National Hypocrisy: Implications of Wartime Values at Home During the Asia-Pacific War

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The First 30 Hours, the Time-Life-Fortune News Bureau reported global reactions to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.[1] In Los Angeles, general consensus deemed the "action itself [to seem] incredible" as citizens took "for granted" the burdens of total war that would ensue.[2] Itabashi Kōshū's statements in Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook's Japan at War: An Oral History depict Japan as a "whole nation bubbled over, excited and inspired" after the attack.[3] However, as policy and media transformed the Asia-Pacific War into an ideological conflict, marginalized citizens of both countries struggled with heightening racial tensions and class inequality. Japan's lower classes and ethnic minorities struggled with broadening socioeconomic gaps as they were forced to sacrifice for the war. Amid rampant racism and discrimination policy in the United States, Japanese-Americans fought to prove their loyalty and humanity to white citizens and Black Americans endeavored to demonstrate their value in the military. Purported national ideals of freedom and equality, seen through wartime propaganda and intended to motivate civilian participation, exposed and exacerbated institutionalized class and racial inequality at home while providing opportunities for social advancement.

In Japan, propaganda emphasized equality and wartime heroism while distorting information to promote civilian sacrifice and mobilization. In Leaves from an Autumn of Emergencies, Tamura Tsunejirō discusses how the government failed to reveal "the truth about the war" to "win the support of the general population."[4] As many citizens, especially those in the lower classes, struggled with the strict rationing of necessities like coal and food distributions, a worthwhile ideological basis of war became necessary to motivate sacrifice.[5] Policymakers manipulated the presentation of information and "[spoke] of the equality of the country's ten million people" to present a simple narrative about the conflict's purpose catered toward civilians: upholding national values like equality.[6] Thus, civilians learned to live not in the war, but for it. This learning extended to children's schools, in which students "wrote to the soldiers of [their] gratitude for their fighting."[7] Glorifying soldiers' endurance magnified their heroism, crafting a role model of sacrifice and wartime mobilization for students. Formal teaching and propaganda strove to motivate citizens to sacrifice for the war on the basis of protecting values like the aforementioned "equality."[8]

However, as the war broadened existing socio-economic divides, Japan's crafted image of equality exposed exactly the opposite. While the lower classes fought everyday to avoid starvation, the rich monopolized resources in order to "circulate them back to the black market."9 Such manipulation of the economy to profit off the struggles of the poorest demonstrates the war's proliferation of social divides. The rich were not only already advantaged, but the limited resources of wartime enabled the wealthy to monopolize necessities — the "strong ate the weak"

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1 Hulburd, David, "War Comes to the U.S. – Dec. 7, 1941: The First 30 Hours," *TIME-LIFE-FORTUNE News Bureau*, December 1941.

2 Hulburd, "War Comes to the U.S," Los Angeles, 1.

3 Cook, Haruko Taya and Cook, Theodore F., Japan At War: An Oral History, (New York: The New Press, 1992), 77.

4 Yamashita, Samuel, "Tamura Tsunejirō: Bittersweet, The Wartime and Postwar Diary of an Ordinary Kyoto Person," in *Leaves from an Autumn of Emergencies*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 109.

5 Yamashita, "Tamura Tsunejirō," 88.

6 Ibid, 97.

7 Cook and Cook, *Japan At War: An Oral History*, 343.

8 Yamashita, "Tamura Tsunejirō," 97.

9 Ibid, 85.

as they actively exploited and expanded the existing socio-economic gap.[10] Wartime propaganda like the aforementioned "equality" leads Tamura to later realize that the Japanese government's messaging regarding equality and heroism on the warfront is "pure semantics."[11] The contrast between supposed "equality" and the restrictive rationing of daily necessities that disproportionately impacted the poor exposed rampant class-based inequality.[12]

A similar contrast existed between American wartime values of freedom meant to motivate civilian mobilization and their true manifestations at home. In Our Mothers' War, Emily Yellin investigates President Theodore Roosevelt's speech about the United States' ideological basis for war, in which he identified "four freedoms," including "freedom of speech and expression" and freedom from "want" and "fear."[13] By attaching broad-base American ideals to the war, Roosevelt transformed the conflict into a cause with a relatable narrative. Black Americans especially saw themselves reflected in Roosevelt's wartime ideals, since the "freedoms" paralleled the rights for which they were fighting.[14] This fight for justice both on the warfront and home front partially succeeded as a motivator for civilian mobilization. Black war worker Hortense Johnson described her mindset as working to not "let [racial injustices] break your spirit, so you quit this struggle and turn the country over to Hitler."[15] Johnson further valued the fight abroad because she was fighting for similar rights at home, and thus became motivated to mobilize for the war.

