"This Is Our Enemy":
The Writers' War Board
and Representations of Race
in Comic Books, 1942–1945

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During World War II, the U.S. government, through the Writers' War Board (WWB), co-opted comic books as an essential means of disseminating race-based propaganda to adult Americans, including members of the armed forces. Working with comic creators, the WWB crafted narratives supporting two seemingly incompatible wartime policies: racializing America's enemies as a justification for total war and simultaneously emphasizing the need for racial tolerance within American society. Initially, anti-German and anti-Japanese narratives depicted those enemies as racially defective but eminently beatable opponents. By late 1944, however, WWB members demanded increasingly vicious comic-book depictions of America's opponents, portraying them as irredeemably violent. Still, the Board embraced racial and ethnic unity at home as essential to victory, promoting the contributions of Chinese, Jewish, and African Americans.

Key words: comic books, World War II, racial stereotypes, Writers' War Board, popular culture, propaganda

In early 1945, the twenty-fourth issue of *All-Star Comics* went on sale at newsstands, drugstores, and U.S. military bases throughout the world. A popular title, *All-Star Comics* traced the adventures of the Justice Society of America, a group of superheroes that included Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, and The Flash. On the cover of that issue, the Justice Society looks on in mute horror as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, riding underneath a Nazi banner, lay

waste to a city. A title banner reminds American readers that "This Is Our Enemy." The issue included a nearly forty-page denunciation of Nazism and of German people and culture, also titled "This Is Our Enemy." Although drawn in part by Joe Kubert, the Polish-born son of a kosher butcher, the issue was not simply the product of reflexive anti-fascism and patriotism.[1] It resulted instead from a long-term cooperative effort between the publisher and the Writers' War Board (WWB), a quasi-governmental agency.[2] Working throughout late 1944, members of the WWB crafted the plot of "This Is Our Enemy" and honed a succession of drafts submitted by writers and editors at Detective Comics (DC), which published *All-Star Comics.* The WWB even provided DC with a list of potential titles, including "German Cult of Terror" and "Goosestepping Through the Centuries."[3] The finished story condemned the German people as a 1,000-year-old plague upon decency, peace, and western civilization.[4] DC sold over half a million copies of the issue to civilians on the home front and servicemen stationed around the world.

Beginning in April 1943, the WWB used comic books to shape popular perceptions of race and ethnicity, as well as build support for the American war effort.[5] WWB members concluded that the core traits of the comic book form—its broad popularity, comprehensibility, emphasis on raw emotion, and distinct lack of subtlety—marked

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1. I draw a distinction between comic book characters and narratives inspired by the patriotism and jingoism of individual comic book artists and writers, on the one hand, and the comic book propaganda created and endorsed by the Writers' War Board (WWB), on the other. Existing histories of the comic book medium focus on comic books crafted by people unaffiliated with any wartime agencies. My article emphasizes the role of the quasi-governmental WWB in shaping comic book content, especially images of race and ethnicity. For works on patriotic comic books created without the input of wartime agencies, see Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890–1945* (Washington, D.C., 1998); Christopher Murray, *Champions of the Oppressed: Superhero Comics, Popular Culture, and Propaganda in America During World War II* (New York, 2011); and Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore, 2001).

2. The WWB is described as a "quasi-governmental" agency in Thomas Howell, "The Writers' War Board: U.S. Domestic Propaganda in World War II," *Historian*, 59 (1997), 800. See also John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York, 1977), 21–45.

3. "Comic on Germany," Nov. 17, 1944, box 11, Papers of the Writers' War Board, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter WWB Papers).

4. Throughout its history, DC has been known by a variety of names, including Detective Comics and National Publications; it also had affiliates, like All-American Comics, which it absorbed in 1946 (earlier, All-American had sometimes incorporated a DC logo on their covers). For the sake of consistency, I refer to all of these entities as simply DC.

5. "Comics Committee Progress Report," May 15, 1944, box 11, WWB Papers.

Figure 1. "This Is Our Enemy!" *All-Star Comics*, 24 (Spring 1945)™ and © DC Comics; available in *All Star Comics Archives, Volume 6.*

comic books as a potentially useful delivery system for propaganda and education. Additionally, because comics, unlike most other major forms of media, were not subject to external censorship, comic book writers and propagandists could freely utilize clear, unambiguous images and language; they did not need to obscure opinions beneath layers of allegory or abstraction. Major comic book publishers submitted story drafts to the WWB and even created new characters and features at the behest of the board.[6] Ostensibly a private group staffed by volunteers, the WWB received funding and support from the federal government through the Office of War Information (OWI). Shielded by its veneer of independence, the WWB wove propaganda into popular culture to fuel a hatred of fascism, encourage racial tolerance in American society, and promote postwar international cooperation.[7]

Through the efforts of the WWB, comic books became political media.[8] Utilizing pre-existing racial stereotypes, WWB members and comic book producers constructed a justification for race-based hatred of America's foreign enemies. Board-approved stories initially depicted Japanese and Germans as racially and culturally defective, yet also as eminently beatable opponents, but, as the war dragged on, the WWB requested increasingly brutal comic book depictions. Germans and Japanese subsequently appeared as fundamentally, irredeemably evil and violent. Beginning in late 1944, this second wave of comic books produced in conjunction with the WWB argued that unremitting violence was essential to creating a world in which democracy and tolerance could flourish. The board's embrace of comic book violence coincided with the actual escalation of the war effort against Japanese and German civilians by the United States and its allies.

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6. Fawcett Publications cooperated with the Navy on stories intended to glamorize the service. The Office of War Information (OWI) worked with comic book publishers, as did the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. These agencies published propaganda comics in a wide variety of languages, for distribution in the United States, Latin America, Europe, and other theaters of war. My dissertation, "Pulp Empire: Comic Books, Culture, and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1941–1955" (University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013), examines the larger relationship between government agencies and the comic book industry during World War II and the Cold War, as well as the diplomatic crises precipitated by the spread of uncensored American commercial comic books.

7. Howell, "The Writers' War Board," 803–804.

8. Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890–1945*, 139.

Paradoxically, the board also generated comic book narratives that promoted domestic racial harmony and international cooperation, in an effort both to bolster the war effort and to portray the United States as an inclusive society, in contrast to its fascist opponents. WWB-approved comics presented racial tolerance—as distinct from true equality—as essential to victory, highlighting the contributions of African Americans and of the nation's non-white allies to the war effort. But these pro-tolerance narratives struggled to overcome the popular and widely understood negative tropes used for decades in American mass culture to represent African Americans, Chinese, and other Asian peoples, yielding complex and ultimately contradictory depictions of race and ethnicity in American comic books.[9]

Comic books during World War II

The American comic book emerged from the depths of the New York City publishing industry in the mid-1930s. Early comic books built upon the sensibilities and style of newspaper comic strips like *Flash Gordon* and *Tarzan,* and on the crisp, fast-paced stories in mystery and adventure-themed pulps like *Black Mask* and *Doc Savage.* From the late 1920s through the mid-1930s, bold and incorruptible pulp heroes acted on behalf of the helpless and disenfranchised, meting out vengeance according to their own moral code. Newspaper comic strips and pulps were ephemeral; their stories and artwork appeared only once before being discarded. In 1933, however, the Eastern Color Printing Company produced *Funnies on Parade,* a collection of reprinted comic strips. Although intended as a promotional give-away, *Funnies on Parade* hinted at a secondary market for newspaper comic strips. Similar titles followed, and, when publishers ran short of reprinted material, they bought new artwork and stories. As a new form of popular culture, comics provided a space

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9. William E. Blake, Jr., "A View of History: True Comics, 1941–1945," unpublished paper presented to Popular Culture Association on April 19, 1980, pp. 10–11, box 1, Dr. William E. Blake Collection of True Comics, Comic Arts Collection, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Va. (hereafter cited as VCU Comic Arts Collection). William Blake's paper focuses on a comic book title called *True Comics,* which rejected traditional superhero tales in favor of narratives based upon real people and events. While Blake does not discuss comic books produced in cooperation with wartime agencies like the WWB, he notes the confused and jarring juxtaposition of the appeals for unity and racism in comic books.

for artists and writers from New York's immigrant communities. Excluded from jobs at middlebrow magazines and commercial illustration firms, Jewish, Asian, and African American men and women entered the burgeoning comic book industry. Joe Kubert, who drew part of "This Is Our Enemy," recalled, "You could be a genius, you could be a nobody, a little kid from Brooklyn like me, or some kind of nut. The doors were open to any and all."[10]

From the outset, comic books proved popular with a broad audience. Children embraced comics as cheap entertainment, packed with bright colors and snappy dialogue. Not subject to external censorship, comic books included images of violence and sexuality that attracted adult readers as well.[11] Sales skyrocketed in 1938 when Superman, the first comic book superhero, appeared in the premiere issue of DC's *Action Comics*. Enthralled by Superman, consumers bought nearly a million copies of *Action Comics* every month. Publishers soon churned out dozens of superhero titles aimed at adults, boys, and girls. Fawcett Publication's good-natured, childlike Captain Marvel debuted in 1939. Two years later, DC unleashed Wonder Woman, the first female superhero. The Spirit, from Quality Comics, and The Spectre, from DC, catered to darker, more adult tastes. By the early 1940s, comic book writer William Woolfolk recalled, "Comics were selling 102 percent; that is, they were selling beyond the spoilage rate. If [a sales outlet] had a magazine just lying around tattered, they would not turn it back because it would sell eventually."[12]

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10. David Hadju, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (New York, 2008), 22. For more on the early comic book industry in New York City, see Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book* (New York, 2004).

