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“There’s no Yellow in the Red, White, and Blue”: The Creation of Anti-Japanese Music during World War II

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This article focuses on the production of anti-Japanese music during World War II through the frameworks of popular culture, consumption, and propaganda and by analyzing the music itself, as well as lyrics and sheet music covers. Anti-Japanese music codified certain racial beliefs while distinguishing among Asian nationalities. Portraying Japan in racialized and gendered terms told Americans something about themselves and white male superiority. These musical images also demonstrated the dialogue between the music industry and its consuming audience. Publishers and composers tried to describe the nation’s emotions toward the enemy. Although their early efforts were somewhat successful, overall, anti-Japanese songs were not. Consumers looked to other musical forms and lyrics to embody the war, not necessarily voting against racism, but for more innovative music.

In times of war, modern governments, sometimes aided by private individuals and corporations, use propaganda to reinforce and shape public attitudes. Propaganda, however, also reveals a great deal about the underlying cultural processes involved in its construction, as demonstrated by anti-Japanese songs written by American songwriters during World War II. These songs illustrate how popular culture served as government propaganda and helped codify preexisting cultural assumptions about the Japanese to mobilize the American people for the war effort. They also drew upon a long lineage of racist thought, primarily about African Americans, and applied it to the Japanese, using music as a method of dissemination. In this respect, anti-Japanese music marked a convergence of propaganda and prejudice with a form of popular culture deeply rooted in consumerism. The result was not musically innovative (as some forms of race-based music have been), but it was different from anti-German and anti-Italian propaganda in telling ways and—also significant—ultimately not very successful in the marketplace.
An analysis of anti-Japanese songs reveals the persistence, power, and occasional complexity of anti-Asian attitudes in American culture. This is especially apparent if we approach the topic in a manner seldom employed by historians—with sensitivity to the musical characteristics of these songs and not simply with a focus on their lyrics and visual images on sheet music covers. During World War II composers turned to certain musical forms that, while not popular at the time, reinforced the racist elements found in anti-Japanese songs. Furthermore, songwriters borrowed not only from anti-Asian images but also from African American stereotypes, which popular composers and performers had produced since the nineteenth century. A handful of African Americans, however, also participated in creating racist images of the Japanese, but with their own agenda that was tied to the state of the African American community. Yet, in something of a crosscurrent, not all supported the virulence of these images, and some hoped for the production of songs that were less racist. Indeed, the wide range of ideals held by those in the music industry and in the federal government led to debates about how to represent the war musically, which would complicate the ways in which consumers received this blending of propaganda and popular music. Ironically, despite the best efforts of government propagandists and music publishers to offer what they thought the people wanted, consumers turned to other types of songs to embody the war that fit more precisely with contemporary tastes.

Japan’s attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, was the culmination of over a decade of tensions and provided the final impetus for mobilizing not only the U.S. military but also an anti-Japanese propaganda campaign spearheaded by the U.S. government and supported by popular culture. Building on a long tradition of anti-Asian prejudice, anti-Japanese sentiments increased sharply in 1931 following Japanese military expansion into Manchuria. Japanese aggression in Asia and that nation’s proclamation of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere had also caused considerable alarm among Western powers. With Pearl Harbor, negative images of the “Jap” or “Nip” proliferated and solidified into predictable patterns. Both newspapers and the radio used particular

preconceived notions about Asians to create an image of a vile and treacherous enemy. Almost two weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, *Time* magazine ran an article on how to differentiate between the Japanese and America’s Chinese allies. The article described the bodies of the Japanese as “short” and “seldom fat.” They tended “to be stockier and broader-hipped than the short Chinese.” The personalities of the Chinese and Japanese also differed. “The Chinese expression is likely to be more placid, kindly, open; the Japanese more positive, dogmatic, arrogant. Japanese are hesitant, nervous in conversation, laugh loudly at the wrong time.”

This blatantly negative stereotype of the Japanese (versus the quiescent Chinese) appeared to be widely shared. A poll of Americans conducted by Hadley Cantril in July 1942 found that 73 percent believed that the Japanese people were “treacherous,” 63 percent thought they were “sly,” 56 percent said “cruel,” 46 percent said “warlike,” and, on the positive side, 39 percent said “hard-working.”