However, this mirroring of values revealed national hypocrisy amid heightened racial tensions. The parallels between Roosevelt's speech and Black Americans' fight for freedom turned Roosevelt's stated values "hollow" — racial injustices at the time, including job discrimination and segregated armed forces, largely prevented the domestic application of wartime values.[16] The hypocrisy became embarrassingly apparent when German prisoners of war received front row seats at a performance meant for Black American troops.[17] Treating American troops as inferior to the enemy demonstrates the falsities of claimed freedoms. One New York Post columnist described the country as either "believers in the principles of democracy" or "a collection of the greatest frauds the world has seen."[18] As the United States became obligated to show the veracity of their ideological basis for war, the incongruence between American political values on the international stage and their domestic applications became apparent. Although these declarations of ideology were intended to motivate citizens to mobilize for the war, and justify reasons for entering the conflict, they also highlighted questions regarding their lack of authenticity in civilian life.

Such exposure of empty rhetoric provided opportunities for advocacy groups; without advancements in social justice, the ideals would remain fraudulent. The Black press leveraged this hypocrisy by spreading the "Double V campaign," in which Black citizens fought for both victory over facism on the war front and racial discrimination at home, as the two battles were aligned with one another.[19] Yellin's discussion of Jane Crow, or institutionalized discrimination faced by Black women, depicts how both civil rights groups and individual activists exposed empty values to further their advocacy.[20] As a labor union for Black workers and the NAACP planned a march in Washington D.C. to protest job discrimination, Roosevelt immediately worked to negotiate — the march would have been an obvious indicator of the lack of true justice in the United States, staining the American image of liberty and democracy.[21] Given existing racial tensions, such a demonstration would have also decreased public support at home and soldiers' morale on the war front. Roosevelt later issued an executive order to encourage participation in the national defense program "regardless

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10 Yamashita, "Tamura Tsunejirō," 113.
11 Ibid, 97.
12 Ibid, 97.
13 Yellin, Emily, "Jane Crow: African-American Women," in *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the From During World War II*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 208.
14 Ibid, 208.
15 Ibid, 208.
16 Bailey, Beth and Farber, David, "The "Double-V" Campaign in World War II Hawaii: African Americans, Racial Ideology, and Federal Power," in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer, 1993): 817-843.
17 Yellin, "Jane Crow," 220.
18 Ibid, 223.
19 Ibid, 212.
20 Ibid, 204.
21 Yellin, "Jane Crow," 204.

of race, creed, color, or national origin," demonstrating the success of leveraging the exposure of empty rhetoric.[22] Speaking up about obvious hypocrisy became more powerful than ever, as policymakers were forced to take action in order maintain the carefully crafted "moral standing of America in the concert of world nations."[23] Policy that mitigated job discrimination in defense industries provided Black women workers opportunities for social and political advancement. Many performed lack-luster jobs "with gusto" in hopes of proving to the nation that they were valuable citizens outside of domestic labor.[24] The opportunities of industry specific to wartime catalyzed such advancement.

In both Japan and the United States, empty rhetoric about equality and freedom led to realizations of the government's false messaging. A desire to fulfill the ideals of propaganda surrounding freedom led American policymakers to begin grappling with institutionalized inequality. Further discussion is needed to explore both countries' wartime exploitation of marginalized groups for manpower, the intersection of race and class-based discrimination, and how ideals manifested in unique ways for different marginalized groups. Despite the falsities of political values presented for the international stage, the declaration of ideals ultimately encouraged improvements in their domestic realities. Although these ideals have yet to be fully reflected in citizens' daily lives, it is clear that the war compelled leaders to create an idealistic, albeit perhaps unattainable, standard toward which to work.

[22] Ibid, 204.
[23] Ibid, 217.
[24] Ibid, 214.

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