11. This combination of large circulation numbers and minimal censorship made comic books unique among American popular media. In an effort to avoid externally imposed censorship, Hollywood studios accepted self-regulation through the Motion Picture Production Code instituted in 1934. Radio and television broadcasts faced restrictions imposed by advertisers and corporate standards of decency. In contrast, during World War II, comic book publishers faced no punitive censorship code, only the prevailing tastes of the market. For a history of the Hollywood censorship code, see Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York, 2009).

12. Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 13; Mike Benton, *Superhero Comics of the Golden Age* (Dallas, 1992), 56–57; Joseph Guilfoyle, "General Stores," *Wall Street Journal*, April 14, 1943, p. 1; and "1944's Magazines," in *ibid.*, Nov. 16, 1943, p. 1.

In the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, federal policies further expanded the adult audience for comic books. Comic books were sold on military bases, while civilian buyers sent used copies to servicemen stationed around the world.[13] In addition to encouraging sales of commercial comic books, the Army circulated up to 1 million copies per issue of an instructional comic book called *Army Motors*. It distilled complex technical concepts into a comprehensible combination of text and images and educated thousands of recruits with varying levels of education and reading comprehension.[14] Beginning in 1943, both the Army and Navy also worked with publishers on comic books designed to boost enlistment among young adults.[15] Ultimately, 44 percent of men in the Army described themselves as comic book readers.[16] By promoting government policies, comic book publishers reached a larger adult audience, reaped sizable profits, and earned a veneer of patriotic legitimacy.

The OWI oversaw much of the U.S. government's effort to build public support for the war effort. The Franklin D. Roosevelt administration downplayed overt propaganda in favor of a "strategy of truth," and the OWI aimed to inform Americans, rather than harangue them.[17] A focus on facts, not emotions, avoided unflattering comparisons between the OWI and the state-controlled propaganda organs of Germany, Japan, and Italy. Building public support for U.S. policies and goals was essential to victory, however, and some policymakers sought to circumvent the "strategy of truth." To this end, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., sanctioned the

13. For letters to the editor that describe the popularity of comic books among servicemen, see *Boy Comics*, 30 (1946), Michigan State University Comic Art Collection, East Lansing, Mich. (hereafter MSU Comic Art Collection).

14. Bob Andelman, *Will Eisner: A Spirited Life* (Milwaukie, Ore., 2005), 80–85.

15. *Aviation Cadets*, 1 (1943), box 1, VCU Comic Arts Collection; C. C. Beck to Russell Crouse, Aug. 7, 1943; Stanley Kauffman to Crouse, Aug. 19, 1943; and Selma Hirsch to Kauffman, Aug. 25, 1943, all three in box 11, WWB Papers.

16. The figure of 44 percent readership in the Army comes from two sources: Marya Mannes, "Junior Has a Craving," *New Republic*, 116 (Feb. 17, 1947), 22, and a 1949 radio discussion, "How Do The Comics Affect Your Child," in which professor Paul Witty of Northwestern University cited the same number. "How Do The Comics Affect Your Child," folder 12, box 109, Fredric Wertham Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Wertham Papers).

17. Nancy Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947–1960* (New York, 2003), 17–21; Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 21–45; Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (New York, 2009), 88–104; Howell, "The Writers' War Board," 795; Alan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942–1945* (New Haven, Conn., 1978), 2–5.

creation of the Writers' War Board in early 1942.[18] He sought an agency capable of inserting propaganda into popular American culture to promote policies the government supported but could not overtly endorse. Frederica Barach, the board's executive secretary, confirmed Morgenthau's mandate, describing the WWB as devoted to the promotion of "government policy and popular support for the war effort while the government itself technically refrained from propaganda." In spite of this claim, the board received federal funding, with government agencies dictating 85 percent of its output. Indeed, in the opinion of one member, the WWB operated as a government agency.[19]

Members of the board did not receive compensation from the government, although by mid-1942 the Office of Facts and Figures (the predecessor to the OWI) was supplying an executive secretary, clerical assistance, and office space.[20] Volunteers from various popular culture industries, including authors Pearl S. Buck and John P. Marquand, broadcaster and journalist William L. Shirer, editor of the Book-of-the-Month Club Clifton Fadiman, and playwright and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II staffed the board. Its chair was Rex Stout, author of the popular series of Nero Wolfe detective novels. From the perspective of an employee at the OWI, the WWB exerted control over nearly 5,000 professional writers and enjoyed access to thousands of newspapers and hundreds of radio stations.[21] The board additionally established a symbiotic relationship with many of the country's largest comic book publishers and influenced portrayals of some of the most popular comic book heroes of the day.

The WWB embraced comic books as a way to reach soldiers and civilians wary of more overt, government-manufactured propaganda. Indeed, the board stated that "Many of its messages can be very

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18. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., also made appearances in comic books during World War II. See *Picture Stories from the Bible*, 1 (1942), box 2, and *War Victory Comics*, 1 (1942), box 4, both in VCU Comic Arts Collection. Additionally, Chester Bowles, the head of the Office of Price Administration, appeared in patriotic comic book advertisements. Even President Franklin D. Roosevelt appeared in both advertisements and fictional stories.

19. Howell, "The Writers' War Board," 795–800.

20. In 1942 the OWI absorbed the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF). For a history of the OWI and its predecessor agencies, see Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda*, and Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 94–99.

21. Rex Stout to Hirsch, March 5, 1942, box 6, WWB Papers, cited in Howell, "The Writers' War Board," 796.

effectively put over in the comics magazines, [including] combating race hatred, preaching the necessity for United Nations cooperation and unity here at home." Beginning in April 1943, it sent letters to various comic book publishers requesting cooperation from artists, writers, and administrators. The board convened a Comics Committee, headed by novelist Paul Gallico, to supervise the burgeoning relationship between the board and the comic book industry.[22] Over the next two years, the members met with publishers, including DC, Fawcett Publications, Parents' Magazine, Popular Comics, Standard Magazine, and Street & Smith.[23] Cooperating publishers agreed to write stories based on ideas proposed by the WWB and to implement the board's feedback and instructions regarding comic book representations of ethnicity, race, and other critical wartime topics.

The WWB perceived comics as useful vehicles for propaganda for four reasons. First, comic books were enormously popular during the 1930s and early 1940s. One title, *Superman Comics*, sold roughly 10 million copies in 1941 alone.[24] Consumers bought a million copies per month of *Captain America Comics*, which spawned a host of popular, patriotic imitators. During the war, over 100 titles battled for attention at American newsstands, and total annual comic book sales climbed into the hundreds of millions. The medium thus gave the WWB access to a hugely popular and affordable propaganda delivery system. Indeed, comics proved so popular that publishers constrained by paper rationing resorted to slashing the number of pages. Only by reducing the size of comic books could they meet the growing public demand.[25]

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22. Clifton Fadiman to Lorraine Beim, Nov. 4, 1944; "Extract from Minutes of July 7" [no day and month indicated], 1944; "Comics Committee," Aug. 9, 1943; Charles W. Wessell to Frederica Barach, July 24, 1943; and "Comics Committee Progress Report," May 15, 1944, all in box 11, WWB Papers. Paul Gallico was a sportswriter and novelist, perhaps best remembered today for his novel *The Poseidon Adventure*, published in 1969.

23. "Comics Committee—Joint Project with Race Hatred Committee," July 7, 1944, box 11, WWB Papers. The records of the WWB indicate that at least eight comic book publishers cooperated with the board to some degree. I define a cooperating publisher as one that complied with at least one of the following criteria: soliciting instructions from the board; permitting board members to critique and edit scripts; proposing ideas for new stories to the board; or maintaining communication with the board and in particular the Comics Committee.

24. "Review of Comic Magazines," Irmengarde Eberle to Writer's War Board, March 30, 1943, in *ibid.*; Benton, *Superhero Comics of the Golden Age*, 45.

25. Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 36; Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Jackson, Miss., 2010), 22–23.

Second, comic books enjoyed a large, diverse adult audience comprised of civilians and members of the armed forces.[26] Beginning in 1943, members of the board discussed the usefulness of comic books for educating and entertaining servicemen. That year, E. R. Ross, an editor at comic book publisher Famous Funnies, assured Rex Stout, "The general trend in comic magazines [is] toward a more adult approach. Whereas the audience we reached was once primarily childish, our books now have their greatest percentage of sale in the Army and Navy bases, both in and out of the country."[27] Nearly half of all soldiers and sailors regularly consumed comic books, and the Navy classified comic books as "essential supplies" for the Marines stationed on Midway Island.[28] Ultimately, the WWB interpreted comic books as an excellent means of reaching a wide range of readers from varied backgrounds.

Both young and adult readers confirmed their devotion to comic books through letters sent to publishers. A letter from an Army chaplain stationed overseas to publisher M. C. Gaines of All-American Comics noted, "we are at a hospital unit serving overseas, and before we left the states we took with us a small supply of your books titled *Picture Stories from the Bible.* These books have become so popular with our patients that we are now requesting that you ship us fifty more copies." Gaines forwarded the letter to the WWB along with a request for an exemption from paper-rationing

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26. In 1942 George Hecht, publisher of fact-based titles like *True Comics* and *Real Heroes*, issued a similar comic book specifically aimed at adults. Titled *Comics Digest,* the cover of the inaugural issue emphasized that it was "For the millions of adults who read comic books." In an open letter on the first page, Hecht reiterated, "Nearly everybody reads the comics—old and young alike! They are America's best-loved kind of reading." *Comics Digest,* 1 (1942), box 2, VCU Comic Arts Collection. For documents describing the popularity of comic books among adults, see E. R. Ross to Stout, June 21, 1943; William DeGrouchy to Stout, June 29, 1943; and "Extract from Minutes of July 7," all in box 11, WWB Papers. For additional government documents on the popularity of comic books, see *Readership of Comics Magazines Among 1021 Girls and Boys in Providence, R.I. and Buffalo, N.Y.*, box 211, Records of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

27. "Review of Comic Magazines," March 30, 1943; unknown correspondent to Barach, April 21, 1943; Ross to Stout, June 21, 1943, all in box 11, WWB Papers. See also DeGrouchy to Stout, Aug. 29, 1943, in *ibid.* DeGrouchy, editor at publisher Street & Smith, gushed, "There is so much that can be done with the 'comic' magazines and their tremendous circulation among the youth of our country, and the large new audience of adults both in the defense industries and in our armed forces."