To propagate and tap into these sentiments, the federal government pressured the music industry to produce patriotic music, including songs that dealt with the Japanese. Government officials understood the power of music and were interested in using it to mobilize the American people to support the war. It was the musicians and publishers, however, who chose what was published and promoted, using their reading of the market as a guide. That reading was not necessarily consistent with the government’s agenda. One must take this sometimes conflicting process into account in order to understand the production of anti-Japanese songs.

The place to begin an analysis of anti-Japanese music is with lyrics, which, after all, are what specifically define this music. Tin Pan Alley, the name given to the popular music industry located in New York City, published two anti-Japanese war songs—“You’re a Sap, Mister Jap” (1941) and “The Sun Will Soon be Setting for the Land of the Rising Sun” (1941)—within three days of the bombing of

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3. The perception of Japanese, and Asians more broadly, as “hard-working” existed since the nineteenth century when the term was often used to describe Chinese and Japanese immigrants laborers. After World War II, this stereotype contributed to the concept of the “Model Minority,” a belief that, through hard work and innate intelligence, Asians were able to overcome great obstacles, including racism, to succeed in the United States. Hadley Cantril, ed., *Public Opinion 1935–1946* (Princeton, N.J., 1951), as cited by Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 323–324.
Pearl Harbor. This, however, was only the beginning of a spate of anti-Japanese music. Beyond what is obvious and predictable about these songs—that they were racist—lay patterns that illustrate how this particular form worked, perhaps ultimately opening the door for comparison with other kinds of propaganda. The images in lyrics may have been contradictory, but their purpose was always to contrast an inferior Japan with a civilized and progressive United States.

During World War II, anti-Japanese songs diverged from representations of the Japanese that had existed in popular music before the war. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the United States had experienced periodic “Japan crazes” that led to the popularity of Japanese goods and Japanese-inspired American products. Composers and lyricists also used Japan as a musical subject, relying on exoticism and novelty to sell their songs. As in European art music during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American popular songwriters used women or what were believed to be feminine attributes to depict the Japanese. These racialized women were models of femininity that simultaneously criticized feminism as unnatural and justified the sexual desires of European and American men by diverting responsibilities for these feelings to the sensuality and allure of these women. Further, the use of women instead of men as musical subjects removed the supposed threat that Asian masculinity might pose to white womanhood. The performance of “Japanese-ness” by women on the stage and in homes, in which they usually wore kimonos and often danced and sang in what was perceived to be a Japanese fashion, added to these images.

5. James Cavanaugh, John Redmond, and Nat Simon, “You’re a Sap, Mister Jap” (New York: Mills Music, 1941); Sam Lerner, “The Sun Will Soon be Setting for the Land of the Rising Sun” (New York: Berlin, Inc., 1942); “Jivin’ the Japs,” Variety, Dec. 10, 1941, p. 1. I have included the music publishers by name because the music is hard to find without this information.

6. Before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, there was a moratorium on war songs on the radio to help to keep the United States out of war. Thus, when “You’re a Sap, Mister Jap” (1941) came out, the radio industry was just beginning to play music about the war. By the first week of 1942, Mills Music Publishing Company reported that it had sold 30,000 piano copies of “You’re a Sap, Mister Jap” and had several requests from small music dealers asking for more. “You’re a Sap, Mr. Jap’ Columbia Recording As Webs Still Forbid It,” Variety, Jan. 7, 1942, p. 158.

In seeking a means to relate Japan to exoticism and femininity, popular songwriters prior to World War II compounded the racial and gender content of these lyrical images through musical notation and instrumentation. This music did not imitate Japanese music. Instead, it offered musical representations of difference that were well known to American popular songwriters, especially in blackface minstrelsy and in the construction of the “Orient” in European opera. Such songs were performed through the 1930s, especially “Japanese Sandman” (1920), made famous by Nora Bayes in 1920, which was one of the first songs to sell more than a million copies of sheet music. The advent of World War II presented a challenge for composers and publishers who had to reverse previous depictions of Japan as feminine and alluring in order to produce a virulent and war-like enemy. After all, as a form of propaganda, it belittled America’s strength to suggest that the country could lose to a feminine enemy. This task, however, was not an easy one, as producers had to interest consumers in purchasing anti-Japanese songs, often in contrast with to the much more popular “Japanese” tunes that had existed prior to the American entrance into the war.

