbing safes throughout Europe. Unfortunately for them, the money often acquired through looting safes were worthless Weimar-era Reichsmarks.³⁵ Seth A. Givens lays out four reasons as to why soldiers in the European theater looted. Givens stated that “apart from stealing for necessity, profit, and keepsakes, ransacking and plundering abandoned homes became the GI’s way to punish faceless Germans in *absentia*.”³⁶ This plundering of the

³² Seth A. Givens, “Bringing Back Memories: GIs, Souvenir Hunting, and Looting in Germany, 1945”, (Ohio University, 2010), 75.

³³ Ibid., 75.

³⁴ Ibid., 62.

³⁵ Ibid., 68.

³⁶ Seth A. Givens, “Liberating the Germans: The US Army and Looting in Germany during the Second World War,” *War in History* 21, no.1, (2014), 33.

homes culminated in the acquisition of items not normally taken on the battlefield. Often, soldiers looted the cellars of homes and came away with priceless pieces of art stored there during the war. The German museums had sent their art to the countryside so that they would not be destroyed in one of the many allied bombing raids.³⁷ These various items brought back from Europe after the war were prime examples of the types of loot not directly associated with the field gear of a common soldier. Based on this information, it is evident that though the American forces in Europe did not only loot field gear, they did not stoop to the barbaric levels of the looting found in the Pacific. While stealing valuable items like this is not a laudable act, it carries nowhere near the inhumanity of the looting of human remains that occurred in the Pacific theater. In John Dower's *War Without Mercy*, he further highlights the distinction between the types of looting that occurred in the Pacific and European theaters, stating that "it is virtually inconceivable, however, that teeth, ears, and skulls could have been collected from German or Italian war dead and publicized in the Anglo-American countries without provoking an uproar; and in this we have yet another inkling of the racial dimensions of the war."³⁸ While Germans and Italians were still viewed as enemies, they were nevertheless human enemies and treated as such. With

<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.26098365&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

³⁷ Givens, "Bringing Back Memories", 70.

³⁸ Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 66.

the Japanese, they were instead a vermin that deserved to be exterminated in whatever method Americans deemed fit.

The Lasting Effect of Looted Items

The items looted throughout the war have lasting effects on the world today through both personal and institutional ways. Museums and archives throughout the U.S have displayed items looted during the war from both theaters. One such example is that of a rare German wound badge brought back by Larry Hirschbach. The Germans made this rare German wound badge in honor of the failed attempt on Adolf Hitler's life and is now a prized possession of the National WWII Museum.³⁹ Other museums rely heavily on these looted items being donated to them to sustain their collections. One such example is the Gettysburg Museum of History. This museum actively looks for new artifacts to be donated so they can update their collection.⁴⁰ Though these collections of field gear looted during the war are not negative, many hold negative views towards some of the items that are in institutions in the United States.

³⁹ Larry Decuers, "Looting the Reich: German Wound Badge." The National WWII Museum | New Orleans. The National World War II Museum, August 17, 2017. <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/looting-reich-german-wound-badge>.

⁴⁰ "Selling, Donating, Loaning Your Piece of History to the Museum." Gettysburg Museum of History. Accessed November 13, 2019. <https://www.gettysburgmuseumofhistory.com/buying-donating-loaning-to-the-museum/>.

The Japanese skulls brought back during the war from Saipan are held at the University of California Berkeley and are reportedly in violation of the Geneva Conventions for the protection of war victims.⁴¹ As a result, many have called for the university to return these items to Japan so that they can be given a proper burial. Dr. Max E. Childress originally brought these skulls back in 1945.⁴² Though he brought them over 70 years ago, they still spark controversy over whether they should be kept for research or buried for ethical reasons. In 2009, many called for not only the return of the bones to the Japanese government, but also for the university to issue an apology for keeping the remains and using them for scientific research.⁴³ The UC Berkeley collection includes bones from all across the world, including Native American remains.⁴⁴ The dilemma that the university faces between returning these items or keeping them for research purposes is a problem faced by many institutions. Where does one draw the line between ethics and research?

Another place where these skulls are found in recent times is in the personal collections of World War II veterans. More often than not, the items

⁴¹ Jim Doyle, "Japanese War Dead Skulls from Saipan at UC Museum: Calls for Return of the Remains." *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, no. 37, (2009). <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edo&AN=44276004&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Doyle, "Japanese War Dead Skulls from Saipan at UC Museum"

⁴⁴ Ibid.

come to the forefront as the veterans die and their families begin to go through their belongings. Sometimes families turn these items over to the police, but in the case of the skull found in Pueblo, Colorado, the family demanded to keep it. The skull was a family heirloom in their eyes, and as a result they believed it should be kept by the family.⁴⁵ However, this is not always the case. More often than not, the families that discover the skulls do not want them and attempt to return them to Japanese officials. This is evident in a case in Maine where a family discovered a skull in a deceased veteran's belongings. The family gave the skull to forensic anthropologists to be analyzed and returned to Japan.⁴⁶ In other cases, people bring the skulls to universities, or stuff them in shoe boxes and place them in trash containers or lakes so that the ownership cannot be traced.⁴⁷ While these Japanese skulls are often seen as burdens to the veterans and families in today's society, an eager market collects the traditional field gear acquired in both Europe and the Pacific.