28. Mannes, "Junior Has a Craving," 22; "How Do The Comics Affect Your Child"; "Superman's Dilemma," *Time,* April 13, 1942, p. 78; and Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men,* 29.

restrictions.[29] An issue of *Boy Comics,* from Lev Gleason Publications, contained letters from an Army soldier and a member of the Air Corps. The soldier noted, "In *Boy Comics* we really escape from the rigors of Army life. *Boy Comics* are passed bunk to bunk, and believe me, there's a long waiting list." The second letter emphasized, "There wasn't a place on our B-26 [bomber] that *Boy Comics* couldn't be found."[30]

Third, WWB members appreciated the combination of simple text and images within comic books, which seemed to make the medium almost universally comprehensible. In 1944 the *Journal of Educational Sociology* devoted an entire issue to the idea that comic books comprised an overlooked means of educating Americans unwilling or unable to learn through more conventional means. In the issue, Professor Harvey Zorbaugh of New York University noted that, in 2,500 classrooms, students learned reading skills from "Superman" workbooks, while other comic books taught subjects as diverse as foreign languages, classical literature, and science. Even Sunday schools used comic books to teach students about religious history, tolerance, and the dangers of communism.[31] Comics, argued W. W. D. Sones of the University of Pittsburgh, utilized a language nearly "universally understood" by both young and adult readers.[32] This comprehensibility marked the comic book as a medium uniquely suited to distill the complexities of wartime life into language understandable to the widest possible audience. Tasked with building support for the policy of total warfare, WWB members similarly decided that messages embedded within comic books were more palatable and effective than overt, moralistic proselytizing.

Finally, because comic books, like the waves of dime novels and pulps before them, were categorized as lowbrow entertainment, they seemed an unlikely source of government propaganda. Recalling the virulent propaganda promoted during World War I by the Committee on Public Information and contemplating the dictatorial

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29. M.C. Gaines to Fadiman, Aug. 25, 1944, box 11, WWB Papers.

30. *Ibid.*; *Boy Comics*, 30 (1946), MSU Comic Art Collection.

31. Harvey Zorbaugh, "The Comics—There They Stand!" *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 18 (1944), 202. Harvey Zorbaugh was a professor of educational sociology at New York University. He was also a paid member of the editorial advisory board at Fawcett Publications; the names of board members appeared on the first page of every Fawcett comic book. The company promoted the board, which included the Director of the Child Study Association of America, Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, as a guarantee of "high standards of wholesome entertainment" in its comic books.

32. W. W. D. Sones, "The Comics and Instructional Method," in *ibid.*, 233.

stranglehold over popular media in the Axis countries, many Americans associated explicit government propaganda with totalitarianism.[33] Comic books allayed this concern by cloaking patriotic exhortations beneath layers of bright colors, easily understood text, and imaginative characters. Appropriating the comic book format enabled the WWB to tackle controversial topics like race relations while tempering propaganda messages with humor, romance, and adventure. As a board member emphasized in 1943, "we believe that many subjects can be handled [by comics] without interfering with their entertainment value while making use of their power."[34]

Even the advertisements within comics—absent from government propaganda materials—lent an air of familiarity and validity to comics produced through the cooperative efforts between publishers and wartime agencies. Advertising, according to the OWI, provided "authenticity" to propaganda.[35] Wartime comic books included advertisements for a bewildering array of products aimed at male and female readers, including war bonds, bogus weight-loss creams, weight-gain pills ("Skinny girls don't have oomph!"), toy guns, bras, male corsets, and sex toys (often billed as "electric spot reducers"). Other advertisements for home electronics and automotive repair courses tempted adult readers with visions of products sure to be available after war's end, tacitly promoting the government's advocacy of swift, total victory through any available means.

Intriguingly, the board apparently decided to utilize comic books to influence popular perceptions of race without conducting any analysis of how and to what extent readers actually absorbed messages encoded within comic books.[36] Rather, board members imagined that any medium as popular as the comic book doubtless exerted an influence upon its audience. In 1944, however, WWB executive secretary Frederica Barach took home a copy of a "swell" board-sanctioned anti-racist comic book, only to find that her children interpreted the narrative as a confirmation that racial intolerance was "inevitable and

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33. For a history of the Committee on Public Information, see David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York, 1980), 45–92.
34. Barach to George Marcoux, July 15, 1943, box 11, WWB Papers.
35. Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 39.
36. See John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (New York, 2010), chap. 1. See also Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkeimer, "The Culture Industry," in Horkeimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif., 2007).

had always been part of history."[37] Despite this sort of anecdotal evidence, the WWB treated the comic book as a uniquely comprehensible medium, capable of delivering government-sanctioned views on race to a wide community of consumers.

Nazis versus Germans

Cooperation between the WWB and the comic book industry worked to transform cartoon images of race during World War II. When board members first grew interested in the comic book medium in 1943, they asked publishers for stories about practical wartime issues, including labor relations and inflation.[38] At the time, the board was less concerned with representations of race and ethnicity. By late 1944, as U.S. losses mounted and Japan and Germany failed to surrender, the WWB focused on comic book portrayals of Germans and Japanese.[39] Fearing that comics treated America's enemies too lightly, the board encouraged very specific hatreds based on race and ethnicity to build support for the increasingly brutal U.S. policy of total war. In cooperation with comic book creators, the board characterized Japan and Germany through a template of clearly defined racial stereotypes. Cooperating publishers duly represented the fascist enemies as racially defective, incurably violent, and responsible for their own destruction.

Beginning in 1944, the new wave of board-sanctioned comic book representations of Germans and Japanese worked on two distinct and potentially conflicting levels. On the surface, these images stripped America's opponents of their humanity. Germany and Japan, suggested comic books, were aberrant cultures and "plenty worthy of hate."[40] By year's end, comic books written or approved by the board argued that the Japanese and German people were irredeemably aggressive and anti-democratic, so that any relaxation of the war effort would empower innately bigoted and cruel societies. By portraying all Germans as atrocity-committing Nazis and all

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37. Barach to Gallico, Dec. 30, 1944, box 11, WWB Papers.
38. "Comics Committee Progress Report," May 15, 1944, in *ibid.*
39. Howell notes that in 1944 the WWB, at the behest of the Treasury Department, embraced Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau's draconian postwar plan to destroy Germany's industry and reduce the country to an agrarian existence. Howell, "The Writers' War Board," 802.
40. Unknown correspondent to Barach, no day, month, or year indicated; Eberle to Barach, March 30, 1943, both in box 11, WWB Papers.

Japanese as incurably evil, the board was encouraging Americans to practice intolerance and hatred. Only by engaging in a justified and uniquely American sort of discrimination, argued the WWB, could the United States eliminate fascism and ensure a peaceful postwar world.

Prior to 1944, comic book artists and writers had typically depicted Germans either as buffoons or bloodthirsty criminals. Often the distinction rested upon whether a German character was a member of the Nazi Party or an average soldier. Either way, Allied heroes generally faced off against villains like vicious Nazi officials, sneaky saboteurs, and oafish officers. These early comic book narratives implied that while specific Nazis were more evil than others, not all Germans were inherently aggressive or vicious. Allied heroes fought against evil in the form of individual opponents; the enemy was a person, rather than an ideology or a nation. Indeed, Germans sometimes even appeared as sympathetic, explicitly anti-Nazi characters.

"Hobo on a U-Boat," from the comic book *War Heroes*, illustrates the different treatment initially accorded to individual Germans and Nazis. In the story, merchant seaman Archie Gibbs survives a German torpedo attack on his ship and is pulled from the water by the crew of a U-boat. The sailors who save him wear civilian clothing, and even the ship's captain prefers a white sweater and shorts to a uniform. When Archie refuses to divulge his ship's cargo, however, he is brought before a menacing Gestapo officer in full Nazi regalia. Archie senses tension between the U-boat crew and the brutal Gestapo officer. Confident that the German seamen will protect him, Archie mocks his interrogator. Enraged, the office tortures Archie and leaves him to die. Behind the back of the Gestapo officer, the German sailors tend to Archie's injuries, give him food and medicine, and make up a bed for him. One of the crewmen even mocks Hitler, thumbing his nose while mimicking the Nazi salute. When the submarine founders under an Allied depth-charge attack, the Germans give Archie a life-jacket and urge him to leap overboard. Thanks to the warmth and bravery of the non-Nazi crew, Archie survives his encounter with an individual villain.[41]

When not depicted as merciless thugs, comic book Nazis appeared as easily defeated buffoons. In *Young Allies*, oafish Nazis—including Adolf Hitler, himself—prove incapable of defeating

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41. *War Heroes*, 9 (1944), box 4, VCU Comic Arts Collection.

a group of American and British children. The Young Allies are
a collection of five kids, all but one of whom boasts specific skills
and a shared hatred of fascism. The nominal leader is Captain
America's sidekick, the bright and brave Bucky Barnes. Aiding
Bucky is Toro, young partner to the Human Torch, who can ignite
his body, fly, and hurl balls of flame at his opponents. The Young
Allies also include the intellectual Jefferson Worthing Sandervilt and
Percival Aloysius O'Toole, better known as Knuckles, a Brooklyn-
born punk without fear or peer as a fighter. Only Whitewash Jones,
the lone African American member of the team, lacks intelligence
or raw courage, although the other members acknowledge White-
wash Jones's fluency in "the crass ways of the world," praising his
skill with a harmonica.[42] On their first mission, the Young Allies
encounter and defeat several Nazi villains, including a strutting,
bloodthirsty Nazi officer with the absurd name of Fritz Flootzen-
dootzen. When the young heroes reach Berlin, they trick a Nazi
super-villain named the Red Skull and a group of Nazi guards into
pummeling a chunky Adolf Hitler. Fuming helplessly after his beat-
ing, Hitler cries, "Zuch a fool they make of me yet!"[43] Despite his
demand for vengeance, the Young Allies escape.