As discussed in John Dower’s War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War, Americans turned to a limited number of images to dehumanize the Japanese during World War II, in sharp contrast with previous feminine and exotic ones. Popular notions of Japanese religious practices and racial inferiority, as well as child and animal imagery, appeared in anti-Japanese songs. Lyricists glossed over religious differences among Americans in order to present a classic


10. For more information on racialized images, see Dower’s War Without Mercy. Although I use similar racialized images as Dower, I also demonstrate that 1) musical notation can support or subvert these images; and 2) the importance of music in portraying these images (Dower scantily cites music as representative of racialized images of Japan).
struggle of a good (and apparently Christian) United States against an evil enemy in the form of the “heathen” Japanese.\textsuperscript{11} For example, the song, “Good-bye Jappys” (1945), overtly linked religion and the United States by calling the attack at Pearl Harbor a “sin” against both the United States and God.\textsuperscript{12} “When We Set that Rising Sun” (1945) claimed that Japan was “a land of heathen people” with “no respect for God or man.”\textsuperscript{13} These religious and spiritual overtones gave the United States a moral imperative to participate in the war.\textsuperscript{14}

It should come as no surprise that race figured prominently in anti-Japanese songs as a marker of “otherness.” Consistent with an earlier belief that Asians, particularly immigrants to the United States, represented a “Yellow Peril” that threatened to overcome white populations in the Far West, composers used color to denote the racial difference between the Japanese and Americans and implied that all true Americans were white.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, yellow also acted to differentiate Japanese from America’s other enemies. In stark contrast to their treatment of Germans and Italians, as noted by Dower, songwriters constructed the war with Japan as a struggle against an entire people. Virulent images of Germany focused primarily on the Nazis or particular leaders, especially Adolf Hitler, and lyrics concerning Italians directed anger against the Fascists or Benito Mussolini. Some songs encapsulated this racial logic in lines such as “There’s no yellow in the red, white, and blue, We’ll show that Nazi fellow, and Muzzy too,” “There’ll be no Adolph Hitler nor

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\item For example, see Margaret J. Green and Ortha Green, “Good-bye Jappys” (Hollywood, Calif.: Nordyke Publishing, 1945); Roger Crombie, “We’re Going to Lick those Dirty Japs” (Cincinnati: Acme Music Service Printers, 1942); Gilbert Lee and Mae Cook, “Hallelujah Fo’ De U.S.A.” (no publisher, 1943); Anna Adams Beste, “Satan’s Angels from the Rising Sun” (Wilmington, Del.: Anna Adams Beste Publishers, 1942).
\end{enumerate}
Yellow Japs to Fear,” and “Hitler, Mussolini and that race of yellow skin.”16 These songs reinforced the notion that, while Germany and Italy were our enemies, it was only particular groups or individuals that the United States was fighting. There were no such distinctions for the war in the Pacific. For these popular composers, all Japanese were enemies.17

Another persistent image portrays Japanese as naughty children who needed to be punished by white Americans and Europeans. This exaggerated contrast suggested a hierarchical and paternal relationship that songwriters imagined (or hoped) existed between the United States and Japan. In “Spanking the Jap” (1942), the lyricist describes a common scenario personifying the war as an adult punishing an unrepentant child.