The field gear collected by soldiers during the Second World War are found in museums as well as bought and sold on the open market for collectors to acquire for private collections. These private collections contain artifacts of

⁴⁵ Harrison, "Skull Trophies of the Pacific War", 817-8.

⁴⁶ Nok- Noi Ricker, "'Trophy Skulls' Turning up as Veterans Die," *Bangor Daily News*, October 6, 2010.

⁴⁷ "Trophy Skulls Now a Burden to Veterans," *The Tampa Tribune*, October 6, 1988, <https://www.newspapers.com> (accessed July 2, 2020).

various nature that can be later donated to museums for exhibits or kept for private enjoyment. Numerous militaria shows occur throughout the country where dealers and collectors get together to buy, sell, and trade the various items that they either own or want to own. One such organization that hosts several shows around the country is the Ohio Valley Military Society. The society states that their primary endeavor is to “promote the study and collecting of historic military artifacts.”⁴⁸ In addition to these shows, there are numerous websites where collectors can buy these items that were brought back during and after the war by those who fought.⁴⁹ Items such as helmets, bayonets, belts, and medals are all field gear items found in private collections (see figure 24-28).⁵⁰

⁴⁸ “About OVMS.” Ohio Valley Military Society. Accessed November 13, 2019. <http://www.sosovms.com/About-OVMS/>.

⁴⁹ “A Collector's Guild.” Accessed November 13, 2019. <https://www.germanmilitaria.com/>; “The Ruptured Duck - Original WW2 German and US Militaria for Sale.” The Ruptured Duck, LLC. Accessed November 13, 2019. <https://therupturedduck.com/>.

⁵⁰ Lawrence Dahl, *Assorted Field Gear*, Photograph, (Mt. Juliet, Tennessee: n.d).



Figures 24-28. Examples of looted items found in private collections. (Lawrence Dahl, "Assorted Field Gear," Photograph, (Mt. Juliet, Tennessee: n.d)).

Ultimately, there was a stark difference in the looting that occurred during the Second World War depending upon the theater of conflict. This was largely due to the racialized nature of the conflict in the Pacific Theater, where American soldiers believed they were fighting a subhuman race that did not deserve humane treatment. As a result, they were able to justify the mutilation and taking of Japanese human remains as souvenirs. This barbaric form of souvenir hunting was not prevalent in the European Theater, where Americans believed they were fighting a racially equal people. Propaganda played a critical role in fueling these racial and ideological beliefs that the Japanese were unforgivably different and therefore undeserving of respectable treatment.

Conclusion

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the United States directed its anti-Asian sentiment towards an enemy of the nation. This racist ideology, bolstered by heavily racialized propaganda, presented itself through the brutal

treatment of Japanese living and dead during the Second World War. The mutilation of dead soldiers was a barbaric act found mainly in the Pacific Theater of conflict. The human trophy remains taken in the Pacific Theater demonstrate the barbaric and racist ways the American soldiers could target a certain group of people they deemed as different. While human trophy taking was evident in the Pacific Theater, it was not evident in the European theater. This can be attributed to an ideology in which the American soldiers saw their European enemies as a similar race and their Pacific enemies as "others." Therefore, the trophy hunting of Japanese human remains can be concluded as being heavily racially motivated. The result of the trophies taken during the Second World War had lasting effects on society through various means. The institutions that both house and utilize the items and the private collectors who obtain them do so with the idea that they can provide further information to people. While whether or not these institutions can ethically keep these items is debatable, there can be no argument that wartime looting will be a continued discussion for years to come.

While it is well known that we possess various militaria items from World War II, the trophy hunting of Japanese remains during this war is not common knowledge. Americans continue to hold the belief that the Second World War was "the good war." It had a just motive and overwhelming support, and the bleaching of skulls and taking of human remains does not fit that heroic narrative. Another reason for this historical gap is that the immediate allyship with Japan after the war and the emergence of larger threats in China and Russia helped

Americans move past the idea that the Japanese were a subhuman enemy race. While there was and still is considerable Anti-Asian sentiment, the Japanese became an ally rather than an enemy. The consequence of this exclusion from the narrative is a skewed opinion of American involvement in the Second World War, and therefore an inaccurate history. Based on considerable evidence, the racially-motivated taking of Japanese human trophy remains occurred far more often than previously discussed in scholarship. The purpose of this work is to shed light on this previously excluded narrative, demonstrating how race and trophy hunting were directly linked during the Second World War. This inclusion is critical in the historical memory of WWII. It is a well-known fact that history is written by the victors, and victors never see themselves as the villain. Americans have a long history of glossing over the more inhumane events of their history, preferring to highlight the more heroic parts of the story. World War II was no different, and the American acts of courage and bravery were lauded while their acts of barbarity faded into the background.

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