This approach changed in late 1944, when the WWB provided
comic book publishers a clear template for German characters.
Above all, the board urged comic book writers to conflate Germans
with Nazis. Americans needed to believe that Germans, along with
Japanese, were incurably hostile; they could be re-educated only
after a necessarily brutal conflict and total Allied victory. As part
of this strategy, the board encouraged writers to de-emphasize indi-
vidual villains in favor of a new emphasis on fascism and "German-
ness." The German nation—and all of its inhabitants—was the enemy
of democracy, freedom, and equality. There was thus no need to
create unique and buffoonish Nazi comic book villains; the very real
atrocities committed by average German soldiers offered more than
enough raw material for broad, comic-book condemnations of fas-
cism and German aggression.

Believing that comic books provided an effective means of dis-
seminating its new perspective on Germany, the WWB commissioned

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42. Bruce Lenthall, "Outside the Panel—Race in America's Popular Imagination:
Comic Strips Before and After World War II," *Journal of American Studies*, 32 (1998), 57.
43. *Young Allies*, 1 (1941), MSU Comic Art Collection.

an anti-German narrative from DC. Board members drew up the plot of the story and refined the text, inserting changes to emphasize that "the German people have willingly cooperated with their leaders, rather than being unwilling dupes." DC had provided an early draft that placed responsibility for Nazism upon Germany's leaders, rather than on average Germans, but WWB executive secretary Barach rejected the draft, insisting on "radical" changes. She reminded editor Sheldon Mayer that "The emphasis on leaders who tricked their people into war strikes entirely the wrong note from the board's point of view. Emphasis should be rather that the people were willing dupes, and easily sold on a program of aggression." Mayer complied, and the final text of the story, which appeared in the spring 1945 issue of *All-Star Comics*, presented Hitler as simply "a mouthpiece" for the malignant beliefs and policies embraced by the German people.[44]

According to the final, board-approved version of "This Is Our Enemy," World War II occurred because Germans—all Germans— were inherently violent. In one of several scenes emphasizing this point, an old Teutonic knight gazes across a battlefield and reminds his young comrade, "There is nothing like battle. It is like wine to a man, filling him with excitement and eagerness." The younger knight agrees, confirming, "That is what we Germans have always been taught." "This Is Our Enemy" also demolished any distinction between Germans and Nazis. It condemned all Germans as members of "a degenerate nation whose people throughout the centuries have always been willing to follow their military leaders into endless, bloody but futile warfare."[45]

Through this portrayal of the German people, the narrative endorsed hatred and violence as the only possible solutions to German militarism. Justice Society member Johnny Thunders proclaims, "Until their mad ideal of world conquest is broken forever, Germany will always be an aggressor nation. Well, if they want total war, we'll give it to them!" The Germans, wrote Clifton Fadiman, were "justified in destruction for their aggrandizement." "This Is Our Enemy" also included a board-sanctioned vision for the postwar world. Since Germany's inherent aggression posed a permanent

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44. Barach to Eugene Tillinger, Dec. 2, 1944; Barach to Gaines, Dec. 13, 1944; Barach to Sheldon Mayer, Nov. 13, 1944; and Fadiman to Gaines, June 30, 1944, all in box 11, WWB.
45. *All-Star Comics*, 24 (1945).

threat to Europe and the United States, durable peace would require three steps. First, the Allies had to shatter the nation, society, and culture responsible for plunging the world "into a maelstrom of blood."[46] Second, the United States had to re-educate and de-program the German people. Finally, peace would require a world organization devoted to non-violent conflict resolution. If these steps failed to eliminate violence in the postwar world, the United States also needed a standing peacetime army and universal conscription. This issue of *All-Star Comics* sold 600,000 copies and reached an estimated readership of "several million" adults and children. The board viewed its cooperative effort with DC as a resounding success and as a template for further collaboration between its members and the comic book industry.[47]

The Japanese enemy

The WWB ultimately encouraged similarly paradoxical sentiments—hatred and brutality as the solutions to fascist aggression and bigotry—in comic books aimed at America's enemy in the Pacific, but where the board feared that Americans did not sufficiently loathe Germans, it had little doubt that Americans held a deep hatred for Japanese. This was due both to the humiliating and devastating attack on Pearl Harbor, and the long-standing, derogatory representations of Japanese and other Asian peoples in American mass culture, not least comic books. Beginning before Pearl Harbor and continuing after the U.S. entry into the war, Japanese characters inhabited a curious dual role in American comics. Japanese were simultaneously subhuman—defined, as John Dower argues, "in terms of primitivism, childishness, and collective mental and emotional deficiency"—but also as members of a powerful, pan-Asian threat to American society, the "Yellow Peril."[48] In wartime

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46. *Ibid.*

47. Gallico to WWB Advisory Council, Feb. 13, 1945; Dinah Gelbin to Barach, Feb. 13, 1945, both in box 11, WWB Papers. Gaines and Barach believed the issue demanded even wider distribution, and the WWB helped Gaines draft an appeal for an allotment of additional paper. The head of the OWI's Book and Magazine Bureau rejected the appeal and chided Barach for becoming involved, suggesting that "it is better to remain on the editorial and policy side of the fence." See Barach to Gaines, Dec. 2, 1944; Oscar Schisgall to Barach, Dec. 7, 1944; and Barach to Gaines, Dec. 13, 1944, all in *ibid.*

48. John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1993), 9, and Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia, 1999), 146–147. I utilize Robert G. Lee's argument that a combination of political,

comic books, there was no Japanese analog to the "Good German."[49] These widespread cultural assumptions were everywhere in mass culture, and they played a significant role in constructing a wartime definition of Japanese people.[50] Beginning in mid-1943, the WWB shaped and directed these stereotypes in support of specific, board-sanctioned policies and perspectives.

Perhaps the quintessential example of a menacing, Asian villain first appeared in the December 1939 issue of *Silver Streak Comics*, starring Daredevil, "The World's Most Daring Man of Action." Daredevil's nemesis was The Claw, a mysterious "God of Hate," the unchallenged ruler of a nation of "strange religions and mysterious customs." The Claw embodied and amplified the pervasive prewar conception of the Yellow Peril.[51] He was enormous, dwarfing New York City skyscrapers, and had dripping fangs instead of teeth. Tufts of yellow hair hung over his sharply slanted eyes and his oversized, pointed ears. He lived in a subterranean pit of fire, emerging to issue instructions to his army of slaves. Bent on destroying America, "the most unfortified country in the world," The Claw ordered wave upon wave of slaves to invade the United States. The strong among his army were worked to death and the weak crushed beneath his enormous yellow feet.[52] He was a superhuman monster, obsessed with America's complete destruction. Average American civilians or soldiers were no match for him. The Claw appeared in the pages of comic books throughout the war, and only Daredevil, a superhero, could defeat him.[53]

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economic, and cultural factors contributed to a flexible definition of Asians in American popular culture. This flexibility manifested itself in comic books through representations of Japanese characters as simultaneously superhuman and subhuman.

49. Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 8–9.

50. Lee argues that, during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, racial tropes worked negatively to define Asians as pollutants, coolies, deviants, or the yellow peril—all classifications marking Asians as unable to assimilate into American society. He also suggests that popular culture—rather than science or the law—functioned as "the ultimate arbiter of whiteness." Certainly, both standard and WWB-sanctioned wartime comics embraced the most vicious elements of these tropes, portraying the Japanese as a profound threat, not only to democracy, but also to the very fabric of white American society. Lee, *Orientals*, 142–144.

51. *Ibid.*, 106–109, 144.

52. *Silver Streak Comics*, 7 (1941), in Greg Sadowski, ed., *Supermen: The First Wave of Comic Book Heroes, 1936–41* (Seattle, 2009), 138–153.

53. Within the pages of comic books, The Claw terrified even Adolf Hitler. When the two meet in the first issue of *Captain Battle, Jr.*, Hitler's cowardice upsets The Claw, who shaves the Nazi's head and moustache as punishment. While Hitler appears here as

Figure 2. "The Claw," from *Silver Streak Comics*, 6 (Sept. 1940).

simpering and unthreatening, The Claw is terrifying and intelligent. Confronted with Hitler's unwillingness to attack the United States, The Claw exclaims, "The cowardly piece of scum! I will torture him to death for this!" *Captain Battle, Jr.,* 1 (1943).