What is that rap rap rap!
That’s uncle Spanking the Jap
He would not listen to uncle’s plea
So Uncle put him across his knee . . . .18

Sheet music covers contributed to this image. “We’re Gonna Have to Slap, the Dirty Little Jap (And Uncle Sam’s the Guy Who Can Do It)” (1941), “You’re a Sap, Mister Jap” (1941), “We’re Setting the Rising Sun” (1944), and “Tokyo Beware!” (1944) all depicted a tiny Japanese soldier being spanked by a large, faceless hand or over the knee of Uncle Sam.19 This is perhaps an extension of similar images of Asians as childlike that had been used to justify imperialism and, by extension, a belief that it was the “white man’s burden” to civilize Asia.20

19. Bob Miller, “We’re Gonna Have to Slap, the Dirty Little Jap (And Uncle Sam’s the Guy Who Can Do It)” (New York: Bob Miller, 1941); Frank J. Daley, “We’re Setting the Rising Sun” (no publisher, 1944); Betty De Frank, “Tokyo, Beware!” (Philadelphia: Tioga Lodge, 1944); Cavanaugh, Redmond, and Simon, “You’re a Sap, Mister Jap.”
The crudest device used to depict the Japanese people appeared in images based on the supposedly bestial features of the enemy. Unlike the image of the child, animal-like images were used to dehumanize Japanese and to justify the viciousness of American responses to them. This type of imagery also has a long heritage in the United States predating its use during World War II. For example, in the nineteenth century racists frequently represented African Americans and Irish as animal-like to highlight their inferiority. The difference here is that the animals in anti-Japanese music were not to be simply despised; rather, the songs used animal images to help justify killing Japanese. To dehumanize the Japanese enemy, songwriters frequently depicted them as primates, such as “monkeys” and “chimpanzees.” Yet, contrary to Dower’s analysis, in which images of apes or monkeys dominated anti-Japanese propaganda in the United States, Japanese were most frequently equated with “rats” in American popular music. This was perhaps because of the ease of rhyming “rat” (especially in the near rhyme with the term “Jap”), as well as the long association of Asians with vermin.

Oh! the dirty Jap,
Oh! the dirty rat,
Oh! the dirty rats that we know are the Japs,

in the United States, 1880–1917 (Chicago, 1995); Peter G. Filene, Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America (Baltimore, 1998), 99; Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context (New York, 1995).


We will blow them off the globe—
and take their silk robe—
Oh! the dirty Japs,
They are lower than the rats. . . .

The use of rat imagery recycled earlier notions about supposed masses of Asian immigrants invading American shores. During the 1870s and 1880s political cartoonists often exaggerated the eye shape and the length and style of the queue on Chinese immigrant men to align them visually with rats. After Pearl Harbor, the image of the Japanese as rats proliferated; however, Japanese were no longer threatening to infest just Eastern Asia and the Pacific, but all of the United States. These images also contained a convenient double meaning. Like the ubiquitous traitors in 1930s gangster movies, who were also considered rats, the Japanese had betrayed American trust through their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and their unethical tactical maneuvers in battle. Further, the equation of all Japanese with vermin obscured the differences between civilians and the military, as well as between men and women. Through these racialized terms, lyricists and composers justified the systematic extermination of their enemy, allowing the United States to commit unspeakable acts. Paradoxically, the image of the soldier as exterminator also reduced the romanticism often equated with warfare, contradicting the spiritual and religious images of American soldiers fighting an unholy foe.

While white songwriters had a wealth of anti-Asian material to turn to in depicting the Japanese, many also chose to incorporate racist elements found in blackface minstrelsy into anti-Japanese songs during World War II. By aligning African Americans with the enemy, whites differentiated themselves from all “colored peoples” and reasserted their position of power. African American stereotypes would also have been familiar to many white Americans as a

means to denigrate racial others. The use of minstrelsy in these songs, however, highlights the conflicts over ideology during the war—would the United States continue to sanction the racist denigration of the Japanese and the lumping of minorities in the United States together with the Japanese, or would the federal government promote racial pluralism?

Although “Hallelujah Fo’ De U.S.A.” (1943) appears as a “Negro Spiritual,” including a call-and-response chorus, its sheet music cover shows images of white men in blackface. The song also contains slavery images and stereotypical black dialect to declare that the Japanese would use “deceitful words [to] entice yah, then once more you’d be de slave.” The only way to counter “[d]at ol’ debbil Jap” was to “sing an’ pray.”27 In an even more blatant reference to the racist tradition of popular music, “All you Japs Look Alike to Me” (1945) by Leon Cofield draws upon Ernest Hogan’s “All Coons Look Alike to Me” (1896), one of the most successful “coon” songs in the nineteenth century written by an African American (Figures 1 and 2).28 While employing gross caricatures of African Americans found in minstrelsy, such songs had an air of musical innovation through the inclusion of syncopation made popular by ragtime musicians at the turn of the century. Indeed, Cofield’s “All you Japs Look Alike to Me” (1945) borrows shamelessly from the opening of Hogan’s 1896 version. The opening phrases of Cofield’s song are:

All the world is having lots of troubles,
And we are having troubles of our own.