In comic books where Japanese people were not depicted as superhuman, they often appeared as incompetent and subhuman. In these titles, they were portrayed as physically small creatures like monkeys or rats that could be easily exterminated by larger, stronger Americans—in some cases, even by American children or the elderly. In an *Our Gang Comics* story arc from 1944, several children are shipwrecked on a desolate island in the Pacific. Aided by a short-tempered old sailor named Cap'n Dan, they explore the island and begin building a raft. A white child named Froggie and Buckwheat, the lone African American, are sent to find fresh water in the jungle. The two boys stumble upon a secret Japanese radio station hidden in the island's interior and attack the befuddled, incompetent Japanese soldiers manning the radio. The battle rages across two pages and includes several panels in which Buckwheat appears alongside equally crude representations of Japanese soldiers. One of the hapless Japanese soldiers receives a brutal kick from Froggie, while Buckwheat looks on and exclaims, "Once again ah is thankful ah is no Japoon." Meanwhile, Cap'n Dan stakes out a spot near the Japanese hideout and tells the gang, "They're in a spot the minute they start goin' down that Jacob's Ladder!" When a child asks why the Japanese will be in trouble, Cap'n Dan retorts, "Well, because a Jap pilot machine-gunned my own lad when he was parachuting down over the Coral Sea—and ol' Cap'n Dan isn't one to let an opportunity pass!" After killing two Japanese soldiers in front of a member of the gang, Cap'n Dan laments, "I'm sorry you had to see that, lad. It's never a pretty thing to kill even a rat." The child replies, "That's okay—an' that was some shot!"[54]

These conflicting images of the Japanese as either incompetent and subhuman or as superhuman grotesques soon attracted the attention of the WWB. Neither Asian enemies like The Claw nor patronizing representations like easily defeated Japanese soldiers met the board's criteria for effective anti-Japanese propaganda. One board member cautioned, "The comics are drumming up a lot of hate for the enemy, but usually for the wrong reasons—frequently fantastic ones (mad Jap scientists, etc.). Why not use the real reasons—they're plenty worthy of hate!" Perhaps, fretted board member Milton

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54. *Our Gang Comics*, 11 (1944); *ibid.*, 12 (1944), both in MSU Comic Art Collection. Walt Kelly, the political cartoonist and creator of Pogo Possum, drew stories for *Our Gang Comics*, including the issues discussed in this article.

Kramer, comic books had done too good a job of mocking and stereo-typing the Japanese, lulling American readers into expecting an easy victory in the Pacific.[55] Compounding this problem, as an OWI survey of comic books lamented, comic book creators "do not understand that this is a global war. Americans win alone. The enemy is a push-over. The allies are non-existent or subordinate." Such simplistic, condescending representations of Japanese implied that the United States had no need for allies. This "Americocentric" image of the war worked against government assertions that the four Allied powers—the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and China—all contrib-uted to the fight against fascism.[56]

Until mid-1943, the WWB's Comics Committee provided few specific instructions regarding why and how Americans should hate their Japanese opponents. When the board did issue clearer guide-lines, its efforts coincided with a general increase in the ferocity of the Pacific conflict, and some comic book publishers toughened their stance without any input from the board. Increasingly vicious images of Japanese appeared in parallel with the increasing U.S. commitment to total war against Japan, typified by the strategic bombing campaign against the Japanese home islands. Before Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government had condemned the strategy of aerial bombardment. In 1938, for instance, a Senate resolution had named Japan as the chief perpetrator of terror bombing, branding it a "crime against humanity" and "reminiscent of the cruelties perpe-trated by primitive and barbarous nations upon inoffensive peo-ple."[57] During World War II, however, the United States launched its own massive strategic bombing campaign against Japan and Ger-many. The Army Air Force concluded, "The entire population of Japan is a proper military target," and American bombers leveled virtually every major Japanese city with explosives, phosphorus, and jellied gasoline.[58]

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55. Unknown correspondent to Barach, April 1944, box 11, WWB Papers; Milton Kramer to Barach, April 6, 1943, in *ibid.* In addition to serving on the board, Kramer wrote comic books. For additional information on Kramer, see "Suggestion re: Comic Strip Writers," Feb. 20, 1943, in *ibid.*

56. Henry Gemmill, "War Experts Cool Toward the Comics: They Read Them All," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 2, 1942, p. 1.

57. Quoted in Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 38–40.

58. Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York, 1988), 596–597.

The comic book series *United States Marines,* published with the cooperation of the Marine Corps, typified comic-book representations of Japanese during the last years of the war.[59] A 1944 issue of *United States Marines* included a narrative entitled "The Smell of the Monkeymen." Told from the perspective of Eric, an American guard dog stationed with Marines on a Pacific island, the story depicts Japanese soldiers as simian brutes whose sickening body odor betrays their concealed locations. In the course of a Japanese attack on a Marine emplacement, Eric joyfully mangles one of the onrushing soldiers. "The smell of the monkeyman was so strong that it choked him. His teeth sank into a corded throat, a snarl ripped up into his mouth and into the soft flesh that choked his jaws." Drenched in blood, Eric returns to his master, who praises him for "killing that monkey." The next issue of *United States Marines* boasted "Nippon's Sun Starts Down" a vivid retelling of a U.S. attack on a Japanese base in the Pacific. The story contains detailed images of Japanese soldiers burned alive by American flamethrowers manned by laughing Marines. Another story in the same issue, "Jap Souvenirs from the Solomons," describes the pleasure of picking over Japanese corpses in search of mementoes. Alongside drawings and photographs of mangled Japanese bodies, the text informs readers that, "Next to killing Japs, American servicemen in the South Pacific like best to collect Jap souvenirs."[60]

Ironically, as the comic book campaign against Japan grew increasingly brutal, participants raised concerns about the usefulness of fanning racial hatred. In late 1944, DC editor M. C. Gaines notified the WWB that he was ready to begin work on a story about Japan as a complement to the anti-German story in *All-Star Comics.* Gaines and his editor Sheldon Mayer worried that a virulently anti-Japanese story would encourage "an increase of race feeling" on the home front.[61] As an alternative, Mayer suggested a more even-handed story about a fictional, anti-fascist underground movement in Japan. Fadiman flatly rejected DC's proposal. The story, he complained,

59. The covers of issues number two and three of *The United States Marines* read, "Authentic U.S. Marine Corps Picture Stories," and the inside covers describe the publication as "Published in cooperation with the U.S. Marine Corps."

60. *The United States Marines,* 2 (1944), and 3 (1944), both in box 6, VCU Comic Arts Collection.

61. Barach to Gallico, Dec. 30, 1944, box 11, WWB Papers; cover letter from Fadiman, Sept. 8, 1944, and Barach to Fadiman, Oct. 5, 1944, both in *ibid.*
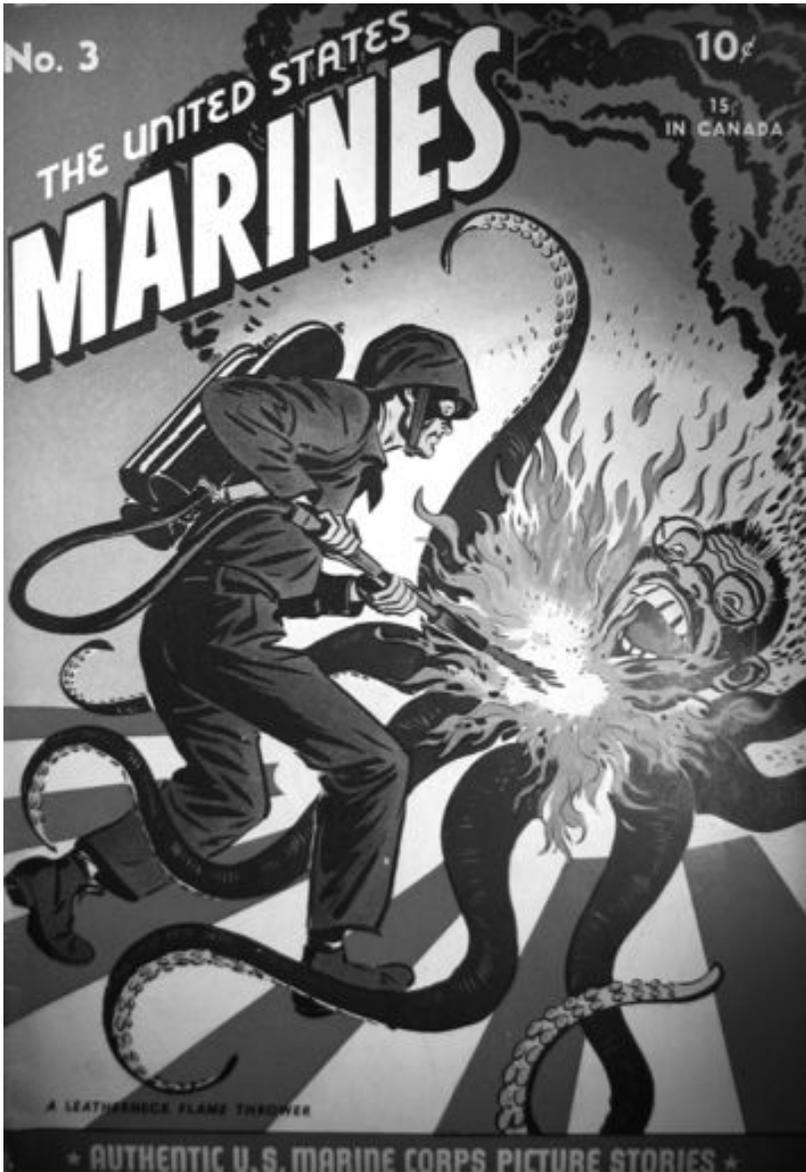
Figure 3. The United States Marines, 3 (1944).

depicted an attractive Japanese "wench," encouraged "a soft peace with Japan," and suggested that the Japanese people disliked fascism. He appealed to Mayer to abandon the idea, reminding him, "Our

attitude towards the Japanese must, if anything, be more stringent than our attitude towards the Germans."[62]

Comic book images of America's allies

Just as board-sanctioned images of Japanese drew upon pre-existing racial tropes, so too did comic book representations of America's Chinese allies. Representations of Chinese characters as heathens or primitive "coolies" were commonplace by the early twentieth century, particularly in political and editorial cartoons.[63] These representations both fed and were fueled by federal legislation, beginning with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.[64] By the time the United States entered World War II, negative perceptions of Chinese were an established part of mass culture, as well as the nation's legal fabric. Not until December 1943 did Congress modify the Chinese exclusion laws, driven by concerns that discriminatory legislation provided the Japanese enemy with powerful anti-American propaganda material and by a desire to ensure that China remained a reliable member of the Allied alliance.[65]

Any effort to use comic books to present a more positive image of America's Chinese allies therefore had to overcome the pervasive and cumulative effects of pre-existing racial tropes and America's history of anti-Chinese legislation. The WWB, however, did not provide publishers with a racial template for non-white allies like China, the Philippines, and India. In the absence of direction from the board, comic book publishers generated very few positive images of non-white heroes. A 1943 WWB review of comic books lamented, "Hate for the enemy is practically the only good propaganda put across," and it noted an absence of positive, non-American characters.[66] That same year, Street & Smith Publications notified the WWB of an upcoming series in *Air Ace* called "The Four Musketeers." With

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62. Fadiman to Mayer, Sept. 21, 1944, in *ibid.* Fadiman's use of the word "wench" to describe a Japanese woman may have been connected to the long-standing stereotype of the geisha. For a history and analysis of the origins of the geisha in American art and culture, see Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York, 2003), chap. 2.

63. Lee, *Orientals*, 51–60.

64. Philip P. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marlon K. Hom, *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* (Seattle, 1995), 19–20.

65. Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 164–170.

66. [1] "Review of Comic Magazines," March 30, 1943, box 11, WWB papers.

members from the United States, Britain, China, and the Soviet Union, the group promoted the cooperative fight against fascism. Although the WWB's Barach condemned the effort as "awful," she provided neither instructions for how to improve the feature nor any support for the idea of non-white heroes.[67]

Board members reacted similarly to a 1944 narrative in Fawcett's *Captain Marvel, Jr.* The story included images of Soviet and Chinese characters, with the Chinese defined, according to a long-standing cultural stereotype, as drug addicts and smugglers. In the story, a Russian diplomat warns that, unless the Chinese stop smuggling opium across the Soviet border, the Soviet Union will invade China. Concerned that the Soviet ultimatum showed an American ally in an unfavorable light, the board requested that Fawcett take greater care with future comic book depictions of Soviet characters. Nevertheless, the board's response included no mention of the stereotypical Chinese characters in the story, or the implication that China weakened the Allied war effort through drug use and smuggling.[68] As with "The Four Musketeers," the WWB did not clarify how the publisher might reframe a story to encourage positive perceptions of an Asian ally.

Still, the board did approve of an independent effort to promote the contributions made by America's non-white allies. *Comic Cavalcade*, a DC publication, included an ongoing series of stories produced in cooperation with the East and West Association, a private agency headed by WWB member Pearl S. Buck and committed to improving American perceptions of allied Asian nations. Issue nine boasted a story titled "Filipinos Are People." Fadiman of the WWB praised the story as "a fine job" and assured the publisher that "the Board applauds the folks who are responsible for it."[69] Yet within its pages, Japanese and Filipino characters are visually indistinguishable. Both groups have grotesque buckteeth, tattered clothing, and bright yellow skin. U.S. soldiers ultimately identify a Filipino only after he speaks in a singsong sort of American slang. "Filipinos

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67. Barach to Gallico, Dec. 3, 1944, in *ibid.* Despite Barach's condemnation, "The Four Musketeers" premiered in the May 1944 issue of *Air Ace.* Intriguingly, the cover touts the connection between the series and the WWB. In bright lettering, it advertises "The Four Musketeers" as "The Writers' War Board Comic." *Air Ace*, 3 (1944).

68. Fadiman to William Lieberson, Oct. 23, 1944, box 11, WWB Papers.

69. Gaines to Fadiman, Aug.18, 1944; Fadiman to Mayer, Sept. 21, 1944, both in *ibid.* For a history of the East and West Association, see Robert Shaffer, "Pearl S. Buck and the East and West Association: The Trajectory and Fate of 'Critical Internationalism,' 1940–1950," *Peace & Change*, 28 (2003), 1–36.

Are People" made no mention of the larger Filipino population, only the contributions of a single Filipino character. Thus, Filipinos may have been people, but, like other comic book minorities, they were still different—human, yet not quite white.

Even these halting efforts were buried beneath the sheer quantity of negative comic book representations of America's non-white Allies. In the absence of instructions from the WWB, publishers overwhelmingly depicted America's Asian allies through derogatory images and language honed over the preceding decades. During the war, perhaps the best-known Chinese comic book character was Chop-Chop, who appeared in *Blackhawk Comics*, *Modern Comics*, and *Military Comics*, published by Quality Comics. Blackhawk, a Polish pilot, first appeared in the August 1941 premiere issue of *Military Comics*. Despite bravely battling the German Luftwaffe, Blackhawk lost all of his squadron-mates and family to a sadistic Nazi pilot, Von Tepp. Intent on continuing the fight, Blackhawk assembled a new squadron, including refugees from the Western European lands occupied by Germany. The squadron also acquired a mascot, a diminutive Chinese man nicknamed Chop-Chop. Unlike the rest of the Blackhawk Squadron, Chop-Chop did not fly a plane. Rather, he acted as a buffoon, often inadvertently aiding Blackhawk through pratfalls and accidents. Colored in the same yellow hue as his Japanese opponents, Chop-Chop dressed in garish, old-fashioned clothing, wore his hair in a queue, and had enormous buckteeth that reached nearly to his chin. Like the characters in "Filipinos Are People," Chop-Chop spoke in a sing-song dialect, threatening to "Smack Japs until they yell 'Remember Kobe Harbor!'"[70] He personified the stereotype of the "coolie."[71]

Characters like Chop-Chop appeared at a time when the WWB was seeking to represent the United States as an inclusive society, in contrast to its fascist opponents. In 1943, the same year that the Chinese exclusion legislation was modified, board members acknowledged that comic books provided a particularly useful means of "combating race hatred, [and] preaching the necessity for United Nations cooperation and unity here at home."[72] In spite of this faith in the

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70. *Military Comics*, 1 (1941); *ibid.*, 28 (1944).
71. Lee, *Orientals*, 58–60.
72. Fadiman to Beim, Nov. 4, 1944; "Extract From Minutes of July 7," no day and month indicated, 1944, both in box 11, WWB Papers.

Figure 4. Chop-Chop, *Military Comics,* 6 (June 1942); Blackhawk™ and © DC Comics; available in *The Blackhawk Archives Volume 1.*

power of the medium, acknowledging the contributions of America's non-white allies presented the WWB with significant challenges. Any pro-Chinese narratives had to overcome the decades of anti-Chinese imagery in American mass culture, as well as over fifty years of legal discrimination against Chinese immigration. Compounding these

issues, the WWB did not assign the same priority to pro-Chinese and pro-Allied comic book narratives as it bestowed on narratives designed to foster hatred of Germans and Japanese.

African Americans in the wartime imagination

At the same time that the WWB nurtured increasingly vicious representations of America's opponents, it also commissioned comic book narratives designed to encourage racial tolerance at home and abroad. Believing that victory overseas demanded cooperation at home, the board worked with publishers on stories depicting the United States as racially and ethnically tolerant.[73] These tales promoted unity among Americans within a very specific context and for a single purpose: victory over fascism. This was a call for public rather than private tolerance, a demand for unity in the public spheres of war production and military service.[74] The board even reassured comic book creators (many of whom were themselves Jewish, while others were African American or Asian American), "While your readers cannot be expected to accept heroes or heroines belonging to minority groups, it is possible to give subsidiary characters Jewish names or depict them as Negroes, etc."[75] Comic book makers complied.

As with the board's endorsement of racism as a war-winning measure, its embrace of tolerance emerged from concern that Americans were unprepared to work together in a long-term battle against fascism. In mid-1944, the board's Comics Committee initiated a joint project with its Race Hatred Committee. Members appealed to four comic book publishers for stories promoting the contributions of non-whites to American culture. The board stressed that the need for such stories stemmed from practical concerns and potential dangers to American civil society. Board members warned publishers, "Some good judges actually fear that a civil war may

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73. Lenthall, "Outside the Panel," 42. Lenthall argues that wartime comic strips, not comic books, described an ideal America, where the brutal realities of race relations were tempered by the hopes of readers and the imaginings of what should be. My argument differs from Lenthall's. Within the context of this article, I suggest that the positive depictions of race relations in comic books owed more to the beliefs—both pragmatic and idealistic—of board members, rather than of comic book consumers.

74. Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago, 2000), 164.