“All Coons Look Alike to Me” (1896) begins:

Talk about a coon a having trouble,
I think I have enough of my own.

Although in different keys and time signatures, the songs have similar rhythmic and melodic lines. In fact, if the last note in the first

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27. Lee and Cook, “Hallelujah Fo’ De U.S.A.” It is not unheard of for American composers to use black dialect to represent Asians. In fact, David Belasco’s play, Madame Butterfly (1900), which eventually became Giacomo Puccini’s Madame Butterfly (1904), used such devices.

Figure 1. Leon A. Cofield, “All you Japs Look Alike to Me” (1945). Courtesy the Library of Congress.

Figure 2. Ernest Hogan, “All Coons Look Alike to Me” (1896). Courtesy of the Brown University Library.
phrase of the chorus were played an octave lower in “All you Japs Look Alike to Me,” these melodies would almost be parallel to each other. Thus, by echoing a popular song from the nineteenth century, Cofield tried to increase the song’s memorability for his audience. Yet, in doing so, he also tied anti-Japanese sentiments to previous depictions of African Americans and lumped these two groups together.

Cofield was not alone in playing on well-known African American stereotypes and applying them to Japanese. Bob Carleton and Charles Dunlavy employed the chorus of “Dixie’s Land” (1859) for the chorus of their song “Banzi You-All” (1946), one of the few anti-Japanese songs published after the fighting had ended. Written by the great white minstrel composer and performer Dan Emmett, “Dixie’s Land” was one of minstrelsy’s best-known pieces, thanks in part to its appropriation as a pro-Confederate anthem. Like “Dixie,” “Banzi You-All” begins the chorus with “Away down South in the Land of Cotton.” Lyrically, these are the only similarities. The music, however, is exactly the same, calling upon the power of aural images of white supremacy. The irony is that “Dixie,” emblematic of the Confederacy, here represents the United States against Japan.

Given the racial politics of anti-Japanese music, it appears paradoxical at first glance that a few examples of anti-Japanese songs also came from African American composers and performers. Many African American community activists and journalists questioned the U.S. government’s racist attitude toward Japan and Japanese Americans in conjunction with the discrimination against African American war workers and recruits. These racist attitudes conflicted not only with the goals of many individuals within the African American community but also with the government’s promotion of pluralism and equality, which many officials hoped would increase African American support and participation in the war. The concept of American diversity and equality was also used to contrast the United States with its enemies and demonstrate the moral imperative of American participation in the war, but such equality was far from a reality.30


30. For a more elaborate discussion on African American perceptions of the Japanese, racism in the United States, and the government’s ideology of pluralism and
When African Americans participated in constructing racist images of Japanese, they followed a path similar to that of white American composers who drew upon a long history of racial music that denigrated African Americans. One instance was Lucky Millender and his swing orchestra’s recording of “We’re Gonna Have to Slap, the Dirty Little Jap (And Uncle Sam’s the Guy Who Can Do It)” (1941) by country and western songwriter Bob Miller. This song compared the punishment that Japanese deserved after Pearl Harbor with the treatment given to African American slaves nearly a century before.

We’re gonna have to slap, the dirty little Jap,
And Uncle Sam’s the guy who can do it!
We’ll skin the streak of yellow from this sneaky little fellow
And he’ll think a cyclone hit him when he’s thru it
We’ll take the double crosser to the old woodshed,
We’ll start on his bottom and go to his head,
When we get thru with him he’ll wish that he was dead . . . .