75. "Digest of Comic Magazine Conference," Dec. 5, 1944, box 11, WWB Papers.

come about in this country unless all men of good will put their shoulders to the wheel" to fight intolerance. A racial war at home threatened not only American-style liberal democracy, but also the country's ability to wage and win a global war. The board needed help from the makers of comic books because "We have got to begin from the ground up with the run-of-the-mill, average American citizen who reads the pulps and the comics and who is decisively influenced by them."[76]

As the Comics Committee geared up to produce pro-tolerance narratives in support of the war effort, Fawcett Publications boasted the best-selling comic book in the United States. Titled *Captain Marvel Adventures*, it featured Captain Marvel, "The World's Mightiest Mortal" and alter ego of young orphan Billy Batson. Billy transforms into Captain Marvel whenever he utters the magic word "Shazam." *Captain Marvel Adventures* sold approximately 1 million copies every month. In 1944 Captain Marvel's fan club included half a million members, and Fawcett received over 30,000 letters from all over the world, addressed simply "To: Captain Marvel."[77] The Captain's popularity spawned several companion comic books, including *Captain Marvel, Jr.*, starring disabled newsboy Freddie Freeman as the alter ego of Captain Marvel, Jr., a teenage variation on the original.[78]

The October 1944 issue of *Captain Marvel, Jr.* included an anti-lynching narrative called "The Necktie Party."[79] The piece emerged from Fawcett's enthusiastic cooperation with the WWB. Fawcett submitted story drafts to the board for comment and even created a new character, Radar the International Policeman, as part of a board-mandated effort to promote internationalism. WWB members enthused over the message of tolerance and justice embedded in "The Necktie Party." The WWB, wrote Fadiman, had "nothing but the warmest kind of praise" for the anti-lynching story in *Captain Marvel, Jr.*[80]

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76. Some WWB documents refer to this organization as the Committee to Combat Race Hatred. For an example, see Kramer to Fadiman, May 26, 1944, in *ibid.* "Joint Project with Race Hatred Committee," July 7, 1944; "Covering Letter on 'Why Race Hatred As A Special Subject," July 12, 1944, both in *ibid.*

77. Zorbaugh, "The Comics—There They Stand!," 201.

78. Benton, *Superhero Comics of the Golden Age*, 45.

79. *Captain Marvel, Jr.*, 22 (1944).

80. Fadiman to Lieberson, Oct. 23, 1944, box 11, WWB Papers. The WWB did find another contemporary Fawcett comic book plot objectionable. The board criticized Fawcett for a script submitted in late 1944 that implied all industrialists and businessmen

At the same time, other Fawcett titles like *Captain Marvel Adventures* included racist, divisive images of black characters, typified by Steamboat, the Captain's valet, who embodies the worst stereotypes from minstrel shows. He has thick lips and kinky hair, speaks in dialect ("Cap'n Marvel, thank heab'n yous heah!"), and bumbles into danger, confounding Captain Marvel and letting criminals escape. Although the WWB criticized racial discrimination as detrimental to the war effort and convened a Committee to Combat Race Hatred, it did not request that Fawcett remove Steamboat from *Captain Marvel Adventures*. [81] Eliminating Steamboat required the determined efforts of a black youth group in New York City. In mid-1945, a group of young activists from Junior High School 120 met with Fawcett editor Will Lieberson and demanded Steamboat's removal. Initially, Lieberson refused, arguing that *Captain Marvel Adventures* included many kinds of caricatures "for the sake of humor." The students responded by showing Lieberson a picture of Steamboat, telling him that "this is not the Negro race, but your one-and-a-half million readers will think it so."[82] Ultimately Lieberson relented, and Steamboat quietly disappeared from the pages of Fawcett comic books.

In June 1944, Fadiman sent a letter to M. C. Gaines of DC, requesting a comic narrative "with a negro hero." Fadiman suggested a tale built around the exploits of the black 99th Pursuit Squadron and offered to send the necessary background materials

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were greedy monopolists. The story, "The Cartels of Crime," starred Radar, The International Policeman. Radar was co-created by members of the WWB and Fawcett editor Lieberson. With the board's support, Radar promoted international cooperation and the postwar United Nations. A revised version of "The Cartels of Crime" that no longer equated wealth with corruption appeared in Fawcett's *Master Comics*, 62 (1945). Lieberson to Fadiman, Oct. 30, 1944; Barach to Gallico, Nov. 1, 1944; and Barach to Lieberson, Nov. 13, 1944, all in box 11, WWB Papers.

81. Steamboat appeared in *Captain Marvel Adventures*, 36 (1944) and 40 (1944), bracketing the anti-lynching story "Captain Marvel, Jr. and the Necktie Party" in issue 22 of *Captain Marvel, Jr.* Steamboat made over fifty appearances in Fawcett comic books, primarily in *Captain Marvel Adventures*, between early 1942 and early 1945. Although the WWB had nothing to do with removing Steamboat from Fawcett publications, board member Robert Landry sent a thank-you letter to Lieberson after learning of Lieberson's mid-1945 meeting with the students of Junior High School 120. Robert Landry to Lieberson, May 2, 1945, box 11, WWB Papers.

82. "Negro Villain in Comic Book Killed by Youngsters," *Chicago Defender*, May 5, 1945, p. 11.

to All-American.[83] Gaines's staff duly crafted a story including the 99th Pursuit Squadron, nicknamed the Red Tails and perhaps best known as the Tuskegee Airmen. The story, "The 99th Squadron," appeared in the winter 1945 issue of *Comic Cavalcade,* a title with a circulation of 400,000 copies per issue.[84] In spite of its title, the protagonist is not an African American flyer but a white pilot named Hop Harrigan. Aided by Sergeant Tank Tinker, his sidekick and mechanic, Hop fights fascism all over the world. "The 99th Squadron," finds him stationed in the European theater, alongside the Tuskegee Airmen.

Hop and his squadron-mates must fly a Luftwaffe general, Fritz Schlange, a Nazi Party member, to a prisoner-of-war camp. After boarding the transport plane with Schlange, Hop delights in informing the Nazi that their pilot is named Izzy Epstein. Hop then sets up a movie projector and screen and offers Schlange the opportunity to watch some in-flight movies while the plane wings toward the prison camp. Schlange accepts, and Hop rolls a film depicting American P-40 fighter planes of the 99th Pursuit Squadron shooting down German aircraft from Schlange's own squadron. Deeply impressed by the bravery and skill of the American pilots, Schlange exclaims, "Those pilots of the 99th must be your best veterans. No doubt men of the superior races." Hop smiles as the Nazi watches the planes of the 99th Squadron land. Schlange is horrified as the film continues, depicting the victorious African American pilots of the 99th descending from the planes. Shaken, he exclaims, "Donnervetter! Those— *those* are the pilots who shot down my men?" Angrily, Hop responds, "So much for your 'superior race' nonsense."

Stunned, Schlange submits to one last film depicting his defeat in aerial combat and subsequent capture by the Allies. He gloats as the film silently unspools, showing the Nazi pilot's plane as he strafes a Red Cross convoy. Then a member of the 99th Squadron shoots down Schlange's plane, wounding the general and forcing him to crash-land near the wreckage of the Red Cross convoy. Deflated, Schlange stares at his own wounded, unconscious body on the screen as first a Jewish soldier and then an African American volunteer for

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83. The WWB requested material on the 99th Pursuit Squadron from the OWI. Fadiman to Gaines, July 10, 1944; Barach to Ted Poston, July 3, 1944, both in box 11, WWB Papers.

84. Gaines to Fadiman, Aug. 18, 1944, in *ibid.*

Figure 5. "The 99th Squadron," *Comic Cavalcade,* 9 (Winter 1944); © DC Comics.

blood transfusions so that the Nazi might live. Schlange murmurs that he is no longer a true Aryan, to which Hop retorts, "You should feel better for it." Chastened, the Nazi asks to apologize to Epstein, the Jewish pilot at the controls of the transport plane. Epstein refuses to

speak with Schlange or to accept his apology, telling Hop, "The herrenvolk learn too little and too late. The blood of the millions of innocent minorities that have suffered and died under Nazi brutality may not be erased by a word."[85]

The WWB applauded the finished story, which appeared not only in *Comics Cavalcade*, but also in the *CIO News*, a publication of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) with a circulation of half a million copies per issue.[86] Still, in spite of its anti-Nazi language, the narrative contains few specific references to the Tuskegee Airmen, and images of black aviators appear in just three of the fifty-three panels comprising the eight-page story. The pilots of the 99th Squadron have no dialogue and interact with neither Hop Harrigan nor his Nazi captive. Black and white pilots do not share a single panel. Although the board had requested a story starring "a Negro hero," the finished story focused on Hop Harrigan and Schlange. The actual pilots of the 99th Squadron are virtually invisible. Epstein, the Jewish pilot, remains hidden as well. Readers "hear" his disembodied voice from behind the closed cockpit door but never see his face.

In mid-1945, at the request of the board, DC began work on a story about former slave, abolitionist, and women's rights activist Sojourner Truth. The WWB provided Gaines with a copy of a biography of her, along with a suggestion that he consult photographs of her held by the Schomburg Library in New York City. The board also solicited help from Walter White, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).[87] DC submitted a draft to the WWB, and, although the board had no objections, it sought additional external opinions from the Bureau for Intercultural Education.[88] Shocked by the narrative, the bureau warned, "The author unconsciously deepens the image of the 'Negro type' and so defeats the purpose of the story. It inspires repugnance." Far from praising the contributions of Truth, the story perpetuated stereotypes "associated in the minds of many whites with illiteracy and ridicule." Specifically, the bureau asked that DC not depict

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85. *Comic Cavalcade*, 9 (1945).

86. Unknown correspondent to Barach, Jan. 22, 1945, box 11, WWB Papers.

87. Barach to Gaines, July 21, 1944; Barach memorandum, July 12, 1944; Barach memorandum, Oct. 4, 1944; and Barach to Walter White, July 5, 11, 1944, all in *ibid.* It is unclear whether or not White responded to her request for assistance. Board records do not record a written response.