World War II was not the first time black composers and performers participated in musical forms that, in the hands of whites, were used to denigrate African Americans. They had done much the same after the Civil War when black men took to the minstrel stage and, somewhat later, when African Americans like Paul Lawrence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson lent their talents to so-called “plantation” or “coon” shows. Despite the fact that their performances fulfilled white expectations of African Americans, their involvement often had a racial edge to it, the implications of which may have eluded whites but gave African Americans a forum to question these stereotypes through subversion. During World War II several African Americans continued this tradition by reasserting their position in the experience of exclusion through the marginalization of racial freedom, see Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York, 1998), 219–248; Barbara Dianne Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938–1948* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999); Reginald Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (Albany, N.Y., 1998), 92–127; Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952* (Minneapolis, 1997), 246–249; William Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* (Philadelphia, 1999), 62–67; Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939–1945* (Princeton, N.J., 1978), 92.

31. Miller, “We’re Gonna Have to Slap, the Dirty Little Jap.” Copyright © 1941, Universal–MCA Music Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.
others and by creating a space for African Americans within the war effort.\(^{32}\)

Some African American composers and musicians, often looking to their own musical traditions, also drew on the same racial devices as their white counterparts to depict Japanese and, in turn, aligned themselves with whites. Recorded three and a half months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Peter Joe “Doctor” Clayton adopted the blues form to express his disgust with the surprise attack in “Pearl Harbor Blues” (1942).\(^ {33}\) It begins with a reference to Pearl Harbor and then dwells on the poor relationship between the United States and Japan that had existed before the war. His song employs several child or animal allusions, such as “that bites the hand that feeds ‘em soon as he gets enough to eat,” possibly a reference to the fact that the United States had sold brass and scrap iron to Japan only to have these materials turned into weapons. The nature of the Japanese bombing at Pearl Harbor draws the following comparison from Clayton: “even a snake won’t bite you in your back, he will warn you before he strikes a blow.” Well aware of the effects of racism, African American musicians participated in the creation of a racial hierarchy, but one that placed themselves in the middle and the Japanese beneath them.\(^ {34}\)

In addition to anti-Asian and anti-black stereotypes, songwriters during World War II also used musical notation itself as an important way to reinforce notions of Japanese inferiority. Out of all the possible musical styles available during the war, the march was most common in anti-Japanese songs. This form represented the revival of a type of music not popular prior to the war, but associated

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with nationalism, patriotism, and militarism.\footnote{35} John Philip Sousa, in his 1928 memoir \textit{Marching Along}, tried to explain the appeal of marching music for himself and his audiences:

I think Americans (and many other nationals for that matter) brighten at the tempo of a stirring march because it appeals to their fighting instincts. Like the beat of an African war drum, the march speaks to a fundamental rhythm in the human organization and is answered. A march stimulates every center of vitality, wakens the imagination and spurs patriotic impulses which may have been dormant for years. I can speak with confidence because I have seen men profoundly moved by a few measures of a really inspired march.\footnote{36}

During World War II Rep. J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey (later a leading anticommunist and convicted felon) agreed with Sousa, noting that “[w]hat America needs today is a good 5 cent war song. The nation is literally crying for a good, peppy marching song, something with plenty of zip, ginger and fire.”\footnote{37} Warren Dwight Allen, professor of music at Stanford University during the war, also supported the revival of the march. “Marching calls for organization; a marching people must be united . . . order is the prime desideratum; everyone must ‘keep step’. . . . Our civilization is still marching onward and that the march toward world unity is possible because of certain principles of musical organization that are closely akin to the principles of political unity.”\footnote{38} The use of marches with anti-Japanese lyrics reflected the relationship between musical form and lyrical content. Even by the 1940s marches were used mostly for military and civic ceremonies, not in dance halls as they had been in World War I with the popularity of the two-step, a fast-paced ballroom dance set to a march tempo. By combining music embedded


\footnote{36. Sousa, \textit{Marching Along}, 358.}

\footnote{37. “Songs of the Times,” \textit{Time}, Feb. 9, 1942, p. 41.}

\footnote{38. Allen, \textit{Our Marching Civilization}, 61.}
in the Western military tradition with anti-Japanese lyrics, composers tried to represent an America unified against an invading Japanese foe and to reinforce a belief in American virility, with the assumption that these soldiers were also white and Christian. Music and words were supposed to work together to demean the Japanese enemy and to assert a particular relationship between white masculinity and military success.

Despite the efforts of those in the music industry and some government offices, the anachronistic musical form used in many anti-Japanese songs, especially the march, did not fit public tastes. Through the influence of African American composers and performers starting in the latter part of the nineteenth century, popular music had become more complex and rhythmic. In dance halls and on record players or radios, people listened to jazz, blues, swing, and country and western music. It was also during the early 1940s that bebop and rhythm and blues took root among particular audiences, leading to new musical developments in the postwar era.39

Ironically, it was the influence of African Americans on the American musical landscape that indirectly undermined the consumption of propaganda music, including anti-Japanese songs. Several government officials and leaders in the music industry were concerned with the lack of success of what they saw as appropriate war-related music, especially in the form of marches, and tried to find ways to disseminate them to the public and make them popular. Efforts focused on trying to persuade musicians and bandleaders to play war material, but not to “swing” it. Despite the popularity of swing music, the government was more concerned with communicating a particular message to consumers that it feared could be lost through syncopation and the slurring of notes. In a summary report of an Office of War Information (OWI) meeting held in August 1942, an unnamed government official stated: “these songs do not make good dance music, and bandleaders say that if they play songs of this nature, that they lose [their] audience. In an attempt made to ‘swing’ the tune, its purpose is defeated, and the melody lost in the type of arrangement necessary to convert it to ‘swing’

time.” Government officials felt that one way to resolve this problem would be to change the audience’s attitude toward the musical forms that leaders felt were more appropriate during the war. In order to do this, it was suggested that “a prominent dancing teacher or team be induced to work out a dance adapted to the rhythm. This dance could be popularized in night clubs, on the stage, and in movies.” This idea, however, was never implemented. The conflict between the government and musicians highlighted that popular music and propaganda were often at cross-purposes and that there was little that could be done to induce consumers to want what was perceived to be anachronistic music.

Despite the proliferation of race-based anti-Japanese propaganda in music, films, newspapers, and posters, a few songwriters and government officials were concerned that these images would foster a “race war,” dividing the nation along racial and religious lines. Liberal Democrats, who had supported President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal and were working for the OWI, promoted the idea that American participation in World War II was also a vehicle to end racism and discrimination in the world. As many individuals knew, these ideals did not exist in the United States, and, in many instances, the government fully sanctioned discrimination. Still, the government needed the full cooperation and support of all minority groups, particularly African Americans, Asian Americans, and Jewish Americans, in order to win. The promotion of pluralism and anti-Japanese attitudes required a delicate balancing act by many government officials. In order to appease these marginalized groups, the war was often described ideistically as a battle against the forces of evil and racism in the world. At the same time, the promotion of anti-Japanese sentiments was designed to appeal to those who supported white supremacy, especially catering to an active political constituency in the South.

40. “Music Meetings, Correspondence, etc.,” Records of the Office of War Information, RG 208, National Archives II, College Park, Md.

41. For the most part, discussions of freedom and pluralism during World War II ignored Asian Americans and Mexican Americans, especially in light of Japanese American internment. During the war, Congress did rescind the Exclusion Act of 1882 and parts of the National Origins Quota Act of 1924, thereby allowing Chinese, Filipinos, and Indians to immigrate in small numbers and naturalize. This act, however, was not in response to Asians living within the borders of the United States but to pressure from America’s Chinese, Filipino, and Indian allies abroad. See Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore,
Several prominent individuals in the music industry personally supported the ideology of pluralism over the race-based propaganda promoted by the government and the private sector. John Desmond, music critic for the *New York Times*, often worked with the OWI and encouraged communication between the music industry and the war effort. Besides writing articles describing the purpose of music during the war, he also had to balance anti-Japanese sentiments in the United States with his own opinion on what type of music should embody the war. In doing so, he questioned the quality, substance, and style of anti-Japanese music without condemning the racist nature of these songs outright. In June 1942 Desmond accused the writers of war songs of being “less than terrific. [T]housands of songs, rhyming Jap with slap, mama with Yokohama, and yank with tank have poured into music publishers.” Luckily, he wrote, only a small number passed the first audition. “[A] few went over the country on national radio hook-ups and via recordings, and fewer still won even temporary public acceptance. None was an ‘Over There’ or even an ‘Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning.’” 42 Even in a meeting of the OWI on August 25, 1942, government officials concurred with Desmond that they needed to dissuade composers from writing jingoistic songs. “[T]he idea in getting better songs written was . . . to eliminate . . . the ‘flip’ type of song, which presented the war as an easy victory—such as ‘we’ll go over and slap the Japs and be back next week, etc.’” 43