88. Barach to Gaines, Sept. 31, 1944, in *ibid.*

Figure 6. "Sojourner Truth," *Wonder Woman*, 13 (Summer 1945); © DC Comics; available in *Wonder Woman Archives Volume 6.*

Truth as a slave, because this implied the superiority of whites, and it requested the deletion of the word "nigger" and the phrase "faithful slave," as these perpetuated the myth that slaveholders deserved

loyalty from their slaves. The Bureau for Intercultural Relations additionally criticized the WWB and All-American for assigning a white artist to the story.[89] In reality a black artist, Alfonso Greene, *did* draw the story and even signed the first panel. Apparently, neither the members of the Bureau for Intercultural Education nor those of the WWB knew that Greene was African American.[90]

The finished story presented Truth as brave but also as dependent on the courage, knowledge, and open-mindedness of white Americans. It appeared in the summer 1945 issue of *Wonder Woman* as part of an ongoing series of historically themed tales called "Wonder Women of History." As with the earlier story on the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the biography of Sojourner Truth did not expressly mention civil rights or contemporary racial injustices. It simply focused on the bravery of an individual African American woman, while simultaneously suggesting that white Americans facilitated this bravery.[91] One of the white slaveholders, "a good-natured man named Martin Scriver," sells her to another man for $350, a price based upon her amusing "independent airs." After escaping her new owner, she turns to the legal system in an effort to reclaim her infant son, whom she was forced to leave behind. When a white judge mocks her appeal, a white lawyer intercedes and retrieves her child. Significantly, Truth appears more as an advocate of women's rights than as a vanguard of the movement for racial equality. The story depicts her arguing with individual white men and preaching to a group of white people; she never shares panel space with other African Americans. In accordance with the board's limited endorsement of racial equality, the comic book biography of Truth represented her as an individual who, with the help of sympathetic whites, solved personal rather than larger social problems.

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89. Memorandum from Helen Trager of the Bureau for Intercultural Education to Writers' War Board, in *ibid*. For an overview of the Bureau for Intercultural Education, see Shafali Lal, "1930s Multiculturalism: Rachel Davis DuBois and the Bureau for Intercultural Education," *The Radical Teacher*, 69 (2004), 18–22.

90. Comic book writers often worked in anonymity, and most stories from the wartime period were not signed. See Greg Metcalf, "'If You Read It, I Wrote It': The Anonymous Career of Comic Book Writer Paul S. Newman," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 29 (1995), 147–162.

91. *Wonder Woman*, 13 (1945).

Conclusion

A thorough understanding of the connections between policy-making and constructions of race in American society requires an exploration of public culture, and American comic books offer an optic through which to examine these linkages.[92] The challenge of this cultural approach lies in forging connections between the vast, fluid expanse of mass culture and policy decisions.[93] The symbiotic relationship between comic book makers and the WWB constitutes a clear example of these connections. Under the board's supervision, comic books became political media, conscripts in the cultural war against fascism. Faced with the task of building support for the policy of total warfare, and unconstrained by the "strategy of truth" imposed upon the OWI, comics provided the WWB with an alluring alternative to more conventional media and a new means of defining America's enemies on the basis of race and ethnicity. This effort proceeded apace with the increasingly violent campaigns in Europe and the Pacific. As the U.S. government embraced the policy of total war, comic books were deployed to explain why this was essential to the nation's survival.

The WWB utilized comic books because its members believed the medium possessed several unique traits. Comic books were cheap, popular, portable, and comprehensible. Unlike film or radio, comic books were not subject to any sort of external censorship. They seemed capable of communicating with a remarkably diverse audience deemed out of reach of more conventional propaganda, through the sort of language and violent imagery deemed unacceptable in more middlebrow media. Children and adults, civilians and servicemen, the semi-literate and the well-heeled—all enjoyed and understood the combination of action, words, and images woven throughout comic book narratives. Comic books did not *seem* like propaganda.

From the outset, the WWB's involvement with the comic book industry was inseparable from the issue of race. As early as 1943, the WWB had identified comic books as a particularly useful means of

92. Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley, 2005), 1–8. See also Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York, 1998), 1–5, and George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana, Ill., 1994), 19–41.

93. Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, Conn., 1998), 6.

shaping popular perceptions of America's enemies as not only different but also deserving of destruction. The board was aided in this effort by the nature of the comic book medium and industry. Free from the censorship and constraints imposed upon more established mass culture like Hollywood films, comic book creators and propagandists could utilize remarkably high levels of violence and racism in the service of U.S. policy.

While the WWB clearly understood the potential value of the medium, the writers and propagandists at the board seemed less sure of how best to deploy comic books in the service of strategic goals. The WWB's confusing and at times contradictory approach is neatly summarized in the organization's annual report for 1944. The report confirms that the agency "continues to concern itself with the nature of the Japanese and German enemy, and with the rising tide of prejudice against racial, religious, and other groups here at home. We believe that our military success must not be jeopardized by sentimental illusions about our enemies or bigoted notions about our Allies and fellow-citizens."[94] In essence, the board sought to achieve two potentially conflicting goals: promoting racial and ethnic harmony at home while nurturing in Americans a race-based hatred of the nation's opponents and the belief that victory over the Axis depended upon a commitment to total war.

The board's actions suggest that its members expended more effort on narratives designed to foster race-based hatred than on tolerance. The board provided comic book publishers with clear instructions regarding the depiction of America's enemies while supplying no such template for representations of America's non-white allies or non-white Americans. Although the comic book medium was not subject to any form of censorship, the members of the WWB and the men and women in the comic book industry were still constrained by the need to appeal to the broadest possible audience. It was far less risky to promote hatred of Germans and Japanese than to address the question of domestic race relations. Neither policymakers nor propagandists sought to weaken what George Lipsitz terms "the power of whiteness."[95] Wartime culture

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94. *Writers' War Board Third Annual Report*, Jan. 1945, box 339, Records of the Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives, College Park, Md.

95. George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, 1998), 3.

could not be allowed to interfere with the essential reasons why many white Americans agreed to fight.[96]

Efforts to build racial goodwill through comic book narratives were further hampered by the legacy of racist imagery in American mass culture. At the time of the U.S. entry into World War II, the nation's popular consciousness included fairly well-defined, negative images of Chinese, Japanese, and African Americans. Comic book writers and artists appropriated some of these tropes to define Japanese as alien and dangerous, but it was harder to shed imagery that had been used for decades to define African Americans and Chinese. Artists and writers tried to side-step the issue by praising individual non-white heroes, rather than making broader statements about the contributions of non-white Americans and their allies. The result was confusion. Messages of tolerance shared visual space with the very violence and racism attributed by American propagandists to the nation's fascist enemies.

In some cases, derogatory racial tropes and conventions appeared on the same pages as patriotic, inclusive imagery, in both board-sanctioned and standard commercial titles. A single page from a 1943 issue of *Young Allies* exemplifies this contradiction. The page contains only one frantic image. In it, the Young Allies are engaged in a vicious fight with several Japanese soldiers. One of the squad's white members, Knuckles, is busy pummeling an adult Japanese soldier. Nearby, the leader of the Young Allies, Bucky Barnes, struggles to restrain a Japanese officer intent upon stabbing Whitewash Jones, the squad's lone African American member, with an enormous knife. The faces of the Japanese officer and Whitewash are nearly touching, and both are rendered in the crude, racist visual language of the time. Whitewash has thick purple lips and

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96. For a unique discussion of why Americans agreed to fight in World War II, see Robert B. Westbrook. "'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James': American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II," *American Quarterly*, 42 (1990), 587–614. The core argument is that, during World War II, Americans were not asked to think of their wartime obligations in political terms. Rather, the U.S. government based its call for sacrifice on two moral arguments: first, the claim that citizens were obliged to defend moral values—democracy, freedom, and equality—that superseded the need to fight for the United States as an individual nation; second, that Americans were duty-bound, as individuals, to defend the pursuit of private property made possible by liberal democracy. His second point, in particular, supports the arguments in Blum, *V Was For Victory*, especially 92–105. See also Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940–1950* (New York, 1986), 1–20.

wears a bright green checked suit with a garish tie. Above White-wash, straining to bury a knife in his neck, the Japanese officer peers through round spectacles perched on a pig-like nose and grits a set of enormous buckteeth.[97] What messages were alert readers to extract from this and similar stories? Surely they noted the conflicting appeals for tolerance and cooperation, juxtaposed with demands for the utter destruction of non-white, non-American nations.

This juxtaposition highlights two of the major challenges created by the appropriation of the comic book medium. First, the very popularity of the comic book also worked to weaken the WWB's efforts to shape the medium to its purposes. During the war, board members helped to shape numerous stories that appeared in a variety of top-selling comic books from the leading publishers in the industry. Just one of these stories, "This Is Our Enemy," appeared in the popular *All-Star Comics* and reached an audience of several million readers in the spring of 1945. Even that issue of *All-Star Comics*, a product of the industry's most powerful publisher, competed with roughly 100 other titles, the majority of which were assembled without input from the WWB. For every image of domestic harmony or German treachery carefully crafted by the board, there were thousands, even millions, of potentially conflicting comic book narratives full of fantastic Japanese super-villains, buffoonish Nazi officers, and viciously stereotyped African American characters. Second, although some contemporary scholars endorsed the comic book as a powerful means of disseminating propaganda, the WWB had little tangible evidence that audiences absorbed the intended messages from comic book narratives. Nevertheless, the allure of the medium, along with the crushing demands of waging a total war, overrode these concerns.

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97. *Young Allies*, 8 (1943).