Abel Green, music critic and editor for *Variety* and consultant for the OWI Music Division, not only recognized that the racist elements of anti-Japanese songs undermined notions of equality and pluralism in the United States, but also that these songs had international consequences. In several articles, he pointed out that composers who used color to distinguish Americans from Japanese “just completely forget our brave Chinese allies who are also of the Celestial race.” By equating yellow with racial inferiority and the en-


42. John Desmond, “Tin Pan Alley Seeks The Song,” *New York Times Magazine*, June 6, 1942, p. 14. “Over There” (1917), written by George M. Cohan, and “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning” (1918), by Irving Berlin, were classic war songs of World War I that also did not mention the enemy.

43. “Music Meeting, Correspondences, etc.,” RG 208, National Archives II.
emy, composers denigrated all Asians, including American allies in India, the Philippines, and China, thereby undermining the U.S. relationship with these allies. Instead of these songs, Green recommended “Freedom Road” (1942), with lyrics by Langston Hughes and music by Emerson Harper “which properly salutes the democratic credo for all races and creeds.”

Thus, he countered the white and Christian (and male) American norm in anti-Japanese music with a song by African Americans, encompassing all people and religions.

The existence of these long-forgotten songs about Japanese during World War II must be viewed within the overlapping frameworks of popular culture, racism, gender, and consumerism. The production of these songs was an extension of racism and a response to animosity developed before and during the war. Through both lyrics and musical form, anti-Japanese music codified certain racial beliefs about otherness, especially by combining African American and Asian stereotypes. At the same time, it complicated the tendency of racism to put all Asians in the same category. It also served to tell Americans something about themselves and white male superiority by portraying Japan in racialized and gendered terms.

More importantly, these musical images demonstrated the complex relationship between the music industry and the consuming audience. Drawing upon the racism that existed in the United States, publishers and composers tried to describe the nation’s emotions toward the enemy. While at the beginning of the war their efforts were somewhat successful, overall anti-Japanese songs were not. During February and early March of 1942 anti-Japanese songs appeared on The Billboard Charts for the first and last times (none appeared on Your Hit Parade, another measure of musical popularity). The recording of “You’re a Sap, Mister Jap” (1941), with Carl Hoff and the Murphy Sisters, ranked 23 for the week of February 28 on all coin machines and jukeboxes and 16 for the week of March 9. “Goodbye Mama, I’m off to Yokohama” (1941), recorded by Teddy Powell and his Orchestra, with vocals by Dick Judge and Peggy Mann, reached the 21 spot on The Billboard Chart for the week of

February 14, 1942.45 A writer for *Variety* in 1942 attempted to explain this lack of long-term success by observing that “the American masses unmistakably veer to the boy-meets-girl song themes with a once-over-lightly war background; or yearn for the loved ones away from home; or dream of the peaceful valleys around the corner.”46 While this analysis is rather simplistic, it proved accurate in describing consumer tastes during the war. This did not mean that racism disappeared, despite the effort of some government officials and leading musicians to question racism in music and government policies. It persisted throughout the war toward both Japanese and Japanese Americans.

During World War II, consumers looked to other musical forms and lyrics to embody the war. They listened to sentimental ballads such as “A Lovely Way to Spend an Evening” (1944), by Frank Sinatra, and “White Christmas” (1942), by Bing Crosby, and danced to swing bands like those of Glenn Miller and Duke Ellington. Although military and civilian officials wanted to unify American resentment toward the Japanese, this goal conflicted not only with other ideologies generated during the war but also with the openness of the market. A small irony may be that consumers were not necessarily voting against racism but rather for more innovative music.

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